

CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

In every home lurk little bits of broken equipment that you know you should fix but never get around to doing. In the Rubin home there is the famous plug hole, or for my American friends, the drain. It is upstairs in the bathroom and the "thingy" that closes it is missing. Hence there is a constant danger that at any given moment something will swim down that open hole whilst the water is running. Now the real problem is that unlike water, any such object could - no, if I know anything from experience I can safely say, will - become lodged somewhere in the labyrinth that is your domestic plumbing. It will sit there forgotten and unmourned, allowing all kinds of ugly rubbish to build up around it. Then one fine day, all will explode! The water won't go down, in fact it will rise up in righteous indignation, you will not be able to shift it, and the plumber will have to dissect your entire bathroom. He will then show you a long lost toothpaste top and tell you that you should have had the plug hole fixed years ago.

Any reader with even a minimal sense of intuition will have guessed by now that these words are being written with more than a mere academic interest in plug holes. Well I'll own up. Today I lost a toothpaste cap down that hole, and try as I might, it went beyond my reach within seconds. It is now ensconced in the intricate twists of my plumbing, and the only question is, when do I call the plumber?' I can let the problem slide into the murky backburner of my mind; forgetting it, vaguely hoping that far from eye, far from heart,' will prove to be true and that I will never have to give it another thought. But in my heart of hearts I know it is there, gathering together all kinds of muck, just waiting for the moment to explode back into my life. The dilemma is simple, fix it now, or pay the consequences later.

In the realm of spirituality we have a similar situation. We have all kinds of safeguards that are meant to keep us safe and sound. Unfortunately, there are any number of holes in our defence system, and every once in a while something really bad slips in.

Torah observance is a perfect protective shield, but when we have small lapses, then the rot sets up a breeding ground. The bad bit need not seem all that terrible; perhaps it was a particular juicy bit of *lashon hara* or a momentary feeling of anger and jealousy, nothing major mind, but corrosive all the same. It gets stuck in your heart, and becomes a magnet for all the rubbish that floats about in our minds. Gradually the mire builds up, the anger redoubles, and then one fine day, Bam! It all blows up in our face. At such a time repairing the soul will need major work, whereas if the minor irritant had been expelled right away, nothing untoward would have happened.

The trouble is we really don't like to admit that the bad stuff has in fact entered. We prefer to talk it away, thinking it is just some minor irritant that will flow away in the course of our lives. Being truthful to oneself is a difficult thing, but if we allow ourselves to be kidded by our own ego, then we must expect the backlash. It is astounding how often we speak ill of others, or harbour jealous thoughts, yet, we are adamant that there is nothing untoward, that all is well. "Who me? I never thought that, nor said this, and if I did I didn't mean anything by it." Sure, and I did not allow the toothpaste top to fall into the drain, right, so it will all be okay. Actually no it will not be; and it must be fixed before it is too late. There are many who become so embittered because they hold onto these little specks of wrong in their hearts. They destroy their entire outlook in life, poisoned by stuff they could have gotten rid of long ago.

This *kapital* speaks of the ultimate time of reckoning when the evil done in this world by those who despise Hashem will be punished. Perhaps it can also be seen as a message about our personal battle with malevolence. We too should accept that if we allow maliciousness to dwell in our souls, we face terrible consequences. There is no such thing as a spiritual vacuum; the space in our soul is filled with what we allow to enter.

KEL NEKAMOS HASHEM ... "Almighty of vengeance Hashem, Almighty of vengeance, reveal Yourself."

I have noted before, gutte *Yidden* were wont to say; *Der velt iz nisht hefker*, "The world is not unaccountable!" There are consequences that we must realize. Hashem is a Loving Father, but then, a loving parent must set borders for his young, or else they can come to ruin. When we absorb some awful traits we must realize that Hashem's vengeance can be swift. I have seen situations where hate and anger have spawned horrendous results, things that could never be explained away as mere accidents of fate. If we pollute our hearts we cannot expect purity. Hashem's "vengeance" is not what we mere humans understand the expression as meaning. Its core does not come from the normal human sense of anger or retribution. Rather, Hashem's rule over this world stems from His complete love for all His creation, and His "vengeance" is to rectify spiritual inconsistencies that we have caused.

YABI'U YEDABRU ASAK ... "They express, they speak with arrogance; all the evil doers are boastful."

The inner site of our wrongdoing is the direct result to our clogging up our hearts with arrogance and boasting. We do not like admitting our failures, rather than accept that we have allowed wrong to become ingrained in our being; we talk ourselves into believing that in fact we are righteous and all is well.

VAYOMRU LO YIREH ... "And they say, "G-d does not see, and the G-d of Jacob is not concerned."

We are told: *Shivisi Hashem Lenegdi tamid*, "Keep Hashem before you always;" but that is no simple matter. The Ropshitzer Rav zy"a was known for his quips, quips that were packed with enormous holiness. He once walked over to someone after the fellow finished his private shemone esrei and said, "Shalom Aleichem and welcome back." The surprised fellow looked at the Rebbe in dismay.

The Rebbe continued, "I can tell that during your shemone esrei your mind was a million miles away, so I thought it only right to welcome you back."

It is difficult to keep Hashem in our minds even when praying, how much more so when we go about our daily business. We don't have to think Hashem isn't looking; our problem is we do not even think of Him at all.

HASHEM YODEI'A MACHSHEVOS ADAM ... "Hashem knows the thoughts of men, that they are vanity. Fortunate is the man whom You chastise Hashem, and whom You instruct from Your Torah."

This is no academic exercise; Hashem does know our thoughts and our vanity. He offers us signs throughout our lives, reminders of where our focus should be. We can turn our backs on these Holy messages or we can hear the Torah lessons and unplug that which blocks our hearts. This is our choice in life - either call the plumber today, or face the flood tomorrow ...

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