

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FIFTEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Society provides so many different distractions from the drudgery and irritations of everyday life - mass entertainment, huge amusement parks, flashing lights and much more. We are surrounded by so much noise that we can't really think straight. This is no mere coincidence; rather, it is what the sterile world of the mundane is built upon. But focusing our attention elsewhere causes us to lose sight of who and what we truly are.

These external manipulations draw us away from our source of true sanity, from *Hashem*. Sometimes the pain is so great that we feel, *If only I could grab hold of my will, just for a minute, I could stop the cacophony that grates at my soul.* Those manipulators of our minds want to keep us away from all such thought, so they throw ever more junk our way just to keep the distraction fresh. How many times have we witnessed people crying just from the sheer desperation of feeling that they have no control over their lives. And our young are even more vulnerable to this tyranny of noise. Go to any "Jewish" record shop (sorry, today they are tapes and disks) and listen to what is being played. Look at how the "Chasidic Pop Stars" are being packaged for our young, what kind of entertainment is put on for them, how the performers act. Isn't this really the same sort of distraction as much as the others? The ones that suffer are our souls, buried under an avalanche of debris.

So, what can we do, where can we go? *Hashem* in His wisdom saw to it that in the middle of the darkest of times we would have an island of sanity. *Chanuka* is that special place, and its soft light is meant to re-ignite the brightness that is our bewildered embattled soul. The *Sochatchover Rebbe* was once asked why the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that a person is obligated to buy lighting materials for the *Chanuka menorah* even if he is destitute and will have to resort to begging to do so, whereas most other *mitzvos* are not mandatory if a person lacks the means to perform them with. The Rebbe replied, "We find a rule in the *Gemara (Brachos 6)* that if a person contemplates performing a *mitzva* but is unavoidably prevented from doing so, *Hashem* allocates to him the credit as if he actually accomplished the deed. *Chanuka* lights, however, are different. They are lit for a specific reason - to give public testimony to *Hashem's* miracles that are associated with the festival. Since the mere intention to perform the duty will not provide public evidence, this precept cannot be assumed to be fulfilled except by its actual performance."

What were those actual miracles? Obviously we all know the story of those trying times. One of the driving forces behind the despair of the *Yidden* at that time was their sense of total loss. They did not feel they could possibly overcome their enemies. The foe's army was huge, they had shiny shields,

and I'll bet they made a lot of noise. It took *Yehuda* to stand up and tell them that all that they saw was just a distraction, and if they would but focus on the will of *Hashem*, they would find the peace of mind needed to win. They needed light to split the darkness of the rash and loud world.

This, then, is why the lighting of the *menora* must be done in real terms in each home. Today we face different foes, but no less harsh. They capture us with their wonders, glamour and flightiness, but capture us they do. We too need the light, the actual light of *Hashem's* warmth, to help us out of this quagmire. When we sit by the *menora* and stare into the lights, we escape for just the moment from the harsh artificiality of the mundane light outside our doors. We can quiet our racing hearts and let ourselves become calmed and tranquil. The noise recedes and our minds regain some balance. If this isn't a miracle in real terms, then I don't know what is.

Kapitel 115 is part of what is termed "full *Hallel*," that joyous group of psalms said during prayers only rarely, including all eight days of *Chanuka*. And what a special Chanukah message it holds. Come with me and let's look at it together.

Lo lanu Hashem, "Not for our sake, Hashem, not for our sake, but unto Your Name give honor; for the sake of Your kindness, for the sake of Your truth." *Hashem*, we are not worthy of your goodness, we have allowed our hearts to stray. Rather, we ask that You give us of Your kindness so that we and the rest of the world around us can realize Your true essence.

Lama yomru hagoyim, "Why should the nations say, Where now is their G-d?" "If we remain distracted by this worldly clamor, all those about us will say, "Look, those Jews were so close to the Creator once upon a time, and now look at them. They are as crass as everyone else."

Atzabehem kesef vezahav, "Their idols are silver and gold, products of human hands. They have a mouth but cannot speak, they have eyes but cannot see." The word *atzabehem* refers to their idols, but it can also mean their sadness, stemming from the root word *atzuv*. A *gutta Yid* once interpreted this as meaning that their sadness and anxieties come from their quest for silver and gold. The world thinks it is in their hands to create their wealth, but this only leads to sadness because it is a distraction from the truth. Their mouths work, but they don't speak to the core of their hearts. They have eyes but are blinded, because the illumination they have made is really just vapor.

Kimohem yihiyu oseihem, "Like them shall be their makers - all those who put trust in them." The world's idols are just distraction. They are empty and soon gone. Those who fall into the thrall of such temporary flashes of light will also disappear just as if they were never there. Precisely because the world puts its trust in these shifting shadows we find so much despair, despite the material plenty.

Yisrael bitach baHashem, "Israel, trust in Hashem, He is their help and their shield." *Yidden* are called upon to look beyond the material glitter of silver trinkets. If we trust in *Hashem* we will find the help we need to overcome the beckoning of material idol worship, for we will be shielded by *Hashem's* love. If we break through the barrier of the material facade, then *Hashem's* blessing will flow upon us

in a flood. Wherever we turn we will see *Hashem's* bounty.

Yivarech es beis Yisrael, "He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aharon. He will bless those who fear Hashem, the small ones along with the great." Such is the powerful love *Hashem* has for His children. The gates of His blessing swing open when we just show our trust in Him.

As we sit by the small flickering *Chanuka* lights, we absorb this wondrous message. This alone is the shield that will save us from the brickbats that are being thrown about us. *Hashamayim shamayim laHashem*, "The heaven is the heaven of Hashem, but the earth He gave to mankind." Said the Alexanderer Rebbe, zt"l, "The heavens are already heavenly, but the earth *Hashem* gave to man that he may make of it the heavens."

Yidden, we have spoken of this before. The earth is a mirror image of the heavens; man need only bring its holiness into focus. In these tumultuous times we can make a first step. We can clear out the clutter and the racket. How? Let us sit by the glowing silence of the menorah, whispering these most special words, and then just maybe the truth will bring its light into our hearts.

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