

To where shall we ascend? Our brothers have melted our hearts... then I said to you, “Do not be broken and do not fear them.” (1:28,29)

Fear can do terrible things to a person. Fear is the antithesis of hope. Hope is the cure for fear. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 10a) teach, “Even if a sharp sword is resting on the neck of a person, he should not despair of Heavenly mercy.” One can *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, be at the threshold of death – he should still hope; he should not throw in the towel and give up hope. Indeed, we experience every moment of life because Hashem wants us to experience it. We are alive during our present fearful state because Hashem wants us to live. Who are we to give up hope? If He would not want us to be here – we would not be here. It is as simple as that.

Interestingly, concerning the above *Chazal* (one should not despair even when the sharp blade is poised over his throat), we are not enjoined to pray. We are, instead, told not to give up hope. What does “not give up hope” mean? The *Baal Shem Tov* teaches that while prayer is most certainly critical and beneficial at all times, *Chazal* are telling us not to despair. This means we should maintain our *bitachon*, trust, in Hashem. Prayer is certainly a mainstay, but it should not take the place of *bitachon*. *Tefillah* that is not buttressed with *bitachon* is missing its most essential ingredient. The *Baal Shem Tov* was wont to exhort his *talmidim*, students, to believe in themselves. Hashem believes in us, otherwise, we would not be here. We should at least appreciate His faith in us by having faith in ourselves.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, observes that the *perek*, chapter, in *Sefer Tehillim* in which David *Hamelech* details some of his most distressful and agonizing moments is *Perek* 38. Some notable quotes are: “Your arrows were shot at me”; “My bones have no peace”; “My wounds are putrid and enflamed”; “I am bewildered and stooped, numb and greatly broken”; “My heart is engulfed with distress”; “I have no friend and companions”; “Enemies seek to harm me and speak maliciously”; “I expect misfortune, and pain always awaits.” Nonetheless, David says, “I became like one who does not hear and whose mouth cannot reply, G-d, all because of my hope in You.”

The distinction of this *perek* is that in all of *Sefer Tehillim*, 150 *perakim*, this is the only one which David begins with: *Mizmor l'David l'hazkir*, “A Psalm by David, to remember” (to review and say in times of trouble). (Veritably, *Perek* 70 also begins with *l'hazkir*, to remember, how Hashem saved and protected him from his pursuers and detractors.) Why would David seek to underscore the bitterness, grief, misery and heartbreak that he had experienced in his life – to the point that he encourages us to remember, to recite this *perek* during moments of distress?

Rav Zilberstein explains that David turns to us all and declares: “Have you ever heard of a Jew called David *Hamelech*? He received the monarchy forever. He merited to have a son, Shlomo, who was the wisest of all men, who built the *Bais Hamikdash*.” David was an author, a Psalmist, a poet, a king. *Moshiach Tziddkeinu* descends from him. He is the fourth leg of the Heavenly Chariot,

David Malka Meshicha. He certainly was one of the most prodigious, successful personages in the annals of Jewish history. Yet, he suffered so much. All of *Perek 38* relates his bitter suffering. He never lost hope. His suffering catalyzed his distinction. Thus, we are impelled to remember and inscribe on our hearts this chapter, because it teaches us that no situation, however bleak, is hopeless.

Fear destroys. Fear is, unfortunately, contagious. When a nation is gripped with fear it cannot function; it cannot think properly. What would be considered cogent during a period of calm suddenly becomes devoid of perspective. When fear takes hold of a person, he becomes overwhelmed. As a result, decisions which he would normally produce with ease, he struggles to make, or his decisions are nonsensical.

Acheinu heimasu es levaveinu; "Our brothers have melted our hearts." Our nation that was liberated from Egypt, walked through the dried bed of the Red Sea, triumphed over Amalek, lived on Heavenly bread – but was overcome with *bechayah shel chinam*, unwarranted weeping. Why? The hearts of *Klal Yisrael* had been melted by fear.

In *Likutei MoHaran* (11:48), *Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, writes *K'she'adam tzarich laavor gesher tzaar meod – ha'klal v'ha'ikar shelo yispacheid klal*; "When a person must cross an exceedingly narrow bridge, the general principle and the essential thing is to not frighten yourself at all." The narrow bridge is daunting; it is scary, but, if you want to cross it, you cannot surrender to your fears. *Rav Nachman's* words are the basis of a song which became very popular. In the song, the reference is, *kol ha'olam kulo*, "the entire world is a narrow bridge." In an emboldened move, the Israeli tank corps made their attack across the Suez Canal during the *Yom Kippur* War. As they began their advance towards the bridgehead on the canal, Ariel Sharon, the commander at the time, broadcast the song over all the radios and interiors of the attacking crews. The word, the lyrics, the tune, the hidden meaning, electrified the men until they all sang together, easing their fear and trepidation upon entering the battle.

What is the message of this sweet story? The world is compared to a narrow bridge. Life is filled with narrow bridges, highs and lows, fears and celebrations, pain and anxiety, happiness and joy, sickness and health and then the greatest challenge: mortality. Interestingly, the song compares the world to a narrow bridge. Is that the only dangerous place that inspires fear? A bridge is the symbol of a journey, of movement. The message is powerful. Yes, we are faced with fear, but we must move on. One does not stop in middle of a bridge out of fear. He should try to reach the other side as quickly as he can. This teaches us to work through our fears; do not ignore them, but certainly do not stop along the bridge. Move on! With *bitachon* in Hashem, we can overcome the fears and traverse the bridge. To weep for no warranted reason is certainly not the way to cross the bridge. That was their mistake in the wilderness. We now have *Tishah B'Av* to reflect on our fears, so that we triumph over them as we prepare for an end to the mourning with the advent of *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*.