



A FRIEND IN THE PIT *Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

I can't let go, the fear and sorrow won't allow it. My hand is constantly reaching for my tehillim'l, that well-worn friend of my heart. Since the horror of our enemies has been unleashed upon us, my Tehillim has become my go to refuge. No matter what I want to write, my heart leads me back to the words I wrote decades ago. My work on Tehillim is entitled Rhythm of the Heart and in these difficult times I think it a most apt title. Allow me to share yet another kapital, and may all our prayers bring strength with yeshuous.

Tehillim - Kapitel 142

There was once a fellow who was walking down the street minding his own business when he fell into a deep pit. The poor man cried out for help, but the streets were deserted.

After some time, a doctor passed by and heard his screams. "Sorry, old chap, I can't stop now, but here is a prescription for you." With this the kindly physician threw down a piece of paper.

After some more time elapsed, a lawyer passed and he too heard the cry of despair. "Sorry, time is money, I can't stop, but here is my card. When you get out, call me and we'll sue." With this said, he dropped his card down the hole.

Our poor victim was now at his wits end, totally lost and despairing of any help. Just then a friend of his came along. Upon hearing his buddy's voice, the newcomer quickly jumped into the deep pit. "What have you done? Now we are both trapped here!" cried the first one. "Not really, my friend. True, we are in the same pit, but I have been in this hole before and I know how to get us both out."

Yiedelech, we are all in the same pit, but with us are our true friends, the Gedolei HaTorah who well understand how we can find our way out. As in past generations, they have asked that we say Tehillim together. There is something about the

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dichotomy of everyone saying words of holiness together whilst being enveloped in our own pain. When we share in the same words there is a light that becomes apparent at every level.

Trying to understand this a bit more deeply, my mind wandered to another subject that soon helped me in my quest. Whenever I read parshas Naso I am struck by a particular difficulty. It seems odd that each prince's gifts to the Mishkan are enumerated separately. After all, on the surface it seems that each was giving the very same things.

Guttes Yidden explain that although it may seem that each one's gift was identical, in the eyes of Hashem each was unique and treasured as if it was an original. To each of the princes, their gift was from the heart. It may have appeared just like someone else's, but the fervour, the taam, was his own. Nothing was mimicked; everything came from an original wellspring of understanding. Therefore, each is enumerated as a new and remarkably novel gift.

When we daven with others, it is very much the same thing. Each of us are saying the same words, but the experiences behind those words, the energy of what they represent, is special to each individual. Your cry from that pit comes from who you are and what facets of the darkness are most troubling you. When someone else comes along and adds his own thinking, his own insight, and yes, his own unique brand of heartbreak, then a new bond is created, one that hopefully will cast light and show all the participants a way out.

This kapitel delves into the deepest recesses of the heart, beseechingly asking for salvation.

Koli el Hashem ezak..., "With my voice I cry out to Hashem; with my voice I supplicate to Hashem."

When we are terrified, our words become mangled and distorted, but we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the voice of such pain is always heard. If it is only the voice, only the sound that escapes from our lips, so be it; for if directed to Hashem it will find its place. David Hamelech cries with such a voice and indicates that it is his vehicle of supplication.

Eshpoch lifanav sichi..., "I pour out before Him my prayerful meditation, my distress before Him, I declare."

It isn't a simple thing to open oneself totally to Hashem. We all build emotional walls about us, a veneer of self-delusion that creates a persona that often is not the reality of who we are. It is no easy thing when one must face one's inner torment, but this is what is called for.

The passage tells us of "prayerful meditation," deep inner searching that in itself must be coupled with prayer. As tzadikim say, "You must pray to be able to pray." Through such a catharsis you can come to the point where you can declare what your distress is before Hashem, the true foundation of truth.

Behisateif alai ruchi..., "When around me, my spirit enwraps itself, and You know my path; the path in which I walk they have hidden a trap for me."

This life is so difficult. Hashem knows what stumbling blocks have been thrown in our path. The wording here of enwrapping has a connotation of being doubled over in pain. The path through life often bears down on us with so much force that we wonder how we can even stand upright. An outsider can never truly understand what his fellow man carries within himself. Only Hashem

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knows the full extent, the full meaning of the impact events may have on any given individual. That which makes us unique also makes it near impossible for others to truly comprehend another's feelings.

Habeit yamin ure'ei ve'ei li makir..., "Look to the right and see, that no one recognizes me; refuge is lost for me, no one cares for my soul."

The worst emotion is that of isolation. When we fall into life's pits and think we are alone, then our pain is unbearable. The hope of some refuge from our woes dissolves when no one recognises who we really are, who we could be.

Zaakti eilecha Hashem..., "I have cried out to You, Hashem; I have said, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.'"

The secular world would have us believe that any thought of G-d should be in terms of the next world, if any place at all. The Torah Yid knows that Hashem is about the land of the living, this world, here and now. The only safe portion in this world of pits and falls is with Hashem, Whose light can lead us out of all trouble.

Hakshiva el rinasi ki dalosi me'od..., "Listen to my cry for I have been brought very low, rescue me from my pursuers for they are mightier than me."

When challenged by life's foes, we can lose all sense of hope. The Rebbe of Stolin used to say that depression is not mentioned in the Torah as being a sin; however, the sins that depression can cause are of the worst sort of all. When we are depressed, all our enemies seem to be stronger than us, and with such perception follows reality. This is the enemy that pursues us as individuals and as a people.

Hotzia mimasger nafshi lehodos es shimecha..., "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks to Your Name; because of me the righteous will crown You, when You will have dealt kindly with me."

David describes the tortured soul as being in prison, a place where one is deprived of any movement. When we are burdened with fear, we begin to feel that our spiritual growth is stifled. We gasp for air, but feel suffocated instead. As Yidden we should strive for just one thing - to be able to create a kiddush Hashem with our lives. Our prayers have to focus our hearts on this: "That I may give thanks to Your Name."

Yes, sometimes we are in the pit of darkness, and sure, it scares us. However, when we pray together with others, then maybe - no, certainly - we will help pull each other out. We will then create the kiddush Hashem that is our cause for life, and we will do so with light and Hashem's glory.