THE ULTIMATE CONTACT

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

The Ultimate Contact Never give up hope. No matter how bleak your plight may seem, do not allow yourself to surrender to despair. This is what we are told. This is what we tell others. This is what we believe. Hope springs eternal in the human heart.

In this week's Torah reading, however, we find an altogether different perspective. On the last day of his life, Moses addresses an evocative poem replete with metaphors and allusions to the Jewish people. With broad strokes, he presents a sweeping view of the past and a searing vision of the future. When will Hashem bring an end to the suffering of His people? He tells them. When the power of their enemies spreads uncontrollably and no one can withstand the onslaught.

What does this mean? The Talmud provides the answer. It is a reference to the Messianic era. Moses is prophesying that the Messiah will come when then Jewish people abandon all hope of redemption, when they despair of salvation.

The commentators are mystified. Why is despair a prerequisite for redemption? Yearning for the arrival of the Messiah is one of the central tenets of Judaism. If so, why does the Talmud contend that this yearning must be forgotten before the Messiah can come?

The commentators explain that the yearning for the ultimate redemption must indeed remain strong and vital among the Jewish people without any interruption. The Talmud, however, is addressing a different brand of hope. What is our first reaction when we face an anti- Semitic crisis? Do we turn toward Hashem and plead with Him to save us? Or do we consider other avenues? Do we mobilize our military forces, if we have any? Do we bring all our political and diplomatic influence to bear? Do flex our financial muscles? Do we call upon the press and the media to help us?

This then is the hopelessness that will hasten our redemption. First, we must recognize the utter futility of self-reliance. We must despair of solving our problems on our own. Only then will we turn to Hashem with absolute trust and faith in Him as the sole Source of salvation. Only then will we deserve to be redeemed.

A great sage was sitting in his room, immersed in a pile of holy books. Just then a distraught woman burst through the door and planted herself in front of him.

"You must help me!" she wailed as tears ran down her cheeks. "My husband is desperately ill."

"Come back tomorrow," said the sage.

"Tomorrow?" she shrieked. "I can't wait until tomorrow. He may be dead by tomorrow. I need your help now!"

"If you insist," said the sage. He closed his eyes and pursed his lips. After two minutes of silence, he opened his eyes. The woman looked at him with breathless expectation.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "I can do nothing for your husband."

The woman went deathly pale. She clutched her head and screamed, "Lord in Heaven! Help me! I am lost. Even the holy sage cannot help me. Only You can save my husband. Please! I beg of you!"

Then she collapsed into a chair, her body wracked by wrenching sobs.

"Go home in peace, my child," said the sage. "Your prayers will be answered. As long as you placed your trust in me, there was no hope. But the hopelessness in your heart led you to our Father in Heaven. He is the only One who can give you what you need."

In our own lives, as we strive for financial and professional achievement, how often do we think to ourselves that the key to success lies in contacts, marketing or other stratagems? But that is not really true. No matter how hard we work or plan or scheme, Hashem can wipe it all away with a flick of His figurative wrist. So what are we supposed to do? Of course, we need to make our best efforts, to go after the contacts and the marketing and whatever else seems to be indicated. But we must always keep in mind that Hashem controls the world, and if we're looking for contacts, He is undoubtedly the Ultimate Contact. Text Copyright © 2009 by Rabbi Naftali Reich and **Torah.org**.

Rabbi Reich is on the faculty of the Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum Education Center.