

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED NINETEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I knew it was not going to be easy, in fact, I feared the day. There are some parts of any project that are so intimidating that one tries to sideline them altogether. You go along hoping that the particularly difficult bit will somehow sort itself out and that by some special magic, come the day, and things wouldn't seem so hard after all. When I took it upon myself to write about Tehillim, I knew that this particularly difficult kapitel would come along in its time and would need to be addressed. Well I thought I had plenty of time until I got to it, only to find that, with the help of Hashem, the time has arrived.

The kapitel is not difficult so much because of its concepts, rather because of the vast size of it. One hundred and seventy six stanzas deserve its own book, and here I am trying to touch each Psalm in about thirteen hundred words. Where does one start, and more importantly where does one stop? The kapitel itself is David's curriculum of how to become a total Yid. He maps out each step along his own arduous journey and brings out points that make for a closer relationship with Hashem. Trying to distil all this in short measure is impossible, just as the recitation of this long Psalm cannot be done in a few moments. So where does that leave me? I have said before that Tehillim is such a broad canvas of life lived, that one could write book upon book on its interpretation and yet never even scratch the surface. Therefore, I have looked to some of the gutte Yidden of the past for instruction, and want to share some of their thoughts with you.

Ger Anochi Va'aretz ... "I am a stranger upon the earth; do not conceal from me Your commandments."

The Medzibozzer Rebbe explained this verse in a poignant manner. "A traveller came to a town where everyone was a stranger to him and he had no one with whom to converse. Later another stranger arrived, and both became friends, impelled by their mutual loneliness. They agreed to have no secrets from each other henceforth. The Psalmist says, "I am a stranger in the earth of evildoers and You Hashem are also unwelcome. Let us become friends, and have no secrets from each other."

These few words paint a picture of sheer need and longing. The *Yiddishe neshama* finds this crass world so foreign that even when he goes through the motions he is in his heart alone. He pines for the company of spirituality, and calls out to Hashem to fill the awesome void that gnaws from within. This pining is met with Hashem's love; for He seeks our company at all times and at all levels. The expression of this mutual need is uplifting; it brings comfort and becalms the anxious soul. In this one vignette the tzaddik has given use a whole world of light. He has explained what we have long felt,

and done so with a sweetness seldom experienced.

Hadricheini Binsiv Mitzvosecha ... "Guide me in the path of Your commandments, for therein is my desire."

The Holy Apter Rebbe tells us that Hashem gives man free will to choose his way of conduct; but when He sees a man has chosen wisely, Hashem assists him to continue in the right way. The Rebbe thus teaches this passage accordingly, "Since I find delight and desire in Your commandments, I ask You to guide me that I may steadily walk on the path of righteousness." Yidden want to be good, only we lose our way because of the many pitfalls that the material world sets to trap us. The knowledge that we can choose the right path and then beg Hashem to strengthen our resolve is a great comfort. Because the outer world is such a strong force, without Hashem's help we would be riddled with doubt.

A bit further we read: *Hakeim Le'avdecha ...* "Fulfill for Your servant, Your word that You gave [to me] who fears You."

Again the Medzibozer teaches us a unique way to understand this passage. "Give me words whereby I may be induced towards reverence for You." Having chosen the right path, one needs the language that will bolster this choice. I often say that one of the greatest gifts of being able to learn Torah with adults who have never had the merit to do so when young, is that one is forced to articulate beliefs and concepts that in Yeshiva he never actually needed to talk about. However, when one speaks of them, using words that must come from within, then his own reverence for these holy concepts becomes more entrenched.

Even more, when one speaks of G-dly matters he accepts that everything in his experience is there to teach him Hashem's ways.

The Belzer Rebbe zy"ta said that even from the wicked we must learn. He advises that we observe the manner in which they plan their evil acts, and the untiring way they go about doing it. This, says the Rebbe, is what the stanza here means:

Me'oiyvai Techakmeini ... "From my enemies shall You teach me wisdom in doing Your commandments."

We often see those who have chosen the path of secular materialism feeling quite sure of themselves - sitting in the huge homes, gloating over our apparent lack of material gain. This can cause some to waver, become weak, and lose their resolve. Then we find the Medzibozer tzaddik once more to strengthen our will.

Ta'isi Keseh Oveid ... "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant; for I have not forgotten Your commandments."

On this the Rebbe comments, "When a sheep is lost, the shepherd hunts for it at once, and calls out

to it without delay, lest the sheep forget the sound of his voice. The Psalmist says, O L-rd, seek us out without delay while we have not as yet forgotten Your commandments. If You delay, we may forget Your voice and fail to heed it." We become befuddled by the voices that scream out at us, seeking to guide us away from our connection to our true source, Hashem. However, if the voice of our Shepherd, the voice of Hashem through His Torah, seeps through the wall of noise, then we will never forget what we are meant to do.

And so the kapitel goes on, one hundred and seventy six stanzas, each full of light and hope. The pen could continue for pages yet never even start to find the definitive meaning of these holy sentences. This is the glory of Tehillim; it gives and gives, to each soul, and to each generation. Delve into its sea, dear reader, find your soul listening and learning, feel the power of true flight through its holy intent.

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