

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Chapter 73

As we enter together this the third sefer of Tehillim I ask your indulgence for a moment. I thank Hashem that I have been able to see this project come so far and thank the kind editors who have allowed me the merit to share these thoughts with you. One thing above all is a source of constant inspiration, and that is the support and kindness shown by the many readers who have taken the time to share their comments with me.

I believe one reason this work has seen any success is that it is written on a weekly basis. Tehillim is a living support organism for us all, and by reaching out to understand it on a regular schedule, it becomes that much more so.

There can be no definitive meaning to the psalms' holy words, for each day comes with its own uniqueness and therewith its own needs. Tehillim speaks to these ever-changing matters, and its meaning is kaleidoscopic in nature. No kapitel ever reads the same. Each rendition is swept up with the needs of the one who is reciting it.

In this the first chapter of the third sefer we find David asking age-old questions. Every one of us is sometimes stricken by the enormity of life's incongruities. David shows that it is no shame to ask questions; rather, he allows us entry into the support of age-old answers.

I have often shared with you the reader, different tragedies that as a communal Rav I have had to deal with. As I write these words my mind is fluttering in a thousand directions. In a few hours I will be called upon to bring to rest two young people, a child of seven and his mother. I dread the moment when my entire community will walk into the hallowed grounds of our beis hachaim and find the two gaping holes that have been freshly dug. I will be asked to speak to the stricken family, a young husband and father, his orphaned son of twelve, and the bereaved parents of the young mother. As in the past, I have turned to David Hamelech for comfort. He speaks the words that each of my congregation will be thinking, and he offers us a balm to our broken hearts.

Ach tov liYisrael..., "Surely Hashem is good to Israel, to the pure of heart. But as for me, my feet had almost turned away; in an instant, like nothing, my steps would have been swept aside." Chazal teach us that the word ach, surely, implies that this is a truth that will never change. David begins by stating that Hashem is good to His people - and this truth is forever. It is only because we have allowed

walls to be built between us and Hashem that we sometimes doubt this unalterable fact.

David then continues and allows us into his deepest thoughts. He admits that he almost lost his way, that he was overcome by uncertainty. If this would have occurred, he adds, he would have been swept away from this world. The line between accepting Hashem's truth and falling into despair can often be just a single mistaken footstep. "Like nothing" - a life lived without a burning inner faith in Hashem is likened to nothingness. It is spent here on earth with no real deeper meaning.

Ki kineisi baholelim..., "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the peace of the wicked, for there is no suffering when they die, and their health is sound." It often seems that the wicked have all the good in this life. They grow and prosper, their homes are expansive and they seem to be in good spirits. There is an old Yiddish expression that says, *Halevai du zolts nohr hoben dus vos felt zei*, "If we would only have that which the wicked lack." This means that although we may think all is rosy in their gardens, in fact they have nothing that we truly need. We often wish for so much, never realizing that what we need is ours for the asking. And what is that? The belief that Hashem does good for us!

Lachen anakasmo gaava..., "Therefore they wear pride as a necklace, their body enwrapped in violence." In today's world we can well understand this concept. Everything is superficial; it can all be plucked from the wearer's neck or ripped off his arrogant back. Is this what's real? Does all this so-called "good life" give them contentment? Take a look at the shelves in the bookshops. They groan from the weight of self-help guides. No one is happy.

The psalm goes on to describe how the righteous can be misled by the suave words of the wicked. It also explains that in fact theirs is a world of myth and illusion.

This all seems well and good, but how does one mend a broken heart? The knowledge that the wicked will fall doesn't help one who is facing his own tragedy. Yet the kapitel doesn't leave us here; it goes on with a rich and sweet promise for our own individual salvation.

Vaachashva ladaas zos..., "As I pondered to understand this, it seemed as iniquity in my eyes. Until I entered into the Sanctuaries of G-d, then I understood what would be their end." David admits that at first glance it seemed as if the wicked did have a better life, but then he entered the holiness of Hashem's words and understood the truth. If one sees the world as lived only in the here and now, then he will question. A Yid is meant to see more, and through the sanctuary of mitzvos he becomes sensitized to another realm. The kedusha that comes with following Hashem's mitzvos brings an awareness that transcends this mortal place.

Ach bachalakos tashis lamo..., "Only in slippery places do You set them down, You hurl them down to desolation." One who lives only for this material place is setting himself up for a fall. His existence is based on a slippery slope of self-delusion. Give him one bump, and it all shatters.

Vaani tamid imach..., "But I am continually with You, You held my right hand." By attaching oneself to Hashem one feels the support of His spiritual love. Things may become difficult, even horrendous,

but if you allow Hashem to hold your hand you can find your way.

Baatzascha sancheini..., "With Your council You will guide me, and afterward, with glory You will receive me." Hashem's council is found through His mitzvos. Every time we do His will we take down another bit of the wall that divides us. That wall is built through the foolishness that comes when we surrender to the materialism that presides over the wicked. Following Hashem's path gives us the insight to understand this. In the olam ha'emes, the real world, we will see what true glory is, and it will be into that glory that Hashem will lead us.

Mi li baShamayim..., "Whom do I have in heaven but You, and besides You I desire nothing on earth." This is such a powerful statement. In the world of truth there is but one reality, and that is Hashem. Once you accept this into your heart, then everything here on earth becomes secondary.

Kala she'eiri ulevavi..., "My flesh and my heart yearn, the rock of my heart and my portion is Hashem, forever." Rocks don't move, and neither does the Jewish soul. We are bonded with Hashem to the point where our physical being is also attuned to His ways.

Vaani kirvas Elokim li tov..., "But as for me, G-d's nearness is my good, I have put my refuge in my Master, Hashem, that I may tell all of Your divine mission." David finishes with a simple yet difficult statement. He tells us that Hashem's nearness is all the good that one needs. In times of bitterness, the refuge that lies within this knowledge offers the strength to carry on. We all have a divine mission, for Hashem created each of us for a distinct purpose. We can't always understand why things happen, but when we know in our hearts that there is a Master Who does, then we gain the needed support to carry us further.

I will not have any quick answers for my flock this afternoon, nor will I be able to wave a magic wand and make all the pain disappear. I will come to the graves and share in the tears. However, I will also speak and pray that David's understanding spreads its holy message into our souls. Without it we can never survive; with it, we can find Hashem's refuge.

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