

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I well remember the many hours I sat as a youngster at the table of chassidic masters, who told of the wonders they had seen. They spoke of long-ago heroes who had faced unbelievable torment and yet rose above it all and grew. The tales related how the survivors overcame their blood-soaked trials and learned to lift their heads once more above the most terrible of situations.

These stories were vital to our generation's growth, considering that most of us were either survivors ourselves or had close relatives who had just lived through the worst churban of all. The tales were what allowed us to grow, and we built on their strong foundations.

Now it is our turn. We too must tell our young of our times and the way we became a link in the chain of Jewish history.

Ours has not been a period of only smooth sailing. It was with great difficulty that our sages settled into this new world, be it America, post-war Europe or Eretz Yisrael, and started all over from scratch at middle-age, still scarred from their own painful wounds. They had to become conversant with a new environment, one not inclined to desire a Torah-centered lifestyle. They had new problems that required new responses, all predicated on Torah values. The community needed to understand this and allow themselves to be led by these holy Torah sages.

Today this may seem a simple fact, but at the time it was very difficult. Who would have thought that in these mere Seventy-odd years we would see the Torah world rebuilt to such a dynamic state? Our young must know that listening to daas Torah was not always the norm, and that the first generation of post-war balabatim had great trials that sought to drive them away from the Torah world.

Why is this knowledge so important? Because it's how we Yidden keep going. We learn of what came before so we can move further ahead.

David Hamelech does this as well. In this kapitel he tells of his dismay and tribulations. He does this so we can carry the knowledge of his experiences with us and accept our own, just as he did. We build upon the river of Jewish tribulations, like a huge investment that will bring forth total redemption when the time finally arrives. In the meantime we are connected with David, with every righteous soul, and hopefully with ourselves.

King David does more. He goes on and tells us that we are never alone in these dark times, for

Hashem is with us and holds our hands.

In the sefer Eish Kodesh by the Piaseczna Rebbe, we find a drasha that the Rebbe made on February 14, 1942, in the Warsaw ghetto. He starts with a discussion of the Talmudic passage in Berachos, in which Rabbi Yosi entered one of the ruins of Yerushalayim in order to daven. The Gemora tells us that he heard a bas kol, a divine voice, saying, "Woe to Me for I have destroyed My house, burned My Temple and exiled My children."

In the drasha the Rebbe asks, why did Rabbi Yosi hear this divine voice only in the ruins? Listen to his answer, and listen well.

"A Jew who is tormented by his afflictions thinks that he alone suffers, as if all his personal afflictions and those of Klal Yisrael do not affect Hashem, G-d forbid. In Yeshayahu it states, In all their troubles He was troubled,' and the Gemara (Chagiga 15b) explains: When a person suffers, what does the Shechina say? My head is too heavy for Me, My arm is too heavy for Me.' "

Our Sages tell us that when a Jew is afflicted, Hashem suffers, as it were, much more than the person does. It may be that since He, blessed be He, is not subject to any limitation, which is why no conception of Him is possible in the world, therefore the suffering He undergoes due to Klal Yisrael's troubles is also boundless. It is not merely that it would be impossible for a person to endure the experience of such great suffering. Even to conceive of His suffering, to understand that He does suffer, to hear His voice crying, 'Woe, I have destroyed My house,' is impossible, because He is beyond the confines of a human. Only when Rabbi Yosi entered one of the ruins of Yerushalayim, where he experienced pangs of selflessness in the face of actual holy remnants of Yerushalayim, did he enter into a heightened level of spirituality where he was able to hear the voice of the blessed holy One."

Yidden, do you hear this! The Rebbe tells us that because Hashem is infinite, His pain is infinite and beyond anything we can imagine. And who is the Rebbe who tells us this glorious explanation? A tzaddik who spoke from the burnt-out rafters of the Warsaw Ghetto and who would soon share in the terrible fate of all his family and die al kiddush Hashem. This is what we are, and this is why we can survive. But we must speak of it, tell it, and live it!

Koli el Elokim ve'etzaka..., "I will lift up my voice to Hashem and cry, and He will give ear to me." First and foremost, we must always remain focused on this one truth. Hashem always hears us; He listens and shares in our woes.

Beyom tzarasi Hashem darashti..., "In the day of my trouble I sought my Master, my wound exudes into the night without ceasing, my soul refuses to be comforted. I remember how Hashem favored me and I moan, when I talk about it my spirit faints, sela." David tells us that it is no sin to feel wounded, even to the point where one sees no way out. The important thing is that we remain mindful of Hashem's ability to lift us above it all. Every one of us has had difficulties in life, and when we look back we can see clearly how Hashem saved us. When new tribulations arise we should weep at the momentary

loss of our past trust in Hashem, and strengthen ourselves with hope.

Chishavti yamim mikedem..., "I have pondered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I recall my song into the night, with my heart I meditate and my spirit searches diligently." When things seem gloomy one must take heart from the past. Look where we have come from and Whom we represent. In the darkest of nights our people have looked to Hashem and found promise and strength.

Hale'olamim yiznach Hashem..., "Will my Master cast me off forever, and will He no longer be favorable?" The psalmist now articulates the fears that lurk in all our hearts. We are all too human, and we measure things accordingly. We carry grudges and find it hard to forgive. The passage here asks if Hashem has cast us aside forever. We know how undeserving we are - has He agreed with our findings?

Elokim bakodesh darkecha..., "G-d, in holiness is Your way, what power is as great as Hashem? You are the Alm-ghty Who does wonders; You have let the people know of Your strength. You have redeemed with an outstretched arm; Your people, the sons of Yaakov and Yosef, sela." The answer is an emphatic no! Hashem's ways are true holiness. His manner is far beyond our conception. Hashem has consistently redeemed us from the pit and led us to new heights.

Nachisa katzon amecha..., "You led Your people like a flock, in the hand of Moshe and Aharon." A true shepherd cares for his flock and feels for their needs. Moshe and Aharon were who they were because they felt the pain of their people. Hashem chose them as our leaders so they would bring us out of our slavery with this unique insight. Hashem feels and knows how we are weakened by our circumstances, and He will take us out with empathetic care.

So, my dear friends, we should always be aware from whence we come, and know in our hearts that Hashem will be with us and redeem us.

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