

# CHAPTER EIGHTY

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

Yidden daven. It's what we do; it's who we are. By our very definition and character it has been this fact that has held us together throughout the years of galus. Our very name indicates this. Yehudim comes from the name Yehuda, given by Leah to her fourth son. At his birth she declared, "This time I will gratefully praise Hashem," and with this she gave him the name that has its roots in the word for praise. We are known specifically by the name of Yehuda, for it is our willingness to pray to Hashem that sets us apart from everyone else.

I have often been bemused by the penchant Jews from all segments of our community have in visiting shuls wherever they may go. Secular folk always tell me of visiting synagogues in the most remote of places. What draws them to these oft-disused and crumbling places? The answer is that they are Jews, and Jews like to go where people pray.

It's a wondrous fact that no matter where Jews find themselves living, they will seek to build a shul. Even those who keep very little will spend time and effort in making sure their community has a place to pray. Go to any center of Jewish life and you will find communities building places where they can congregare to daven. In Eretz Yisrael the first sign that a community is viable is its intent to build a shul. This is because synagogues are our lifeblood; they are how we actualize our belief in Hashem. A Jew focuses on prayer because he knows deep down that tefilla is who we are.

The galus we find ourselves in is one that doesn't really cater to people who pray. Materialism is the yetzer hara's way of getting us to forget the real Source of goodness. Whole societies have left their places of prayer behind and turned to new gods, gods created with plastic credit cards and flashy advertisements. In contrast, Yidden may move to new places, but they always build new shuls on their way. They want to come together; at the very least, they want to keep open their dialogue with Hashem.

And indeed, what a rich and heart-rending dialogue this has been. Jews have been in every kind of situation, they have had to fight off every sort of pain, and through it all they have davened. No matter how dark the sky, we have always known that Hashem is our Father Who hears our heartfelt pleas. Even when we thought that perhaps things weren't as we would like, we still stayed loyal, and this in itself was often the answer to our prayers.

In this kapitel the psalmist touches on all this, creating a paeon of heartfelt intensity that cannot but give strength and hope.

Lamenatze'ach el shoshanim edus..., "To the Chief Musician, to the roses a testimony, a psalm of Asaf." We are told that this psalm was written by the members of the Sanhedrin in honor of bnei Yisrael, who are called roses. Notice that it is a song, for although it tells of our great difficulties, it never loses our sense of joy in being Jews. Ro'ei Yisrael haazina..., "Shepherd of Israel, give ear. You Who leads Yosef like a flock, You Who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth with Your might." Despite all our woes, we are true to Hashem. We want only to be His sheep, and we await His light.

Elokim hashiveinu..., "Hashem, lead us back and cause Your face to shine, thus we will be delivered." Our salvation is directly connected with Hashem. Other nations may feel that their strength lies in their own prowess and cunning. We know differently. We are the am Hashem, the nation of G-d, and our deliverance will only come when Hashem leads us and we accept His leadership totally.

Hashem Elokim Tzevakos ad masai ashanta..., "Hashem, G-d of Hosts, how long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people? You have fed them the bread of tears, and You have made them drink tears in large measures." We feel so lost; we beseech Hashem to accept our prayers even if they are not always pure. We have so much pain. Our bread, our working life, seems drenched in tears. We work so hard to survive in this galus that we end up drinking tears of worry in huge amounts. We then reiterate our glorious history. Gefen miMitzrayim tasiya..., "A vine out of Egypt You brought, You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared a place before it, and it took root and filled the land." We were that vine - a seedling brought out of the hostility of slavery and planted in holy soil. We grew and filled that land with our mitzvos.

We are astounded at the terrors we have lived through. Lama parazta gedeha..., "Why have You then broken down its fences, so that all wayfarers pluck its fruit? The boar of the forest ravages it, and the wild fowl of the field feed upon it." What happened, we ask? Why have the wildest of enemies taken over our place, our lives? We can detect something very moving here. The psalmist doesn't say that all this havoc is due to our sins. He doesn't pick at our wounds. Rather, he allows us to ask the questions that weigh so heavily in our hearts. True, there is a time and place for such an account, but here we are speaking in terms of the hurt we carry at our most simple level.

Elokim Tzevakos shuv na..., "G-d of Hosts, do return, we beseech You; look down from heaven and behold, and be mindful of this vine." We don't begin to understand why. We just beg, "Please, Hashem, look at this vine, Your vine, and give it life once more."

Vechana asher nata yeminecha..., "May Your Hand rest upon the man of Your right Hand, upon the son of man whom You strengthened for Yourself." This speaks of the children of Yaakov, Hashem's "right-hand man." We ask for nothing in our own right, but in the merit that we are the descendants of great people.

Velo nasog mimeka..., "Thereby we will not turn back from You, revive us and we will invoke Your Name." It is in the genes of Yaakov's children! We will never turn our backs on our destiny. We ask

only that Hashem revive us so we can extol His Name throughout the world.

Seeing these words gives one cause to think. We truly are a people who want to pray, it's just so obvious. No matter what, even when we cannot understand what is happening, we seek but one thing - that Hashem give us strength so we can daven even more.

Yidden, I have seen this so, so often. Jews with no background turn to me for help to pray. The young seek new kinds of siddurim that will make it easier for them to understand our holy tefillos. Wherever you go, new groups of Yiddishe kinder are finding ways to daven. It's all around us; we just have to open our eyes to see.

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