

CHAPTER NINETY-TWO

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I was privileged to have met a Yid who described himself as the last Yid alive in the world, and I consider myself blessed. He is a life-time inspiration.

Obviously the fellow was mistaken. *Baruch Hashem* he was not the last Yid, but at the time of his story he rightfully thought he was.

It was after the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, when a minute number of Yidden who had somehow managed to secrete themselves in hidden quarters remained there for some time longer. One of these Yidden was Reb Leibel, who was then a young man. He had holed himself up in a small crevice that had somehow been overlooked by the Nazis, and by sheer determination he survived. During daylight hours he would remain in his small hole, venturing out at night to scavenge about for food. He became part and parcel of the deep shadows, knowing all too well what being discovered would entail. He lived out the rest of the war in this manner, never speaking, contacting or touching another human being.

In his matter-of-fact description of this hellish period of time, Reb Leibel told me, "I was sure that I was the last Yid alive in the whole world." And who could blame him for thinking so?

But there is yet a greater measure to this man's heroism, one he stated just as simply. "Not once, never, did I lose faith in Hashem." Even though he was sure there were no more Yidden alive, he remained steadfast in his faith. He still looked to Hashem as a child of Yaakov, and even if he was the last such child, he would not lose his allegiance to his soul's roots.

I have often thought of Reb Leibel's words. Do I truly grasp their depth of meaning? And from where did this simple chassidische Yid find such strength? I only hope their import has given me a part of his remarkable intensity.

It is an incredible fact of history that the Jewish people have remained faithful to their Creator regardless of the vicious mayhem that has marked their lives. From whence does this come? And how do we relate to it in our lives today?

In *kapitel* ninety-two of *Tehillim* we find some insight. "To relate Your loving-kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights." The usual explanation of this verse is that "morning" symbolizes the times when things are bright and the sun shines upon *Klal Yisrael* as a nation. Then it is easy and only proper that we publicly relate Hashem's many kindnesses. At "night," when the world turns dark

and we feel only pain, then we must live on our faith.

In the midst of the *churban* of the Warsaw ghetto, the saintly Alexander Rebbe, *zt"l*, delivered to his chassidim another inspiring message.

"The verse says *emunascha*, 'Your faithfulness,' rather than *emunasi*, 'my belief in You.' It's not a Yid's belief in Hashem that gives him life at night. It's the way Hashem believes in us that gives us life. When the night is so dark and endless, what keeps us alive is remembering how much Hashem believes in us. Hashem believes that we will bring the coming day."

I must admit that when I first saw these words, my heart gave a leap. Here was a saintly tzaddik in the midst of a yawning abyss, crying out for Yidden to remain strong because Hashem has faith in us! What strength, what emotional power!

Yidden have so much within themselves. Each one of us carries an unbelievable amount of potential, but our failing is that we have no faith. I don't mean faith in Hashem - I mean faith in ourselves. As a gutte Yid once told me, to have faith in Hashem one must first have faith in oneself.

Reb Leibel showed that kind of faith. He proved that Hashem's faith in us has never been misplaced.

The concept that Hashem has faith in His children and that the new day will arrive through our perseverance is so beautiful and so powerful, that it enables us to actually turn the darkness into light. The *kapitel* goes on to describe how we can live by this faith. The secret is to see Hashem's greatness beyond what seems apparent at any one time.

"How great are Your works, Hashem; how infinitely profound are Your thoughts." The Seforno explains that Hashem's "works" are what is visible, while His "thoughts" are the Divine purpose behind each creation. "An empty-headed man cannot know, nor does a fool understand this." Those who are uneducated in the realm of spirituality cannot possibly conceive all the wonders that Hashem has created.

Notice that the passage speaks of two levels of ignorance. The empty-headed person refers to one who is ignorant due to simple lack of knowledge. This can be remedied by study with Torah sages. The fool, on the other hand, is one whose limited experience does not wish to allow room for Torah truths. Such a fellow is frightened that the truth will cause him to question or change his whole lifestyle.

"When the wicked bloom like grass and all the evildoers blossom, it is so that they may be destroyed forever." The ultimate test of faith is when one witnesses how evil seems to thrive and find success. This is where we must muster the strength of faith.

Although superficially the wicked ones seem to be winning, the *kapitel* tells us succinctly that their end will be destruction.

This psalm was designated to be sung on Shabbos, for only on Shabbos does one have the quiet

space and peace of mind needed to delve into these difficult truths and absorb them. The Maharal brings a Midrash that tells us that Shavuos has a close connection with Shabbos, since the very first *kabbalas haTorah* took place on Shabbos. He goes on to explain that Shabbos is a spiritual day, not connected to the physical world. Therefore, even though creative work is prohibited on Shabbos, creative spiritual work is permitted. It is thus fitting that Torah, the ultimate metaphysical entity, was given on Shabbos.

Where do we find the strength of a Reb Leibel? Perhaps by sitting down in the creative quiet of a Shabbos or a *Yom Tov* and expressing the truths of this *kapitel* in our own lives. We often gobble up our davening without hardly a thought, missing so much along the way. Shabbos and *Yom Tov* excite the soul and give us the ability to enthuse our prayers with individual meaning.

Following along with the Maharal, we find another facet of understanding. He explains that tradition tells us that every number has symbolic meaning. The number one represents unity and wholeness, as expressed by the ultimate Oneness of Hashem. The number two represents separation, disunity and multiplicity. The number three is the connection between these two disparate entities; a common theme that unites the two. Thus the number three expresses the concept of connection and unification of disparate entities.

This concept is the key to explaining why the Torah was given in the third month of Sivan. The Oneness of Hashem and the diversity of Creation can find a bridge through the giving of the Torah.

This span of understanding is from where we find faith. Torah is the unique gift that makes everything possible.

The *kapitel* goes on to say, "The righteous will blossom like a palm tree, like a cedar in Lebanon he will grow tall. Planted in the House of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d they will blossom." The faith we need, as well as the faith that Hashem has in us, will find nourishment through the Torah and the Torah-righteous. There we will blossom and there we can grow tall.

Yes, I had met the last Yid alive, and he had not lost his faith in Hashem nor turned his back on the loving-faith that Hashem has in us. Instead he chose to "declare that Hashem is upright; He is my stronghold in whom there is no injustice." *Yom Tov* and Shabbos are both G-d-given opportunities to bring all the strands together and balance our hearts with true understanding. The third month is a time of bridging our realities and finally discovering the gift of true faith.

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