

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-ONE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

We Jews are great at politics. Every community has its experts, and each Yid knows instinctively all the whys and wherefores of current events. We are a well-read people, supporting books and newspapers well in excess to our numbers. Yet we don't really know anything at all, and all the discussions held in shul corridors throughout the world is just so much hot air.

Any student of history will tell you that what happens in real life has nothing to do with what observers perceive to be occurring at the time. Events transpire and heads of state confer; yet it is all so much "smoke and mirrors." Rarely do we have any actual knowledge of what is going on. History has been shaped by so many variables. The people playing star roles on the stage of life are just that - people. They get colds, have stomachaches and quarrel with their families, and then go off to a meeting to decide the fate of the world.

At the end of World War II an extremely ill President Roosevelt met for the last time with Stalin and Churchill, and thus a cold war was kick-started because of decisions that a healthy American President would never have acceded to. True, people have choices, but their choices are made within the realm of being humans who are prone to all human frailties.

I often wonder while reading the latest news reports, What's really going on? Why does America do this, or Britain the other? How many agendas are on the table when they speak of peace? How much money is being made?

My readers may think me a cynic, and I don't disagree, for time and again we have seen whole nations taken to war for motives that no one can explain.

As Yidden, we should not be shocked by any of this. Chazal have told us many times that all that we see is a plan that is created by a force way beyond our comprehension. Hashem is running this world, and what we witness is only the human role playing in what is the Divine arrangement. When we find ourselves in darkness, we must always be mindful that true and eternal light will come only from Hashem. "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again."

It would be comforting to think that some kindly disposed fellow could sit down with sworn enemies and somehow work things out. In fact, some tend to believe that such is the case, since otherwise they feel a sense of hopelessness. We crave to think we are in control of things, and that all it will take is another bomb or some long-lost peace plan. The darkness we experience is the result of a

lack of true understanding. Yisrael betach baHashem, Jews believe in Hashem!" This is the only truth, the only beacon of light. All the rest is conjecture and words filled with self-importance.

When we face confusing times our sights must turn, as always, to the one place from whence our salvation will come. Loyal Yidden must articulate this time and again, say it and believe it. When we feel consumed by the terror and despair that our enemies spew forth, we must open our hearts to the eternal truth that is Hashem.

Our kapitel speaks of this in bold, stirring words.

Esa einai el heharim..., "I will lift my eyes to the mountains: from where will my help come? My help comes from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth."

In times of extreme pain we look up to the highest peaks, those majestic vistas of natural strength, waiting desperately for a shimmer of hope. The Sfas Emes said, "During many periods of Israel's history they turned for help in their need to other nations or to those in authority. This rarely brought satisfactory results. Only when Israel comprehended that from naught shall come my help,' namely, that there is no man or people in whom they can place their trust, did it come to pass that they declared in song: My help comes from Hashem.' "

In these difficult times our trust is being tested. Do we really understand that salvation will come only from Hashem? Or do we hedge our bets and quietly wonder if the next foreign minister will come up with the answers?

I have seen a recorded correspondence that took place between Churchill and one of the last generation's gutte Yidden. The tzadik had miraculously escaped from the cauldron that was the Warsaw ghetto, and the British wartime leader sent a letter asking that the Rav advise him on how to bring about Germany's downfall.

The tzadik gave the following reply: "There are two possible ways; one involving natural means, the other supernatural. The natural means would be if a million angels with flaming swords were to descend onto Germany and destroy it. The supernatural would be if a million Englishmen parachuted down onto Germany and destroyed it." Pundits later said that Churchill, being a rationalist, chose the strategy based on natural means...angels and flaming swords. We have no idea what is natural and what isn't, for in a deeper way, both are the same. One thing we do have, and that is the faith that Hashem is the answer.

Hinei lo yanum velo yishan..., " Behold, He does not slumber nor does He sleep, The Guardian of Israel." We see two expressions of what seems to be one act. Perhaps, though, the meaning here is for us to realize that not only does Hashem not sleep, as in unconsciousness, but He does not even nap or slumber. His focus is always and constantly upon His children.

Yomam hashemesh lo yakeka..., "By day the sun will not smite you, nor the moon at night." There are many different dangers that we as a people must face. "By day," when all seems to be going well,

our very success causes envy and hatred. We are never safe when the "sunshine" of envy peers into our every movement.

"At night," when we are in darkness, we should not be fooled into thinking that the sliver of moonlight given to us will bring our salvation. The minds of nations are fickle; yesterday's heroes are tomorrow's villains. Look at who our most vociferous foes are in today's turmoil; they are the same liberal talking, "right-on" thinking folk who extolled our virtues just yesterday.

Hashem yishmarcha mikol ra..., "Hashem will guard you from all evil; He will preserve your soul." Yiddalach, this is what it is all about! We have been granted holy souls, and they are forever. This world is but a mirage, a place where we can aspire to some spiritual growth through its trials. The preservation of our uniqueness, our soul, is what we must always be conscious of.

Hashem yishmor tzeischa uvo'echa..., "Hashem will guard your going and coming, from now and forever." There is a lovely old chassidishe rhyme that is often sung at weddings. It tells of a soul that lives in heaven and seeks nothing more than to bask in the glow of Hashem's throne. Then it is taken by force and sent down to this world crying and begging all the way, for it doesn't want to have to go through the pain and travail of this material place. The nigun goes on to speak of all the ups and downs that life presents, with its final stanza expressing the soul's growth through all adversity. If we always turn to Hashem, accepting His Kingship in our lives, then He will guard the treasure that is our soul not only today, but for all eternity.

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