

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I have an admission to make, one I am sure many of you will understand: I am a bit of a hypochondriac. There. I have said it. Not that I'm not a full-blown, out-of-control hypochondriac. I'm more the "minor aches and pains means something worse" kind.

As a communal Rav, I am called to many a bedside and have seen more than my fair share of heartache. Therefore, when things don't seem to be ticking internally as they should, I'm the first to get on the phone to the doctor. I will want all the tests going. "Check it all out, Doc. Leave nothing to chance." Baruch Hashem, there are plenty of tests available. If you feel the slightest bit off color and something doesn't seem right, well, they can check you in to the hospital and run so many tests you'll forget what it was that bothered you in the first place.

Make no mistake. Of course we have to daven to Hashem first and ask Him to heal us. But people now enter a hospital with the feeling that somehow, in some way, those magical doctors will find out what the problem is. In this day and age, being health conscious is good. Often, we can catch things just in time.

In our community, there is a man who has felt poorly for some months now. He felt weak, ran a slight fever and coughed all the time. He went to his doctor, who tried all the common tricks of his trade, but to no avail. The poor fellow was getting weaker and weaker. He then went to a famous specialist who advised him to have a series of tests that required hospitalization.

By now, the man was convinced he suffered from an incurable disease. He gave it a name (we all know which) and awaited confirmation. He has been in the hospital for over a week, becoming increasingly distraught with each passing day. When I went to see him, I encountered his wife standing vigil outside his room. As I walked closer, I saw she was crying.

Uh-oh, I thought. It must be bad news.

"What is it?" I asked in concern.

"Oh, Rabbi it's good news! They have pinpointed the problem and it's not..." She didn't finish her sentence because tears of relief got in the way.

What happens when our spiritual health is in a slump? Do we avidly seek help? Do we find a top specialist and tell him our thoughts and worries so that he can come to an accurate diagnosis? Does the ache of our fallen soul bother us as acutely as a pain in one of our physical limbs?

In matters of the spirit, we seem to feel that we will find ourselves miraculously cured one day soon. That pang of remorse in the heart, that feeling of loss will surely disappear some day soon, so don't worry. There's no need for a doctor or tests. Just keep going, and it will all be okay.

Perhaps we don't run to our spiritual doctors at the first sign of malfunction because deep in our hearts we know what must be done. We know that the cure lies within us, and only we can resolve to be cured. There is no pill or potion.

This is hard to accept, so we tend to kid ourselves and say it is no problem at all. That way, we don't have to worry.

Spiritual problems have plagued mankind from the first. There is nothing new today that hasn't been seen before, and cures are available for the worst of conditions. Spiritual malaise starts when we are not in proper working order with Hashem's Will. The cure to such conditions comes from actualizing Hashem's will in our daily lives. It sounds simple, but it's almost impossible, for we live in a polluted atmosphere. Clearing the air is no simple matter. In fact, it is a lifelong challenge.

In Tehillim, King David speaks on many levels. Often, he talks about fending enemies. How does that apply to me, wonders the average person. I'm not a soldier? A look at the deeper meaning of the psalms, reveals their relevance for every Jew, in every era. In this kapitel, we find King David once more speaking of his enemies. Listen to his anguish and take heart from his words.

Strive, Hashem, against those my adversaries. Battle my foes. The yetzer hara is our greatest, most constant enemy. It fights us at many different points, using all sorts of weapons. It can come at us from so many places and with such subtlety that you may not realize you are in a battle for your life. David begs Hashem to give him the insight to battle evil at every level. He asks that Hashem help by giving him the understanding that there is, in fact, a battle taking place and dynamics striving against our essence.

Grasp shield and armor, and rise to my assistance. Draw out the spear, and bar the way against my pursuers. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." When you are besieged by fears and insecurities, the only shield is Hashem's love. When the acid of that fear rises up in your heart, listen to what Hashem is telling your soul, "I am your salvation."

May they be shamed and disgraced, those who seek my life. May they turn back in mortification, those who plot my harm. When we realize that evil comes in different guises and wields various weapons, then we will turn to Hashem with this plea.

May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of Hashem thrusting them away. Much of what causes us to stray from Hashem is a mirage. Just like chaff, it will float away to nothingness once we realize its emptiness.

For no reason, they hid a trap for me with their net. For no reason, they dug to kill me. Nothing is as it seems! Our enemy, the yetzer hara, digs pits and covers them with a net of innocence.

My every limb will say, "Hashem, who can compare to You Rescuer of the poor from one stronger than he, and the impoverished and destitute from would-be robbers?" If we focus our energies on Hashem, we will become aware that there is no force like Him. This knowledge will vanquish our spiritual enemies and empower us to rise above those who seek to rob us of our souls.

Malicious witnesses rise against me, demanding of me things I know nothing about. When one gets caught up in a vortex made by an uncontrollable yetzer hara, things you never thought of seem to be shlepping you further away. David has been in his own quagmire, and he tells us where to turn.

My Master, how long will You look on? Restore my soul from their darkness, from the lion cubs my one and only soul. Yidden have seen so much and have been in so many places. In the end, it all comes down to this one truth. Without Hashem, we walk in darkness and the lions of the world feed on our hearts. Hashem is The Master, and if we but ask, then that will be the beginning.

So let our health be good; let tests be taken and passed. And may the greatest of tests, those that are in our soul, bring us closer to Hashem, and each other. For as our kapitel exclaims, *I will thank You in the great congregation.* That congregation is the one created by Yidden who cling together with one heart.

Let them not gloat over me or smugly wink, these false enemies of mine who hate me for no reason. For they speak not of peace, but against the downtrodden in the land. Their thoughts are ones of cunning. We all must become focused on this one truth: that the illness that afflicts one's soul is caused by those inner voices that pretend to speak of peacefulness and tranquility. They wink and blink with deceit, for it is only their ability to conjure that gives them strength.

Let us all pray: *Do not let them say in their hearts, "Wonderful!" Do not let them say, "We have devoured him!"* May we find our strength through Hashem, and remain loyal to His Will for all mankind. This is no easy task. The battles are many, the warriors strong. However, with the sweet words of David, we can beseech Hashem with time-honored words of hope. As he so lovingly ended this kapitel; *And my tongue will tell of Your righteousness, and all day long, Your praise.* Just saying these words bring courage and strength, with hope for a victorious future.

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