Jewish Tribune – Mishpotim

**Holy Healing**

A vast crowd gathered at the west front of the United States Capitol facing the National Mall with its iconic Washington Monument and distant Lincoln Memorial. Sadie took her seat of honour in the very front row, ready to watch her son be inaugurated as President of the United States of America.

After the presidential oath was recited, Sadie turned to the dignitary on her left and said “you see that man?”, pointing at the newly sworn in President, “his brother’s a doctor!”

Jews and medicine go back a long way. All the way back to this week’s parsha where the Torah says וְרַפֹּא יְרַפֵּא, and he shall surely heal, giving permission for doctors to treat patients.

The Rabbeinu Bachaya makes a fascinating observation.

All refuah admistered by human beings is referred to with a *dogesh* in the “peh” of the word “רפא”. For example: "רִפִּאנוּ אֶת בָּבֶל, וְלֹא נִרְפָּתָה עִזְבוּהָ" (ירמיה נא, ט) and of course "וְרַפֹּא יְרַפֵּא**"** in our parsha.

In contrast, whenever it is HKBH administering the healing, there is no *dogesh* and it is instead pronounced “feh”. For example:

"רְפָאֵנִי ה' וְאֵרָפֵא " (ירמיה יז, יד)

"הָרֹפֵא, לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב" (תהלים קמז, ג)

"כִּי אֲנִי ה' רֹפְאֶךָ" (שמות טו, כו)

Why the difference?

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that human medical intervention invariably involves pain, cost and sometimes unforeseen consequences. This is represented by a *dogesh* in the “peh” of the word “רפא”, making it a “hard” sounding word.

Hashem’s healing on the other hand can be gentle, pain free and complete. This is represented by the lack of a *dogesh* and a soft “feh” pronunciation.

The Shulchan Aruch (Oruch Chaim 230,4), as explained by the Mishna Berurah, says that a Yehi Rotzon should be said every time one undergoes any medical procedure. This could even be as minor as taking a paracetamol. We say: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקי שיהא עסק זה לי לרפואה כי רופא חנם אתה. Again, as we refer to HKBH offering the healing, we use the softer pronunciation.

The Mishna in Kiddushin (4,14) famously says: טוב שברופאים לגיהנם – the best of doctors go to Gehinom. Rashi explains that this relates to an arrogant doctor who does not subjugate himself to HKBH as well as to those who choose not to treat poor patients.

There are many other interpretations to this phrase. I once heard a pshat from Rabbi Pinchos Roberts shlita. The gematria of the word טוב is 17 and the phrase refers to those doctors who forget one brocho in shemonei esrei. Namely, they ignore Hashem’s role in the process and forget the brocho of Refoeinu, leaving only 17 brochos and not 18 (shemone esrei).

But there are some doctors who don’t forget Hashem’s role.

Rabbi Roberts told a story of one time when he was walking down Brent Street late one night and saw a man sitting in the driving seat of a parked car, slumped over the steering wheel. Concerned, Rabbi Roberts walked towards the car and as he got closer, to his shock, he saw that it was none other than the legendary Dr S Adler ztl.

Rabbi Roberts knocked on the window and Dr Adler bolted up and wound down the window.

“Is everything ok Dr Adler?” asked Rabbi Roberts.

“I have just visited a patient” replied Dr Adler, “and realise that there is nothing else that I can do medically to help this person; so I came back to my car and am saying Tehillim.”

There are doctors and there are doctors. And there is also the רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר.

May we all merit to enjoy good health and long and happy years.

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