

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED SIXTEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

It is Yom Tov, and everyone is in the full throes of reciting Hallel. The imagery is wondrous; all the heavens are open and we rally together with a sense of joy that is palatable. It is Yom Tov and here we are singing *Yom Tovdige* praises to Hashem. But wait; is this a sound of discord that we hear? Is it possible in our moment of joy that we are describing our unfortunate state of woe?

No student of the human condition can clearly explain what we are experiencing in our times. We live in the shadow of what was the darkest page in human history. Nothing could describe the Holocaust or the trauma it has left in its wake. There are such dark places that words cannot even touch their evil, and the scars of this tragic time will be carried by us all for eternity. How many tear-drenched psalms were sent heavenwards during those terrifying times? Can any mere mortal begin to fathom the millions of terror stricken prayers that were said in the cellars of that unique part of hell? Yet, Jews continued to pray, to beseech, never doubting that their words were being heard.

Now the sands of our fate have changed. A mere sixty some years after the darkness of Hitler, we are faced with new enemies, no less implacable. Our souls seem to be ground down from all this stress and anguish. Our young go on buses with our hearts in our mouths, we shudder at every newscast, and we tremble at what the next day will bring.

Can we, may we, sing in joy with all this staring us in the face? Where do we get the sheer audacity to pray with joy whilst all about us fear stalks our lives?

The answer can be found in the riddle that is the Yid. We are a different people, a people with a destiny that is unlike any other. There is no historical equal to this saga, we are alone, and that in itself is part of whom we are.

Our kapitel starts with:

Ahavti Ki Yishma Hashem ... "I love Him, for Hashem hears my voice, my supplications. For he has inclined His ear to me, in my days I will invoke His name."

The Rebbe Reb Pinchas Koretzer commented on this verse: "I love to have Hashem hear me, not because I wish Him to grant me my desires, nor because I expect to receive from Him any benefits, but because He, the Great and Mighty G-d, has deigned to incline His ear to me, the lowly supplicant."

This is the true path of the Torah Yid. We pray to Hashem so that He should hear our voice. His love

for us is so enormous that He wants to listen to our lowly pleas. Recently someone asked me a powerful question. He had been experiencing horrific trials; things had happened that had turned his entire life around. The party wanted to know what they should be doing. I told him that Hashem must really want their tefillos because He had put them in such a situation that their only manner of finding some light was to pray.

We celebrate Yom Tov - a time Hashem has given us for uplift and joy. In its midst, even with the knowledge of our trials, we focus on that which Hashem has bestowed upon us, that being His love for our prayer.

Afafuni Chevlei Maves ... "The pains of death encircled me; the confines of the grave have found me, trouble and sorrow I would find."

Things can become so dark. We can feel as if we are living in a grave that confines our heart. The taste of our demise seems to be on our tongue. Hashem? What will be of me? How can I get through this swamp of despair?

Uvesheim Hashem Ekra ... "Then I would invoke the Name of Hashem: Please Hashem, save my soul!"

I am a Yid; when my breathing grows shallow with fear, I call out to my Father. I ask that my soul be saved from this depression. For although the troubles will perhaps remain, if my soul feels the truth, then I will persevere.

I have seen Yidden who were in deep tzaros, Yidden who perhaps were not always in shul, but Yidden all the same. I have heard them tell me this one wondrous fact - that as long as in their soul they knew Hashem was with them, they found a way to get through their troubles.

Shomer Pesayim Hashem ... "Hashem protects the simple; I was brought low, but He saved me."

All Yidden have a point where they must leave behind all pretensions, and turn to Hashem in simplicity. It is then that Hashem will lift us, for His protection is at that point. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable at such a level is the protection itself; because it is from there that we are saved.

Ki Chilatzta Nafshi Mimaves ... "For You delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling."

It is only on Yom Tov or Rosh Chodesh that we can stop and integrate these outstanding truths. Hashem saves us every day; if we live it is with Hashem's continuous blessing. If we know this to be our reality, then the tears become holy, and our path becomes straightened.

Es'haleich Lifnei Hashem ... "I shall walk before Hashem in the land of the living."

There are those who walk through life but are spiritually dead. You can have all the trappings of the "good life" and be dead inside your heart. Yidden have options; they can walk before Hashem, and therefore always be in the land of true life. I know it isn't always easy. There are voices that call us

away from our true place. We should accept that perhaps this in itself is our greatest trial.

Today we see many of our lost brethren seeking to learn of their Torah roots. Often I hear from heimishe Yidden who participate in such learning groups that they become invigorated in their own Yiddishkeit because they are learning with others who never heard Torah truths. This is a beautiful bonus for such teachers; they become energized in the land of Torah living. When you have to articulate your Torah beliefs, they become more real in your own heart.

Ana Hashem, Ki Ani Avdecha ... "Please Hashem - for I am Your servant, I am Your servant, son of Your handmaid - You have released my bonds."

The world thinks we are a people with no standing. They use us and then discard us, but no matter, for we are truly free. How? Because we serve Hashem, and this knowledge releases us from the bonds of this world of mirage.

Bechatzros Beis Hashem ... "In the courtyards of the House of Hashem, in your midst, O Jerusalem, Praise Hashem!"

Oh Yom Tov, Oh sweet Hallel, you remind me even in my pain, that we will praise Hashem in the courtyards of His city, it will be, and please, let it be soon.

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