

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Ah stories, they really reach the inner sanctum of the heart. Hashem created us with finite understanding, however, with stories we are able to go just that one step further. Let me share one that I heard. It is told by the child of a holocaust survivor, Mrs. Debby Friedman, and I thank her for sharing this with us.

"On a hot June day in 1944, my mother dragged her starving and emaciated body towards one of the many electrified fences in Auschwitz. A lifetime ago it seemed she and her family had stood face to face with Mengele. His cursed finger had pointed my mother's family to the left and to death. She had been sent to the right, to slave labor and, by the grace of G-d, to life. Now, on this hot and soul numbing June day, she found herself near one of the fences dividing two parts of the Auschwitz camp, longing to be with her family, yet still clinging to life.

"A girl standing on the other side of the fence noticed her and called out in Czech. Turning her head, my mother saw a young girl of about 16 who stood shivering in fear and quaking from emotion. 'Please, tell me, do you speak Czech or German?' the girl asked.

'I speak Czech,' my mother answered.

'And are you Jewish?' the girl asked.

'Yes, of course I am,' my mother replied.

'Do you, perhaps, also know how to pray?' the girl continued.

'Certainly, but why are you asking all these questions?' asked my mother.

"Visibly relieved, the girl explained: 'I heard that we are being taken to the gas chambers tonight. I'm Jewish but I was never taught how to pray. I am terrified. If this camp is empty tomorrow morning, you will know that I'm no longer alive. If that happens, please pray for my soul. My name is Anishka.'

"Her heart breaking for this child just three years younger than herself, my mother reassured her and promised that should Anishka's camp be empty, she would pray for her.

"The next day, the camp on the other side of the fence was eerily silent. Not one person remained. My mother tearfully fulfilled young Anishka's last request. Though Anishka had no idea how to pray, she knew that a Jewish soul is eternally linked to the concept of prayer, and perhaps she went somewhat "easier" to her death knowing that her Jewish soul would indeed be prayed for."

You read these words and the heart quakes with a sudden rush of spiritual warmth. Hashem has given this world a nation called Bnei Yisrael, and despite all the horrors, we seek to pray to Him. It is astounding, we Jews pray even when all hope seems lost. It is one of the greatest mysteries of our people, yet in fact it is no mystery at all.

Every Jew is born with a *pintele* that beats with the need to connect with Hashem. Our enemies have sought to destroy this flame, they have belittled us, tortured us, disparaged everything we hold sacred, yet, the *pintele* remains alive. It is Hashem's gift to us, the kernel that makes us who we are, and nothing can destroy it.

In this kapitel we see how David relates this truth to our everyday needs. It takes but four stanzas but in them are generations of our stories.

Shir Hamaalos Eilecha Nasasi. "A Song of Ascents. To You I raised my eyes, O You Who dwell in the heavens."

The Jew raises his eyes above the fray of this material world. He seeks his Father, Hashem, whose abode is above anything that can harm us. The heavens are eternal; it is there that the Jewish truth lays.

The Zohar notes that the spelling of the word *hayoshvi*, meaning "dwell," is unusual here. It is common usage to spell the word with one *yud*, *hayosheiv*, yet here it has two. The *sefer* goes on to explain that this letter, the smallest in the Hebrew alphabet, can resemble a mere dot or squib, however this extra one alludes to the smallest point that lays within the Jewish heart. When a troubled Yid prays, he penetrates the inner *pintele* of his being and ignites the Divine spark of life which is a part of Hashem Himself. Therefore the psalm is saying: "O You Who dwell on high, hear my plea - the words that come from the *pintele* of the extra *yud* that spells out Your Holy abode. *Chaneini Hashem Chaneini*. "Favor us Hashem, favor us, for we are fully sated with contempt."

We ask Hashem twice for His grace, both for our material needs and for our spiritual ones. Both aspects are in danger whilst we still are made to live in this *galus*. We are fully sated, filled to the brim, with the abuse the nations heap upon us. Rabas Sav'ah La. "Our soul is fully sated with the scorn of the tranquil, and with the contempt of the arrogant."

The nations seek the "good life," one of convenience and passing fancy. They cannot understand that to the *yiddishe neshama* this world is meant to create new chances of spiritual growth. The easy life, the one lived sitting on an easy chair lulling away the days, is not the life a Yid seeks. He wants to challenge himself to greater closeness to Hashem.

Our enemies are arrogant; they feel that their material wealth makes them superior to the "Chosen Nation" which is kept in disdain. However the Bnei Yisrael does not lose faith, they have seen it all before and still, no, more because of all this, they still pray to Hashem.

I have just returned from a sad occasion, the funeral of a very special and unique *neshama*. As I was

walking away I met a close colleague who shared the following with me. The Beis Yisrael says on the passage at the end of parashas Behar, "All this is because the Bnei Yisrael are actually My slaves. They are My slaves because I brought them out of Egypt. I am Hashem your L-rd."

What we are speaking of here are the laws of the dignity we must show to Jews who for whatever reason have become slaves. Such a situation came upon someone usually because he had fallen into bad ways and had to repay his debt to society by working as a slave. Says the Rebbe: "We are talking of Yidden who had fallen to the lowest level yet Hashem says they are His servants, and they are part of those who were taken out of the bondage of Egypt."

This is so real. There are no lost Jews who are gone forever. They are part of the nation that Hashem took out of Egypt. They have the pintele, and they can and will raise their heads to Hashem one day.

I have often said in the past, words heard from the holy mouth of the *Pnei Menachem*, *Alle Yidden zenen heilig*, "All Jews are holy!!"

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