

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-ONE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

As his last few days in this mortal world approached, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizensk lay in his bed unable to eat. His son the Rebbe Reb Lazer begged his holy father to try to eat something, anything. "Isn't there anything I can give you?" he asked. "Oy," sighed the Rebbe, "if only I could get some soup from Malka, the wife of Reb Leibele the water carrier, life would be better."

As if a jolt of electricity had passed through him, the dutiful Reb Lazer ran down to the ramshackle home of the destitute water carrier. "My father the Rebbe is very ill, and all he can eat he says is some soup you once gave him. Please give me the recipe." The worthy Malka started to cry, saying, "I have to tell you the whole story. My husband and I always dreamed that maybe, some day, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech would come to visit us, but it was such a foolish dream. We would never have the chutzpa or the audacity to invite such a holy man into our dilapidated hovel.

"Strangely enough, a few weeks ago the Rebbe passed our house. We saw him coming and thought it was our biggest chance, so my husband ran out on to the street. He didn't know what to say, he just stood there, but the Rebbe is such a special Yid and he understood what my husband wanted. He said, 'You know what Reb Leibel, I'm very tired, could I spend some time in your house?' The Rebbe Reb Elimelech came into our home, and it was just like Gan Eden. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. The Rebbe sat down with my husband. Now my life partner is a good man but not really all that educated. He is just a water carrier with simple ways, he didn't have anything to say to your Holy Father; he was just happy to have such a tzaddik sitting there with him.

"Suddenly he said to me, Malka! What's going on here? We have such a special guest; we better give him something to eat.'

"I ran into the kitchen, looked around, and suddenly I remembered that we ourselves hadn't eaten in days. There was no food in the kitchen. All I saw was salt and a pot of hot water on the stove. What could I do? I took a spoon and began to stir the water, and I davened, Hashem, I have nothing, but if I had something, anything, I would give it to the Rebbe Reb Elimelech. You, Hashem, You have all the tastes of paradise. Can You please put some taste into this water? This is our soup.' As I stirred the water I cried, and some of my tears fell into the soup."

Reb Lazer came back to his holy father, and Reb Elimelech said, "Now you understand. With ordinary soup, you can keep from getting hungry. With Malka's soup you can bring people back to life."

This touching story teaches an enormous lesson. We live in a world that is very sophisticated and complex. We all have airs and graces about ourselves, a patina of self-importance that has developed over time. Everyone wants to be seen as especially knowledgeable and worthy of lofty thoughts. In some ways this is a self-defense mechanism against those who seek to put us down, but it doesn't mean it's right. The simple belief of a Yid for Hashem is far superlative to those who are so involved with their theories that they lose sight of the basics.

Malka was no great theologian, but she knew how to speak to Hashem. In this kapitel David Hamelech shows that he always sought to be simple in his approach to Hashem.

Shir Hamaalos LeDavid, Hashem Lo Gava... "A Song of Ascents of David. Hashem, my heart was not haughty nor my eyes lofty; and I did not concern myself with things too great and too wonderful for me."

Imagine, this is David Hamelech, the great scholar who had the wisdom to put the entirety of the Psalms together, yet he ascends to heights of holiness and faithfully says, "I did not concern myself with things too great." What David is saying is that even with the entirety of the world's wisdom, one has to approach Hashem with simplicity. The Rebbe Reb Elimelech was teaching us that all the learning and study should never deprive us of a simple approach to Hashem. Often our search for Hashem gets clouded by thoughts of lofty concepts. We should allow such degrees of spirituality to grow naturally with our experiences and our learning. It should seem as simple to us, not contrived. David Hamelech did not "concern" himself with such things, they were there, but not manufactured. His spiritual greatness was his ability to use everything he developed in a simple, straight fashion.

Im Lo Shivisi... "Have I not calmed and quieted my soul, like a child that is weaned from his mother, like a weaned child my soul is with me."

In the rush to attain the dizzy heights of perceived greatness, we often forget that one must grow naturally step by step. There is a rush of blood to the head, a buzz that tells us that we are ready to reach levels that in fact we are not ready for. David tells us, "Calm down Reb Yid, the quiet soul is one that is in sync with its reality."

Yachel Yisrael El Hashem... "Wait Israel upon Hashem, from now and forever."

This kapitel is all of three stanzas, yet this too is a vital lesson. There are concepts that need pages of explanation, and then there are lessons learned in a few words. The simplistic approach to divine service is in itself told to us in such a fashion. After all the sophistication we must remember but one thing, serve Hashem, because that is what we are all about.

In Peasnetzna once, during the ten days of penitence between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the Rebbe sent a message from his room to the prayer-study hall downstairs. "Pray in such a way," he told his flock, "that even the floor should sense that there is a great King of the world!"

Sounds simple, and it happens when we are.

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