

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FORTY-SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

We come across it all the time, and we are at a loss as to how we can be of help. Many who have joined our Torah community try their best to become assimilated into a new lifestyle that is altogether different from the one they lived before. This in itself is not an easy adjustment, but there are many additional difficulties that make the transition even more overwhelming.

When a newcomer starts to learn about what the path of Torah offers, he is immediately confronted with the realization that everything he did and thought in the past was wrong. For any rational human mind, this is almost impossible to cope with, especially when the person comes from a nice, middle-class, cultured home. And if he can get past this barrier, he immediately encounters another, even greater barrier looming: *OK, I did wrong, I thought wrong, ate wrong, and dressed wrong. Now I want to change, but what do I do with this wounded heart?* How can a person survive intact when his heart is broken over what he has done in the past?

In truth, this is an issue that every thinking Jew should face, no matter how Torahdik his background. There is no one who hasn't slipped, and it would be a callous heart indeed that doesn't break when a bit of self-examination is initiated. Those who have started late are only more vulnerable, and their past is that much more open to view.

So that is the dilemma. To change means to face certain wrongs one has done. But this can lead to a tattered conscience and a broken heart. One might think that being in such a state is to be recommended and that a Jew should always be "out of order" and despondent. Our kapitel has much to say about this.

Halleluyah! It is good to sing to our God; praising is proper, for He is pleasing. The first thing on the agenda is to sing to offer thanks to Hashem for all that you have attained spiritually until now. We each sing from that place where we are holding; tomorrow we may sing from an even higher place. One who is distraught, filled with the dread of yesterday, will never be able to truly raise his voice in song, and it is "proper" that one do so.

Hashem builds Yerushalayim; He gathers the scattered of Yisrael. The building of a Yiddishe soul can be likened to the building of a sanctuary. Every Jew can build a sanctuary, because that is the will of Hashem. The verse tells us, "He gathers the scattered of Yisrael," which should be taken as a statement of fact: Hashem will gather us all in. If we want to build a sanctuary in our souls, Hashem will give us the ability to do so. One's past difficulties can become the building blocks for a new

reality, and they shouldn't hold us back.

He is the One Who heals the brokenhearted and cures their depression. The Rebbe Reb Bunim once asked, "Since having a broken heart is often desirable in a man, why heal it?" And he answered, "It is healed by removing the sadness it contains, since a man should be joyful in order to serve Hashem." When one turns to Hashem with a broken heart, one can find in the very act of turning to Him the joy needed to go beyond the heartache.

I often note that when a Jew puts on his tefillin, he doesn't treat them casually or throw them around; rather, he puts them on with serenity and calmness. So, it would seem, should we do teshuva, repentance. We shouldn't tear ourselves apart; that is unseemly when doing a mitzva. Rather, we should do it with joy and gratefulness.

Our God is great and all-powerful; His intelligence is limitless. Once again we turn to the Rebbe Reb Bunim, who explains that Hashem causes insignificant things to happen so that they will lead to another occurrence. The second occurrence leads to a third, and this progression continues countless times. When Hashem caused the first event to happen, He knew what the impact of that first event would be and how it would lead to further developments. This, says the Rebbe, is what we should have in mind when we praise Hashem's infinite understanding.

This is a powerful message for anyone who is trying to come closer to Hashem and seeks to repair the spiritual damage he has caused in the past. It reminds us that everything is from Hashem and that the fact that we are now turning to Him was foreseen by Hashem before we were even born. If Hashem has caused things to happen that have brought us to this point of seeking His closeness, then we should find joy in the opportunity to do so.

Hashem gives encouragement to the humble; He lowers the wicked down to the ground. It is beyond human understanding, yet we know it is true: Hashem cares for every soul, no matter how low it has sunk. There is no room for despair, because in the wink of an eye, we can find ourselves reconnected to Hashem's path. This is because although we have wandered away, or perhaps never even known where the path is, Hashem has always been there, within our deepest spiritual point.

Raise your voice to Hashem in thanksgiving; play to our God with a harp. Song raises the spirit, so sing in your heart. Despite the heaviness of your past, realize that your song will be heard.

He is the One Who covers the skies with clouds, Who prepares rain for the land, Who grows vegetation on the mountains. The kapitel now describes the enormity of Hashem's creativeness. This entire world and all we see around us are His creation. Yet, as we mentioned earlier, He is still within every soul.

Those who become aware of their connection to Hashem later in life should feel extreme joy, for in them must be a thousand steps that Hashem has supervised, each step an event that has led them back to where they belong. The brokenhearted can find a healing balm in just this one

understanding. Every Yid is special, and each one of us should sing of Hashem's gift of healing.

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