

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FORTY-SIX

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Recently I was presented with an interesting she'eila. One of my roles as a communal rav is that of watching over the local cemetery. No, I don't have to mow the lawn or check the flower beds; rather, it is my responsibility to make certain that everything that is done is according to halacha.

One of the more vexing aspects of this job is vetting what people write on their loved one's gravestones. Since the cemetery is used by a wide range of Jews, many of whom are not all that sensitive to Torah guidelines, I often have to explain such values to folk who are thinking in terms far from what is halachically permissible. It is here that the feeling of galus really comes to the fore, and I find it so sad.

One fellow asked to inscribe on his late mother's stone: "She rests in peace in the land she loved so dearly."

"Ouch," said I, "that sounds so...er...well, hmmmm...so goyish! Sorry, there is no other way to put it."

"But, Rabbi, Mother's family has lived in England since the days of Cromwell."

"Yes, and they didn't live here before because Jews were banned from the place. Who says they won't toss us out again?"

"Rabbi! How can you talk like that?"

I could tell that this fellow was getting really hot under the collar, and in truth I wouldn't generally talk this way, but sometimes it just gets to be too much. People think it's all so certain, they are settled in and so comfortable, they just don't accept that things could ever turn difficult for us. This well-meaning fellow was certain that his dear departed mom would want it said for all time that her greatest nachas was to be buried in the soggy earth of England.

History seems to talk to others and never to ourselves. Even in devout Torah circles, there are signs of complacency. We are so, so comfortable in this galus, and at times we forget that galus it truly is.

It's not easy living in this unique time. We either find ourselves besieged by hate, or we think we are comfortably situated. In either case, we are in danger, and it is hard to tell which is worse. The place in which we find ourselves today is unique in that it has a little bit of both. Like everything else in life, the picture isn't clear, and we should constantly pray that we never lose sight of our true goals. There are places today where Yidden learn Torah day and night and are allowed to do so in peace. But this may be just an illusion, and our enemies may come out of the proverbial woodwork at any

time to attack us.

As a very visible-looking Yid living in an affluent suburban town, I can tell you that there is no dearth of Jew-haters lurking around. Every Shabbos I am treated to verbal abuse by brave little people who love to scream anti-Semitic epithets from the safety of their fast-moving cars. This doesn't faze me, because I was raised by Yidden who knew where they were and where they truly sought to be.

This kapitel, said daily, is an outcry for light in the spiritual darkness of our galus.

Halleluyah! [I tell] myself, praise Hashem. I praise Hashem while I am alive; I sing to Hashem while I exist. David foresaw the darkness of our galus when he wrote these words. Praising Hashem while one lives, wherever one lives, is the first step to remaining connected to His ways. While we live and breathe, in whatever corner of the world we may be, we must praise Hashem. If not, our soul atrophies and becomes hardened by the temptations of the material world.

The psalmist gives us clear instructions: "Praise Hashem!" Even if you find yourself preoccupied, stop and praise your Creator. The galus has a way of grabbing your attention and dragging you away from your goals. When we stop, if only for a moment, and refocus our thoughts on Hashem's praises, then we are truly able to "live."

Do not place trust in wealthy men, in any mortal, for he cannot save [even] himself. The hardest thing in this secular world is to be always aware that it is Hashem who runs this world. Mankind flies to the moon, converses across continents, sees into every nook and cranny. Even believers can forget and find themselves looking to the magic men for redemption. Yes, sitting now and reading these words, we will think that they are meant for others. If you look honestly into your heart, you may have to admit that sometimes values become a bit hazy.

His soul will leave; he will change back into the soil he once was. On that very day all his plans will be foiled. All the promises, all the gold and silver, it all ends up as nothing more than a pile of dirt in some cemetery. Those who are in power think they will build and create something eternal, but they are finite, and their promises will never outlive them.

This global society doesn't allow for individuality; there is no place for those who think or question. The Torah Yid must recognize that the true world will start after we realize that all that has happened in this world was nothing more than a fleeting dream.

Enriched is the one the God of Yaakov assists; he relies on Hashem, his God. We don't give ourselves enough credit. It is astounding that despite all the pressures of this materialistic world, the Torah Jew stays steadfast in his belief. The entire world marches to another drummer, yet Klal Yisrael sings: **Who created the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them; Who maintains faithfulness forever. He performs justice for those who have been robbed. He gives food to the hungry. Hashem releases those who were shackled.**

Despite all that the world says, we know that Hashem created the entirety of what we experience

and that this truth is guarded by the very fact that we attest to it. The fears and anguish that the world spews forth need not cause us distress, for we know that the imprisoned soul will be freed.

To survive in this galus we must constantly repeat these words. Let them churn in your mind; know them to be your truth.

May Hashem reign forever. O Zion, He is your God for all generations. Halleluyah!

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