

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FORTY-TWO

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

There was once a fellow who was walking down the street, minding his own business, when he fell into a deep pit. The poor man cried out for help, but the streets were deserted.

After some time, a doctor passed by and heard his screams. "Sorry, I can't stop now, but here is a prescription for you." With this, the kindly physician threw down a piece of paper.

After some more time elapsed, a lawyer passed, and he, too, heard the cry of despair.

"Sorry, time is money. I can't stop, but here is my card. When you get out, call me and we'll sue." With this said, he dropped his card down the hole.

Our poor victim was now at his wit's end, despairing of any help. Just then a friend of his came along. Upon hearing his buddy's voice, the newcomer quickly jumped into the deep pit.

"What have you done? Now we are both trapped here!" cried the first man.

"Not really, my friend. True, we are in the same pit, but I have been in this hole before, and I know how to get us both out."

Yiddelach, we are all in the same pit, but with us are our true friends, the gedolei haTorah, our Torah leaders, who well understand how we can find our way out. As in past generations, whenever we face troubles and hardships, they ask that we say Tehillim together. There is something about everyone saying words of holiness together while enveloped in one's own pain. When we share the same words, there is a light that becomes apparent at every level.

Trying to understand this a bit more deeply, I thought about another subject that soon helped me in my quest. Whenever I read the portion of Nasso, I am struck by a particular difficulty. It seems odd that each tribe leader's gifts to the Mishkan are enumerated separately. After all, on the surface it seems that each was giving the very same things. Why not just list them once and say that these were the gifts that every tribe leader gave?

Gutte Yidden explain that although it may seem that each one's gift was identical, in the eyes of Hashem each was treasured as if it was an original. The princes' gifts came from the heart. They may have appeared identical, but the fervor, the ta'am, was individual and unique. Nothing was copied; everything came from an original wellspring of understanding. Therefore, each is enumerated as a new and remarkably novel gift.

When we daven with others, it is much the same. Each of us says the same words, but the experiences behind those words, the energy of what they represent, is special to each individual. Your cry from that pit comes from who you are and what facets of the darkness are most troubling you. When someone else comes along and adds his own thinking, his own insight, and, yes, his own unique brand of heartbreak, then a new bond is created, one that will cast light and show all the participants a way out.

This kapitel reaches places no other does. It delves into the deepest recesses of the heart, beseeching God for salvation.

My voice is one that screams out to Hashem; my voice is one that begs to Hashem. When we are terrified, our words become mangled and distorted, but we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the voice of such pain is always heard. If it is only the voice, only the sound that escapes from our lips, so be it, because if it is directed to Hashem, it will find its place. David cries with such a voice and indicates that it is his vehicle of supplication.

I pour out my conversation before Him; I explain my troubles to Him. It isn't a simple thing to open oneself up totally to Hashem. We all build walls around us, a veneer of self-delusion that creates a persona that isn't really who we are. It is no easy thing when one must face one's inner torment, but this is what is called for.

The passage teaches us that deep inner searching must be coupled with prayer. As chassidim used to say, "You must pray to be able to pray." Through such a catharsis you can come to the point where you can declare your distress before Hashem, that true foundation of truth.

When my spirit is enwrapped [in anguish] about me, You are aware of my pathway. They laid a trap for me on the road on which I wish to go. This life is so difficult. Hashem knows what stumbling blocks have been thrown in our path. The word for "enwrapped" in the verse has a connotation of being doubled over in pain. The path of life often bears down on us with so much force that we wonder how we can even stand upright. An outsider can never truly understand what his fellow man carries within himself. That which makes us unique also makes it impossible for others to comprehend our feelings. Only Hashem knows the full extent, the full meaning of the impact events may have on any given individual.

I look to the right and I peer [to the left], but I have no ally. Any refuge is lost to me; there is no one who cares for my welfare. The worst emotion is loneliness, isolation. When we fall into life's pits and think we are alone, our pain is unbearable. Our hopes of refuge dissolve when no one recognizes who we really are, who we could be.

I scream out to You, Hashem. I declare that You are my hope, my portion in the land of life. The secular world would have us believe that any thought of God should be in terms of the next world, if at all. The Torah Yid knows that Hashem exists also in the land of the living, in this world, here and now. The only safe place in this world of pits and falls is with Hashem, Whose light can lead us out of all

our troubles.

Listen to my prayer, for I am sorely weakened. Save me from those who pursue me, for they overpower me. When challenged by life's foes, we can lose all sense of hope. The Rebbe of Stolin used to say that depression is not mentioned in the Torah as being a sin, but the sins that depression can cause are of the worst sort. When we are depressed, our enemies—those who pursue us as individuals and those who pursue us as a people—seem to be stronger than us, and such perception often becomes the reality.

Extract me from confinement so I may give thanks to Your name. The righteous will crown themselves with me when You will bestow good on me. David describes the tortured soul as being in prison, a place where one is deprived of any movement. When we are burdened with fear, we begin to feel that our spiritual growth is stifled. We gasp for air, but feel suffocated instead. As Yidden, we should strive for just one thing: to be able to create a kiddush Hashem with our lives. Our prayers have to focus our hearts on this: "That I may give thanks to Your name."

Yes, sometimes we are in the pit of darkness, and, sure, it scares us. But when we pray together with others, then maybe—no, certainly—we will pull each other out. We will then create the kiddush Hashem that is our purpose in life.

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