

CHAPTER NINETY-SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I have just returned from what seems to be a yearly visit to the local zoo. I personally am not a zoo person. I just feel queasy about watching Hashem's creatures pacing back and forth in a cage. However, as a devoted *zeidy* it seems to be an unwritten *halacha* that it is my responsibility to take my grandchildren to the zoo on *Chol Hamoed*. Not to do so would somehow ruin their childhood and cause untold damage to them in the years ahead.

So, come the day, come the hero, and yours truly, dutifully wrapped warm, with ample supplies of food to conquer Mount Everest, sallied forth to the wilds of the nearest zoo. As we ambled along from one animal to the next, (I say amble, it was more like, I *schlepped* and the kids skipped), I noticed different signs on the cages. It seems that the zoo people are trying to change their image and so all their cages are festooned with signs telling us how much they care about their stock. They intoned that in fact all the animals living in their zoo are plain old lucky because they need never fear extinction. At every stop we read how this or that animal is very rare and almost extinct in the wild, and how only because those lovely folks in the zoo really care, are these few animals alive.

One such notice especially caught my eye, "If current trends continue, the Asian Elephant will be extinct within fifty years." Well, thought I, if current trends continue, mankind might very well be extinct within fifty years as well! Obviously it is easier to worry about the poor elephant (did you know elephants can't jump?), than the war torn, miserable state of human kind in our times. There was a charity box at the side of the notice, and people were solemnly putting in money, justly worried about yet another dimension of human cruelty towards others.

The world does worry about things; and we who are blessed with plenty, worry more than most. After all, those living in dire poverty have no time to worry about a four-ton elephant when they cannot get enough food for their family's next meal. The answers to many of the problems facing mankind are not all that difficult to discern, nor are they hard to resolve. You need not be a rocket scientist to figure out that most of the rot in this world is caused by greed, jealousy, and selfishness. These are all human traits and therefore will become a thing of the past when humans change the way they relate to each other. Despite this obvious fact, the anger and troubles go on. Yes, this troubled world is rocked by human conflict, and all wars are futile, but each group feels certain that all wars are wrong except their own.

I am sure we all feel this sense of utter despair at times. The story is told of an innocent man who was jailed falsely and held in a dark cell. Years went by, the poor fellow dreamt only of his release.

After a long period of anguish, the day finally arrived, and the prison guard opened up his cell. The prisoner noticed that no key was used, and asked about this only to hear in reply, "Well, didn't you know? That door was never locked!" All those years he thought he was locked in a prison when all the while the door to freedom was open. If there was anything possibly worse than his incarceration, it must have been the thought that he could have easily walked out.

The same may well be true of our own situation here and now. We see ourselves locked into a prison of pain, when in truth the doors have never really been locked at all. Instead, we have lost heart and forgotten that Hashem will bring the wicked to their just punishments, and the sun will shine on His chosen people. In this *kapitel* we are reminded of all this. It was written by *Moshe Rabbeinu* so that we, his beloved nation, should find strength when times seem shrouded in darkness.

HASHEM MALACH TAGEL ... "When Hashem is universally accepted as King the earth will exult; the multitudes of islands will rejoice."

The time will come when even the far most islands in the midst of the seas will realize that Hashem is One. It will be then that the earth itself will rejoice; for no more will it have to witness the blood shed that has soaked its very soil.

ANAN VA'ARAFEL SEVIVAV ... "Clouds and dense darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne."

To the untrained eye it may seem that clouds and darkness are the natural manner in which the world exists. This is a mirage, for righteousness and justice are the true foundations of this world. The truth seems locked away from sight, but given some trust, one can perceive Hashem's reality. Remember, this message is given to us by *Moshe Rabbeinu* who lived with Hashem's essence forty days and nights on Hashem's mountain. He tells us this unique truth for all generations, so that we should know that hope is never to be lost.

HARIM KADONAG NAMASU ... "The mountains melt like wax before Hashem, before the Master of all earth."

The doors that hold us prisoners, the pain that builds up into mountains, all this will melt like wax in the sun. The brightness of Hashem's love will clear away all the mist.

HIGIDU HASHAMAYIM TZIDKO ... "The heavens will declare His righteousness and all the peoples will behold His glory."

The time will come when the clouds will disappear and the very purity of the heavenly message will declare Hashem's truthfulness. The entire world will see for themselves that which the Jewish nation has always known, that Hashem is the One true glory, and His righteousness is forever.

OHAVEI HASHEM SIN'U RA ... "Lovers of Hashem, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His pious ones;

from the hand of the wicked, He saves them."

Sometimes the anguish of this hypocritical world leads us to feel that we too must compromise and share in the world's deceit. We close Hashem's door and stand behind it thinking it locked. Moshe promises us that Hashem will preserve His pious ones, and that they will be saved from despair. The clouds that keep us prisoners are just that, an obstruction that has no matter.

OHR ZARU'A LATZADDIK ... "Light is sown for the righteous and for the upright in heart----joy. Rejoice, righteous ones, in Hashem, and give thanks to his holy Name." The light of truth will be yours if you stay on the course and keep focused. Never let yourself become locked behind the doors of this material world's foolishness. Rejoice and the doors will swing open; you will give thanks to that which is valid, to Hashem, the Holy Name.

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