

Parashat Mishpatim, 5773, 2013:

“I am Hashem Your G-d Who Heals You”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam and Moshe Reuven ben Chaya.

And He said, If you hearken to the voice of the L-rd, your G-d, and you do what is proper in His eyes, and you listen closely to His commandments and observe all His statutes, all the sicknesses that I have visited upon Egypt I will not visit upon you, for I, the L-rd, heal you. (*Sefer Shemot* 15:26, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The above verse appears in Parashat Beshalach, immediately after the *Shira* (Song at the Sea of Reeds). It teaches us in no uncertain terms that it is Hashem, and no other, who heals us. Rashi (1040-1105) underscores this idea with his comments on the phrase, “I will not visit upon you”:

I will not visit upon you: And if I do bring [sickness upon you], it is as if it has not been brought, “for I, the L-rd, heal you.” This is its midrashic interpretation (see Sanh. 101a, Mechilta). According to its simple meaning, [we explain:] “for I, the L-rd, am your Physician” and [I] teach you the Torah and the mitzvot in order that you be saved from them [illnesses], like this physician who says to a person, “Do not eat things that will cause you to relapse into the grip of illness.” This [warning] refers to listening closely to the commandments ... — [from Mechilta]

Our *parasha*, in *Sefer Shemot* 21:19, also contains a reference to healing that is widely viewed by our Sages as the proof and permission-granting text for a physician to practice his or her arts: “If he gets up and walks about outside on his support, the assailant shall be cleared; he shall give only [payment] for his [enforced] idleness, and he shall provide for

his cure (*v'rapo yirapeh*)." Rashi, cites Onkelos (Second Century Palestine) regarding the legitimacy of the physician's role: "**and he shall provide for his cure:** As the Targum [Onkelos] renders: and he shall pay the physician's fee." When our two verses are taken in tandem, it becomes clear that it is the doctor's role to act as G-d's messenger in all acts of healing. Therefore, it is ultimately Hashem who is our *rofeh ne'eman* (true physician). This is reminiscent of a sign I once saw in a religious physician's office: "G-d heals, I take the fee."

How should we conceptualize Hashem's role as our physician? We are fortunate, indeed, that our Sages provided us with a roadmap for answering precisely this question, namely, the eighth *bracha* (blessing) of the *Shemoneh Esrai*:

Heal us, O L-rd, and we will be healed;

Help us and we will be saved;

For You are our praise.

Grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds;

For You, Almighty King, are a faithful and merciful healer.

Blessed are You L-rd, who heals the sick of His people Israel.

(http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/867674/jewish/Translation.htm,

formatting and underlining my own)

A careful analysis of the literary structure of our *bracha* reveals the following:

1. There are three specific requests that we ask of G-d in reference to our health:

“Heal us and we will be healed,” “help us and we will be saved,” and “grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds.”

2. There are two statements of praise (*shevach*) within the *bracha*, “for You are our praise” and “for You, Almighty King, are a faithful and merciful healer.”
3. The *bracha* concludes with the recognition of Hashem as our healer: “Blessed are You L-rd, who heals the sick of His people Israel.”

Let us now examine the constitutive elements of our *bracha*. The first two requests, and the first statement of *shevach*, are based upon a *pasuk* (verse) that appears in *Sefer Yirmiyahu* 17:14: “Heal me, O L-rd, then shall I be healed; help me, then I shall be helped, for You are my praise!” As a result, our blessing states: “Heal us and we will be healed, help us and we will be saved,” and “for You are our praise.” It must be noted that the salvation requested in our *bracha* is not a general one such as found in *Sefer Tehillim* 20:10: “O L-rd, save [us]; may the King answer us on the day we call.” Instead, we are asking Hashem to specifically alleviate any and all ailments and illnesses that we may have.

The second request regarding our well-being, “Grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds,” differs from the first in that it is not directly based upon any *pasuk* found in Tanach (the Jewish Canon of Scripture). Moreover, it highlights the ideas of a “complete cure and healing” (“*refuah shlaimah*”) and specifies “our wounds.” Even with these additions, it would seem that this request simply restates the earlier entreaty of “Heal us and we will be healed,” since there, too, we surely are hoping for the complete restoration of our health. This problem was creatively analyzed by the Eitz Yosef (Rabbi Hanoach

Zundel ben Rav Yosef, died, 1867) in the classic work, *Otsar Hatefillot*:

“Heal us and we will be healed,” means that at the beginning, our healing will come from You Hashem, and afterwards, we will complete the process and see it through to its final conclusion. This refers to spiritual/psychological healing (*refuat hanefesh*). In regards to the restoration of our physical health (*refuat haguf*), however, that is solely in the “hands” of [the Holy One may] He be blessed, it states: “Grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds” – from the onset to the conclusion. This is the case since, in reality, we are helpless regarding physical matters to effectuate a [positive change] without Your assistance. (Underlining and brackets my own)

To summarize: “Heal us and we will be healed,” means that we are partners with Hashem in securing our own spiritual and psychological health. The Holy One blessed be He begins the curative process and it is up to us to ensure its effective completion. In contrast, “Grant complete cure and healing to all our wounds,” refers to physical health – something that is the sole province of the Master of the universe. Thus, these two phrases are not redundant since each refers to a different aspect of the human condition.

I believe that the two expressions of *shevach*, “For You are our praise,” and “For You, Almighty King, are a faithful and merciful healer,” were included by *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) to underscore the singular role that our Creator plays in our spiritual and physical health. In short, we must ever be conscious that “... I shall raise my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come? My help is from the L-rd, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 121:1-2) Then, too, it is very possible that our Sages included these phrases to teach us the fundamental lesson that no matter how difficult a health crisis we may face, Hashem, our G-d, is the Almighty King and “a faithful and merciful healer.” These are comforting words that provide us with hope, solace, and a powerful sense that the future will be better.

Our *bracha* concludes: “Blessed are You L-rd, who heals the sick of His people Israel.” May we be *zocheh* (merit) to always have *refuah shlaimah*, so that we may lead healthy and robust lives dedicated to the service of Hashem. *V’chane yih ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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