

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FORTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Yanky was a regular yeshiva student. He got along well with his friends and was very good in class. One could say that he was above average in his studies, and his rebbes never had reason to complain about him. But underneath the surface, Yanky was living in a hell. His parents were breaking up a quaint term that inadequately describes the turmoil such strife brings with it.

As one of two children, Yanky was constantly stuck in the middle of the constant warring that now passed for normal conversation at home. The young boy instinctively knew that his life wasn't what it should be, and so he kept everything locked up in his breaking heart. Slowly the acid of what was happening churned inside until one night he was taken to the hospital with a perforated bleeding ulcer. Only two years past his bar mitzva he had already become an old man with a horrendous illness caused by those who should have been watching over him the most.

The doctors patched him up and gave him a strict diet that would keep his acid levels down. But they couldn't give him any relief for the root of his illness. No, for that he needed a greater source of healing.

Years later, Yanky shared with me what helped him get past the difficulties at home. He had a very caring rebbe who was heartbroken at not being able to really understand the needs of this student. He accepted that there was much he couldn't do to change the boy's home situation, but perhaps he could teach him how to connect with a greater power than the miserable place he found himself in. He took the youngster for walks and taught him how to use Tehillim. These words became the vehicle that carried the child's heartbreak all the way up into the ears of Hashem, and they brought him strength and courage.

There is an island that is populated by the most bizarre and dangerous creatures known to man. In its jungles are huge, ferocious, man-eating lions, its trees are full of scavenger birds with huge wingspans, and underfoot can be found long, slithering, venomous snakes. This place lies within each of us, and its scary creatures are the products of our fears. No one can understand others' tzaros, because each person's pekele is unique to him and would affect each individual differently; what frightens one person can seem trivial to the next. But although we can't really understand what another is going through, we can accept that it is perfectly feasible for one to feel surrounded by the baying animals that inhabit our minds.

It is astounding to learn how much pain people carry and how much sorrow they have to live with.

Everyone seems so "normal," but beneath the surface there is a whole island of chaos. Yet Yanky learned what we all should that in developing a conversation with Hashem, by using the words of Tehillim as keys, we can open up our hearts and find a way to tame those horrendous creatures, the products of our anguish.

In this particular kapitel, David faces his darkest fears, and with his words perhaps we can as well.

Hashem, hear my prayer; listen to my supplications. Answer me as befits Your faithfulness, as befits Your righteousness. When things are dark, we see ourselves as not being really worthy of Hashem's kindness. After all, what have we done to deserve even a moment's grace? The psalmist asks Hashem to hear our pleas according to His righteousness, that bountiful wellspring of sweet comfort.

Do not relate to Your subject with strict justice, for no living being would be judged as righteous in Your view. When you are brokenhearted, you can turn to Hashem. Yes, you may be lacking in merit, but in truth we all are.

The enemy pursued me; he has beaten my life force to the ground. He has forced me to crouch in the dark recesses like those who are long dead. When our internal fears predominate, they seek to destroy our soul, the very essence of our being. Life turns bleak; you feel you are lying in the dirt, with no hope. This is the worst place one can find oneself. The darkness is suffocating; you are emotionally dead, stunned by the fearsomeness of your problems. One day runs into the next, and all you feel inside is the squeamishness of dread.

My spirit is enwrapped in itself [in anguish]; my heart is paralyzed within me. Every Jew knows how tzaros can become so central to one's life. In the midst of all this, the beleaguered soul is dumbfounded by how much his devils are taking over his every waking moment.

I spread my hands to You; I long for You constantly, as dry land thirsts [for water]. At this time, when all seems so lost, we are told to lift up our hands to Hashem. The thirst for relief is so great; we throw ourselves open to Hashem's healing.

Hurry, Hashem, answer me! My spirit has reached its limit. Do not hide Your presence from me; otherwise I will be comparable to those who have fallen into a deep pit. When we are weary, frightened, and ground down, our spirit is broken. Although we walk through life seemingly in step with others, in our heart we are fighting demons that corrode our every moment. We must ask that we be given the insight to see Hashem's light before our depression turns into total loss of will.

Let me hear tidings of Your kindness in the morning, for I trust in You; teach me the path on which I should go, for I rely entirely on You. Here it is in one sentence. The light we seek can be found in our connection with Hashem. The beginning of personal redemption is when we bond with Hashem with our complete trust. There will always be questions about which direction will lead toward our peace of mind. If we have faith in Hashem, we can allow His will to put us on the right path.

Yanky's parents never did reconcile with each other, and the wounds that young child incurred weren't easily forgotten. But he spoke of those difficult times and of the loneliness that was made easier through his saying of Tehillim.

King David saw the fear that all generations would experience, and he gave us moving words that would open up a pathway leading toward hope.

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