

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIX

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Hashem allows us certain moments when we can see clearly His great love for Klal Yisrael. These auspicious times come without any particular warning, and should be savoured to the full.

A short time ago I was blessed to escort my oldest granddaughter to the chuppa. Nothing I thought of, nor equipped myself for, could prepare me for what happened. As she came to the chuppa, I broke down in tears. Now, I knew the moment would be emotional, but I really lost myself, and sobbed like a baby. Later I was left to wonder why this was so. Obviously it is a great gift from Hashem when one takes part in such a simcha, but I have never lost myself to such a degree before, so why did I become so overwhelmed?

I believe that Hashem sends each of us experiences of such huge simchas, such open grace, that cause us to become engaged with our inner feelings, far beyond all normative reason. For me this was just such an instant and as such the only response I had was the tears that streamed down my face. Hashem's grace is constant but it is not always possible to relish it given the toil of everyday life. Then along come those special times, when all the material walls fall away, and we can see clearly how much Hashem has showered us with His goodness.

The passuk tells us that Yaakov calls out, "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now have become two camps" (Bereishis 32:11). The Sfas Emes teaches us that Yaakov felt diminished in the face of all Hashem had done for him. The enormity of Hashem's chessed made him feel small and not at all deserving of such treatment.

When we start off our married lives we are like Yaakov, with just a staff in the hand and hopes for the future. When, after a time, one is blessed with not two but three camps, how much smaller we feel. The joy of continuity is truly a chessed, and nothing we can say in mere words can touch the feelings of humble thanks that such chessed engenders. Every one of us has been granted such moments; they are what one may call "windows of joy." When we are blessed with such moments we realize that words are futile in describing what our hearts feel.

In this kapitel we see many of these "windows of joy" described. This particular chapter is indeed called *Hallel Hagodal*, "the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving," because it touches on so many of Hashem's mercies to His nation. These mercies are not always written in large letters; rather they are sometimes lived in the small print that makes up the tapestry that is our lives.

Hodu LaHashem Ki Tov... "Thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever."

This is the starting point to all understanding, Hashem is good, and this truth is forever. These words are stark and bold, for they cut through the chafe that is the material world of superficiality and bring us this eternal kernel of certainty.

Le'oseh Niflaos Gedolos Levado... "He who does great wonders alone, for His kindness endures forever."

We live through our allotted time on this mortal place sometimes missing the essence of why we are here. Hashem creates all the wondrous things we experience; it is Him alone, nothing else. Most of the millions of people populating the world never give thought to what it is they are here for. They stumble through life, living in a vaporous condition devoid of any true concept of why they were created. This is one of life's greatest tragedies, because the eternity that is Hashem's love is lost to them. The Psalmist then builds a step by step picture of Hashem's Majesty, first the Heavens, then the earth and the seas, the sun, moon and stars; all are created and controlled by the eternal kindness of Hashem.

We then speak of Hashem's eternal bond with His nation, Yisrael.

Lemakeh Mitzrayim... "He who struck Egypt through their firstborn, for His kindness endures forever."

We are all often personally engulfed in our own private Egypt, a place that is confining and depressing. Yet Hashem will take us out from there, just as He did for our forefathers, for this is His eternal kindness in action. As the next stanza relates, *Vayotzei Yisrael...* "He brought Israel out of their midst, for His kindness endures forever."

The kapitel goes on building this wonderful mosaic of Hashem's bountiful gifts to His people. We should see these wonderful statements as personal phases in our own lives. Who hasn't been led by Hashem through their own Red Sea or gone through times of personal wilderness?

The expression, "For His kindness endures forever," speaks to each individual's experience of Hashem's love.

There may well be many an Og, King of Bashan, or Sichon of the Amorites that bedevil our personal lives, but Hashem slew them then and continues to watch over us now as well.

Shebeshifleinu Zachar Lanu... "In our lowliness, He remembered us, for His kindness endures forever."

We all hit rock bottom at times, and even there Hashem remembers us. We are not worthy of this, yet He does so in any and every case.

Vayifrekeinu Mitzareinu... "And He freed us from our oppressors, for His kindness endures forever."

No matter who or what our oppressors may be, Hashem can free us. We are safe as long as we are

focused on the fact that Hashem does kindness that is eternal.

Nosein Lechem... "He gives food to all flesh, for His kindness endures forever."

This stanza speaks of the highest realm in Hashem's Goodness. It is Hashem's will that brings food to all creation - spiritually and materially.

All these passages bring us to the final ringing joyousness of saying, *Hodu Le'keil Hashamayim...* "Thank the Alm-ghty of heaven for His kindness endures forever."

So, we receive this steady stream of goodness, and yes, every once in a while we become that much more aware of it all. Then the words get caught in the throat, and the tears start to flow, and all there is that one can murmur is "His kindness endures forever."

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