

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-FOUR

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Mobile phones can be dangerous to your health. Who knows what physical hazards will yet be revealed with future research, (while telltale signs of scrambled brains are certainly noticeable, who knows what else?). Its spiritual malevolence is certainly the cause of much concern (as is well documented by our Gedolim). There is yet another problem; they create a vacuum of isolation between us and others. People walk through the streets talking on phones instead of greeting those they pass. Recently a colleague shared the following story with me.

"Last week I caught myself doing something that is truly unforgivable. Whilst I was being served in a shop my mobile phone started ringing. Of course I did what everyone does, I fumbled about in my pockets until I found the thing, and I then desperately pushed several buttons until the object allowed me to answer its shrill call. Who was it? It doesn't matter. Take it for granted that it was not an emergency (the reason I carry the thing in the first place is so in case of emergency I can be contacted). Anyway, while I was having this inane conversation, I was automatically signing a receipt allowing my goods to be packed, and without stopping, I walked out of the shop. I then realized what I had done. I had been disrespectful to the young man who had served me; that formless voice in the piece of plastic took precedence over the real live person who was helping me. I returned to the shop and apologized. Why? Simply because this world is cold enough without my adding to its darkness and because that young man should know that he is a valuable human soul." Well let me tell you that this episode moved me, and I felt that its teller was a true to life modern hero. He wouldn't feel comfortable with such a description, nor would he recognize himself in such terms, nevertheless hero he is.

It is a well-known fact that we need to have heroes; life without them seems a dull and stagnate place. Even more than that, without heroes we would never strive within ourselves to become improved people. Heroes tell us that it is possible to overcome the hazards of life. They teach us how to dare to be better.

Now to many, the word hero denotes some sort of super human, a person that is able to "leap over high buildings in a single bound." However, real heroes can be those who seem to be living hum drum lives and in fact are giants of the spirit. Each individual is sent extraordinary challenges that are created exclusively for his specific uniqueness. What may be easy for one can be extremely difficult to the next. If you face your particular challenge and meet it head on, then you are a hero. You have shown a strength that touches the very edge of your ability and have overcome your weakness.

Think of all the everyday heroes that face their challenges daily. Don't look for acts of valour writ large; instead look for the small acts that transcends the reality of the common. Have you met someone who goes out of his way to greet others? Or perhaps that neighbor that goes shopping for the elderly woman from across the road? The episode I related shows that its protagonist was able to accept his mistake and make amends, even though the person he slighted probably never even thought about it for a moment. He had fallen short of what he should be, and it was his challenge to realize this and change.

In dark times such as these where you can walk down a busy street and notice that everyone is talking to his hands which seem to be clutching the ears. In such lonely times we should seek to find heroes who break through this isolation and give others back their dignity. The challenge of today is tailor made to our times, and calls out for us to observe those who are overcoming the walls of silence that surround so many.

Shir Hamaalos, Hinei Barechu Es Hashem... "A song of Ascents. Behold, bless Hashem all you servants of Hashem, who stand in the house of Hashem in the night." In this "night," this time of visual blindness, where no one sees his neighbor, we ask those who are His true servants to bless Him in this world. When someone reaches beyond himself and creates a place of blessing, then that place becomes part of Hashem's house.

This kapitel is the last of the group of fifteen Ascents' that describe how Klal Yisrael can rise ever higher in their connection with Hashem. It is here that we can see that each of us can be servants of Hashem' if we create the ambience of blessing even in these dark impersonal times.

Se'u Yedeichem Kodesh... "Lift your hands to the Sanctuary and bless Hashem." Usually this can be understood that we speak here of the "raising of the hands" done by the kohanim in the times of the Sanctuary. However, today everyone must strive to raise his hands in the service of Hashem. We are all meant to create a kiddush Hashem by raising our sights ever higher and striving to use our physicality in His service.

Yevarechecha Hashem MiTzion... "Hashem will bless you out of Zion, [He who is the] Maker of heaven and earth." Zion is that place from whence all blessing flows. We are faced with difficulties, which are tailored just for us. They are the steps that are created so that we can ascend higher in our service of Hashem. Everything is possible with His help, for it is He that created all that is real.

Therefore we should strive to become heroes, to be strongmen who can do what seems impossible. In this way we can truly ascend, grow higher, and become living examples of Hashem's will.

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