

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

"Rabbi, I just can't go through with this wedding."

These were the words that greeted me some years ago, on a cold January afternoon. They were spoken by a distraught young lady who was supposed to be married in the early spring. She was a comparative newcomer to Torah life, and although she had spent two years in a seminary in Jerusalem, she still felt that the burden of her previous life was too heavy. She couldn't believe she was worthy of any nachas and therefore was bent on destroying all hope for any.

"There is nothing more whole than a broken heart," said the Kotzker Rebbe in one of his most famous classic statements. The Jewish heart is always mended when it comes before its Maker with an acknowledgement of its weaknesses. However, many are the times when we become so ensconced in a sense of bewildered and painful soul-searching, that we turn the broken heart of a true seeker into the torn, depressed carrier of personally inflicted self-hate.

The line between remorse and defeatism is a thin one, and its makings lie within oneself. We all try our best; no Yid seeks to be bad. However, the road we trod upon is full of emotional potholes, and it is the rare individual who doesn't suffer from the jolts that these holes may cause.

To be constructive one must be able to judge oneself in a way that is both true and positive. The Kotzker often said that when one is floundering in the "mud" of his sin he should not dwell upon its content too much. "If you are in the mire, the more you stir it up the more it will stick to you." When judging oneself it is never a positive thing to dwell too much on what one's sins consist of, for then those very sins begin to take on an added negative power over one's soul.

I often counsel those who have started on a Torah path a bit late in life not to "beat themselves up" over their past. Being too harsh with themselves will not help bring them closer to Hashem. To the contrary, it can make them feel that they have no place in a rarified environment. Total self-abasement denigrates the holiness that Hashem has placed in each of us. In truth there is no room for despair, for Hashem awaits us wherever we are.

There are many types of judges that come our way in life. Most are hopefully understanding and righteous. However, there are some who can be soul destroying. The worst one of all may be the inner voice that refuses to forgive. There is no harsher judge than one's own self, for it is in the precincts of one's heart where one's reality abides. But there are times when the inner judge is no longer impartial. Its voice becomes shrill with insecurity as it becomes the tool of the yetzer hara.

This road leads to depression and unforgiving bitterness. On this path one finds himself distant from Hashem's warming forgiveness and thus lost forever.

This kapitel speaks out about the corruption caused by evil judges. It may do us well to consider if we are not judging ourselves in such a fashion.

Mizmor le'asaf Elokim nitzav ba'adas Kel., "A psalm of Asaf, Hashem stands in the congregation of the Alm-ghty, in the midst of the judges He gives judgement."

Hashem is found within the congregation of His children, despite all their mistakes, foolishness and foibles. His judgement of our ways is touched by the reality that we live in.

Ad masai tishpetu avel., "How long will you judge lawlessly and show partiality to the wicked, selah?" When we stand before the courtroom of our own hearts, we often weigh our judgements according to false impressions and misguided standards. Such over-zealousness can sometimes become a source of wickedness, because it keeps us from truly becoming attached to Hashem.

Shiftu dal veyasom., "Render justice to the lowly and the orphan, deal righteously with the poor and destitute." There is no greater orphan than one who has lost the ability to hear Hashem's call. In this vein, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk once related the following parable.

A father and his son were travelling a long distance in a carriage. As they passed through a forest with sweet, heavily laden fruit trees, the child was permitted by his father to get down and pick some. Although they had a great distance to travel, the father could not keep his hungry son away from the fruit. The son strayed deeper and deeper into the forest. Before he was out of earshot, the father gave him the following advice.

"You keep crying out, 'Father, Father,' and I will always respond, 'My son, my son.' As long as you hear me answering, you will know that you are still safe. But when you can no longer hear me replying, you will know that you are lost in the forest. Then you must run back until you find me again."

When we ramble within our minds and seek to judge ourselves, we should remember that it is Hashem's call that we must hear. When we think we no longer hear it, when we feel we are too far lost in the forest of our lives - that is precisely the moment we must run home to our roots.

Paletu dal ve'evyon., "Rescue the lowly and the needy, save them from the hand of the wicked." We are so susceptible to feelings of inadequacy. We believe ourselves totally beyond the pale, and this is true wickedness. Aleh Yidden zenen heilig! "All Jews are holy!" So gutte Yidden have always told us. We each have the spark of kedusha that dwells within.

Notice that one of the first acts we do at the Pesach seder is to eat a vegetable dipped in saltwater. Some explain that this shows that even the lowliest of life, something grown and nurtured deep within the ground, can rise up and assume a holy position at the seder table. It only needs a bit of

cleansing with the salt-tinged tears of remorse. No one is beyond reach of those tears, no one.

Lo yadu velo yavinu., "They neither know nor understand, they walk along in darkness, and all the foundations of the earth are shaken." We all know that teshuva is available to everyone. However, when we judge ourselves too harshly we allow the world around us to grow dark. We no longer see this concept as being real, and we become blind to all understanding. The very foundations of our relationship with Hashem are shaken to the core, leaving us vulnerable to negative forces.

Ani amarti Elokim atem., "I have said, 'You are G-dlike beings, all of you sons of the most High.' "
Yidden, we are all so precious to Hashem. We are each the children of the One on High and a being that carries kedusha with every step.

Yes, aleh Yidden zenen heilig, only sometimes we get lost in the forest and forget to hear this truth. We can always find our way home, if we only judge ourselves with fairness and understanding.

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