

Adass Aish Kodesh

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בס"ד

Rhythm of the Heart

Tehillim – Kapitel 91

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

The wintry weather has hit in full force. It is cold and rainy outside, the nights are longer, and there is a feeling of discomfort in the soul. It is ten weeks since the *bren* of *Yom Tov* burned so enthusiastically, and one seeks strength to make it through the dark, wintry nights. Our Father in Heaven knows all too well the needs of His children, so He gave us Chanuka as a spiritual antidote. And what sweet medicine it is.

The mind floods with the warmth of Chanukas of years past. This special time is tailor-made to fulfill our every need. The short winter days make life lived in the daylight even more hectic. Somehow the biological clock doesn't find enough time to get everything done. There is an edge of incompleteness fluttering in one's mind.

We rush home as the skies are quickly turning into night, the children gather about expectantly, the menorah sparkles, and the very air seeps with the feeling of family togetherness. Father makes the *brachos*, the flickering lights spread from one end of the window to the next, and age-old songs are sung in chorus. It is a moment of nourishment in the crass world around us.

Each family has its own Chanuka customs, and ours is no different. It's amazing which small acts in mitzva observance become the cherished memories for future generations. In the Rubin family it has long been the custom to sit by the lighted menorah for a half-hour reciting a whole raft of *zemiros* together. This tradition was handed down from previous generations and gives us all a warm feeling of continuity.

One favorite song is the ninety-first *kapitel* of *Tehillim*, which we recite seven times in unison. Come and share with me its heartwarming words.

The *kapitel* begins, **"Whoever sits in the refuge of the most High shall dwell in the shadow of the Alm-ghty."** The world today has gone mad. None of the time-honored values of the past seems sacred anymore. We, the Torah community, are cast upon the turbulence of a secular society that has no place or time for matters of the soul. Instead, time is seen as a tool to be used in the pursuit and consumption of every sort of object and whim. If someone tries to bring it to a halt, he is seen as a hazard to the progress of this global village.

We are afraid to open our doors - who knows what evil will spring forth? It is the winter of mankind's heart, and the frozen pain so tangibly felt seems to permeate the very air we breathe.

The opening words of this *kapitel* give us hope, warmth and courage to carry on. The refuge they refer to is the refuge of a Torah family, where the warmth of safety is present and insulated.

This beautiful *kapitel* was composed by Moshe Rabbeinu upon the completion of the construction of the *Mishkan*. Moshe was telling us that if we stay within the shadow of the Alm-ghty we will find true refuge. The holy Alshich explains that the place where the Alm-ghty dwells is actually within the heart of man. The most sacred of places is within our very selves.

The problem is that we don't always realize this truth. We seek external answers for internal needs. The soul is so very thirsty, yet we are frightened to give of our own nourishment. Even many in our own community are often too harassed to stop and actualize this. All too many dedicated Yidden live their lives on automatic pilot. Their careers, the struggle to earn a livelihood, the rat race of keeping up with others - it all gets in the way.

But there are moments of sanity that can grab us from this deluge. Seven times, again and again, we say it: **"I will say to Hashem, He is my refuge and my fortress."** The safe place we yearn for is within our hearts. This realization builds a fortress against the cold from without.

This psalm has within it every letter of the *alef-beis* except for the *zayin*. The Abudraham points out that the word *zayin* literally means weapon. With a deeper understanding of the holy words of this *kapitel*, we will have the greatest of weapons to fend off the cold of our

enemies. In fact, the greatest of dangers is this very coldness. It calcifies our sensitivities and makes it hard for us to even feel how far away we may be.

Zayin also stands for the number seven. Every *motzaei Shabbos* we say this *kapitel* to remind ourselves of the renewal of the seven days of Creation each week. Perhaps the custom of reciting these words seven times by the glow of the menorah should also instill this into our minds. The creation of a warm and loving life starts with finding refuge in Hashem, and that sanctuary lies within the grasp of every Jewish heart.

The *kapitel* continues, **“That He will deliver you from the ensnaring trap, from devastating pestilence.”** Can there be any greater traps than those set by the society that surrounds us today? How often do we fall victim to the mind-snares that await us at every turn? How many lavish *simchas* must there be before we wake up and realize what folly it is to focus so much on the *gashmius* aspects?

The *yetzer hara* takes on a different guise in each generation. Today he dresses up in the longest of coats and the largest of hats, and he asks only one thing: “Don't think!” You can live and take part in this vibrant Torah world, but if false labels and prestigious comprise drive your priorities, it can be very cold indeed.

Seven times we say it, over and over. It's cold outside, but we sit huddled about our lights, hoping to bring them into our souls. **“You shall not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day.”** Yes, we walk in dark times. Morality has gone for an extended vacation. We have good reason to fear this darkness - this void of all that is good and proper. Yet if we can discover and tap into the abundant G-dliness that is within the refuge of ourselves, we can go through the darkness without fear.

The “arrow that flies by day” indicates a fear of the sudden changes and crises that seem to come from nowhere. One minute you are walking along without a care in the world, and then all of a sudden something happens that changes your whole life. I call this the “stuff happens syndrome,” and there is no formula to keep such “stuff” from happening. If, however, we are really connected with our faith in Hashem, then all the “stuff” thrown at us will never defeat us. We will see life's detours as G-d-sent indicators that allow for our growth.

“A thousand will fall at your side and a myriad at your right hand, but it shall not approach you.” People who can't relate to Hashem's Will through their adversity are destroyed by those events. The Yid who lives by his faith will not lose himself, and total depression will never “approach” him.

“No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent.” Evil can drive us down when we let it disconnect our will from our heart. If, however, we stay loyal to the refuge of Hashem, even if we lose a few skirmishes in life's battles we will never be lost.

In this dire time, each family, each “tent,” can be saved from the plagues of the world by coming together and sharing the glowing lights of the menorah. That cold place outside is not ours. Ours is the shimmering warmth of the *lichtelech* that remind us of our own need for rededication to what is real. Seven times we affirm it, again and again. It is Hashem Who reaches out from the cold that seeps within. We need but accept and embrace His promise of that warmth.

And thus our psalm ends: **“I will satisfy him with long life and show him My salvation.”** Hashem promises us that if we truly live with the light of His faith our lives will find real satisfaction. That is the true essence of a long life - one that is not measured by time but by spirituality. What greater salvation can we aspire to?

So, my dear friends, gather around your menorahs and invite the light of Hashem into your very selves. Say the words of old once, twice, yes, even seven times, and create a memory - create a place of eternal light.