


LIVING WELL

A selection of the Rebbe's letters on the importance of maintaining optimal health and instructions for living a healthy lifestyle



הואיל והיות הגוף בריא ושלם מְדַרְכֵי (עבודת) הַשֵּׁם הוא.
שֶׁהֵרִי אֵי אֶפְשֶׁר שִׁיבִין או יֵדַע דְּבַר מִיַּדְעֵת הַבּוֹרָא וְהוּא
חוֹלָה. לְפִיכָךְ צָרִיךְ לְהִרְחִיק אֶדָם עֲצֻמוֹ מִדְּבָרִים הַמְּאַבְדִּין
אֶת הַגּוּף. וּלְהִנְהִיג עֲצֻמוֹ בְּדְבָרִים הַמְּבָרְרִין וְהַמְחַלְמִים.

Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of (serving) Hashem—for one cannot understand or have any knowledge of the Creator if he is ill—therefore, he must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthful and helps the body become stronger.

(Rambam, Hilchos De'os, 4:1)

לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת הרב יהודה יעקב
בן ר' אברהם אבא ע"ה
רעפסון
נלב"ע כ"ז אדר ה'תש"פ
תנ"צ'ב'ה'
נדפס ע"י
משפחתו שיחיו



Introduction: The Preciousness of a Yid's Body

... My father-in-law, the Rebbe, of blessed memory, related the statement of his father, the Rebbe [Rashab] *nishmaso eden*: “See how precious is the body of a Jew — for its sake has [Hashem] poured forth so much [Torah and mitzvos].”

When Hashem gives each and every one of us something as precious as the body, we are to make every effort and truly exert ourselves to ensure that the body be healthy. In so doing, we make it possible to fulfill Hashem's will [of performing Torah and mitzvos, which is specifically performed with the body].

This is as the Rambam states in *Hilchos Deos*, beginning of ch. 4, that “maintaining a healthy and whole body is an integral part of [one's] *avodas Hashem*.” And then there is the letter of the Maggid [of Mezritch] (printed in *Hatomim*) to his son, the holy “Malach,” [in which he states]: “A small hole in the body causes a large hole in the soul.”

My intent is not to lecture — rather, it is my hope that the above will hopefully have a positive effect on you, and through you [it will also have an effect] upon your husband.

Although the Zohar does state that the “strength of the soul leads to the weakening of the body,” this is to be understood [in the context of the spiritual power and potency of the holy soul] weakening the corporeal demands of the body — not, Heaven forbid, weakening the health of the body.

Indeed, we readily observe that when a person is healthy he can accomplish so much more in all areas [than when he is unhealthy,] particularly with regard to matters relating to love of Hashem, love of Torah and love of a fellow Jew.²

Over the years, the Rebbe quoted these words of the Rambam on numerous occasions, urging his listeners, whether in *sichos*, letters, or *yechidus*, to meticulously guard their physical health. In honor of the month of אייר, the name of which includes the first letters of “אני ה' רפאך” — we present this collection of letters from the Rebbe about maintaining optimal health and healthy living habits.

These selections are culled from the book *Healthy in Body, Mind and Spirit*, volumes 1 & 2, compiled by Rabbi Sholom Ber Wineberg and published by Sichos in English.¹

The Importance of Maintaining a Proper Schedule

I received your letter in which you write about the state of your health:

You should seek the counsel of your *mashpia*, asking him to arrange your course of studies so that it will not in any way negatively impact your health, for there is the known Torah ruling, “Maintaining a healthy and whole body is an integral part of *avodas Hashem*.”

Surely you are also aware of the saying of the Alter Rebbe (quoted in *Hayom Yom*, entry for Erev Rosh Hashanah): “We have absolutely no conception of how precious the body of a Jew is to Hashem.”

You should therefore follow the doctor’s orders and make sure to follow a proper schedule — in accordance with your health requirements — regarding food, drink and rest. Hashem will then also grant you success that your *davening* and Torah study be accomplished with proper *yiras Shamayim*.

Enclosed is the *maamar* where you will also see that the spiritual deficiency caused by the power of the body only refers to the body being dominated by the *nefesh habahamis*, but not — G-d forbid — regarding the [power of the body] in relation to a person’s health, for that is related to the well-being of the Divine soul.³



Trade Away the Fasting

Over the years, the Rebbe generally discouraged people from taking fasts upon themselves as a way of doing teshuvah or attaining spiritual heights, and suggested other methods instead:

...With regard to fasting:

I have already told you — based on the words of the Alter Rebbe — that it is not advisable to take upon yourself extra fasts in addition to those that are already on the calendar.

One of the reasons offered by the Alter Rebbe is that today's generations are weaker than previous generations and are no longer physically capable of enduring extra fasts. Obviously, my suggestion to you is therefore valid even now [that you are feeling better].

Your impending resolution to undertake fasts should be changed to resolving to serve Hashem with extra measures of joy. Moreover, you should endeavor to inspire others to serve Hashem in this [positive] manner as well.⁴

Alternative Forms of Fasting

I was astonished to learn of your custom to fast from time to time on Mondays and Thursdays and also Erev Rosh Chodesh. Moreover, you do so despite the known directive of the Baal Shem Tov that one should make sure to be healthy so that [ill health] not be a hindrance to the command of serving Hashem with joy, for we readily observe that in this generation frequent fasting weakens one's health and hinders the performance of mitzvos.

Understandably, the above refers to those fasts that the person accepts upon himself (and not those fasts that are commanded by Jewish law).

Should you insist on a form of fasting, then there is the known directive of the Rebbe Maharash that this can be accomplished by refraining from unnecessary speech, even when one greatly desires to do so. This applies not only

to forbidden slanderous speech, but even refraining from speaking extraneous words.

As to food fasts — this can also be accomplished by eating nourishing foods, but not seeking out those foods that are particularly tasty.⁵

Follow Doctors Orders With Joy

It has been some time since I received a letter from you. I hope to G-d that this is a sign that everything is well. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate for you to expressly write [to me] about this.

During these days of Kislev, the “Month of Liberation,” you should act in accordance with the statement of our Sages, of blessed memory, who commanded us to follow doctor's orders and do so with a sense of joy.

It should make no difference to you in what manner and through which means you fulfill Hashem's will — what is of primary importance is that you do so without reservation. Thus, when Hashem commands you to obey the doctor, you should do so and be satisfied at the opportunity presented to you to fulfill Hashem's will.

Consequently, you should do so with a sense of joy. And when you will act in this manner, Hashem will assist you to see with your own eyes that there is indeed much to be satisfied about.⁶

What To Eat

An individual asked the Rebbe what to do about his diet; some of his “health foods” may have had an overall bad effect, etc. The Rebbe responds:

Regarding what you eat and your diet:

What you eat is not so important (as long as they are **properly kosher**); as much as the **reason why** you are eating: Is it only to indulge in pleasure and satiate your hunger, or is it in order to be healthy, thereby enabling you to do good things, etc.

See also *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, ch. 231 [where it is explained at length that everything a person does should not be for bodily pleasure, but in order to serve Hashem].⁷

Establishing the Hours Needed for Sleep

In reply to your letter of the 8th of Kislev in which you describe the times that you go to sleep and arise, and you ask my opinion if this conduct is correct or whether it should be changed:

The ultimate criteria for the above should be in keeping with the exposition offered by the Alter Rebbe in *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, regarding a teacher of children. [There the Alter Rebbe states that a teacher] should not stay up so late in the night that [his lack of sleep] will affect the efficacy of his teaching the next day. (See *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:12.)

Understandably, the same applies to one's own study of the Torah [— one should not stay up too late if it will keep him from being alert when he awakens the next day].

Since the amount of sleep a person needs is different from one individual to the other, depending on the nature of his body and the amount of sleep he is used to getting, etc., [it is therefore impossible for me to advise you as to the exact amount of sleep you need].

The statements in the various codes of law regarding the amount [of time] a person should sleep is but a median amount and applies to the majority, for Torah speaks to the needs of the majority, [however, individuals may well vary as to the exact number of hours of sleep they require].

You should test yourself [to see] how many hours of sleep you require, so that when you awaken you will be able to study with the necessary amount of [alertness and] comprehension. Based on this test, you should establish the hours of going to sleep and waking.

It is self-understood that in any case you are to carefully observe the time of the morning *Shema*, [i.e., that you arise in time to recite the morning *Shema*], a matter that is of particular import during the summer [when there is a greater possibility of missing the proper time for the recitation of the morning *Shema*].⁸

Sleeping During the Day

... It is obvious that one is to sleep at night (in accordance with both the revealed and esoteric portions of Torah, and as is to be observed as well in the nature of human conduct). Only in unusual circumstances should one nap during the day. (That which is cited in the book *Minhagei HaChasam Sofer* requires further examination.)

With regard to [sleeping on *Shabbos* day,] see the *Shulchan Aruch* of the Alter Rebbe, end of chapter 281, as



well as *Pri Etz Chayim*, *Shaar* 16, Chapter 1. This matter requires further investigation.⁹

Follow a Routine

You write to me about feeling weak and also about suffering from insomnia:

It may very well be that both matters are a result of your failure to lead an orderly life, without having set and established times for food, drink and sleep, etc.

Moreover, it is well known how our Rabbeim demanded [from others] and were also exacting and strict with themselves in regard to keeping an orderly lifestyle. They explained and expounded on how lack of routine and order prevents success in the performance of Torah and mitzvos.

...It would be advisable that you consult with a doctor so that he may calm you of your fears [regarding your weakness and insomnia]. Also ask him to establish for you an orderly routine for eating, drinking, etc. You should — as much as possible — make sure to stick to this routine.

May Hashem send His healing words and heal and strengthen you.¹⁰



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The Symmetry of Physical and Spiritual Health

The Rebbe teaches us time and again that everything that happens in our physical world is a reflection of occurrences in a spiritual reality. This is especially applicable to the health of the human body, since the life of the body is completely dependent on the chayus it receives from the neshama. The following is a small selection of the Rebbe's words in this regard.

Increase in Torah — Increase in Life

Surely I need not draw your attention to the deeper meaning of the concept that the Jewish people are “גוי אחד בארץ—the one nation on earth” — not only the simple meaning that Jews believe in one G-d and in one Torah, but that they draw down unity [“oneness”] into all aspects of this world.

This is to say that there is no disunity and plurality within this world at all: Just as Hashem is one with an utter

and simple unity, so, too, is unity and singularity found within all worldly aspects, particularly since the physical and the spiritual are not separate entities, but are truly one. It is just that Hashem allowed for the possibility [for man to believe the opposite of the truth] — as our Sages, of blessed memory, say: “Let he who *desires* to be mistaken come and be mistaken.”

This is part of the mission of the Jew: That he himself understand and sense Hashem's unity and make this aspect of Divine unity understood to those in his surroundings, and, to the greatest extent possible, to all those upon whom he has influence.

The same holds true with regard to one's health: When one needs to improve and increase his physical health and well-being, he should do so in conjunction with and with a concurrent and corresponding increase in his spiritual health and well-being — in the words of our Sages: “Whoever will increase, will see an increase.”

In light of the above, I am taking the liberty to bring to your awareness that it would be beneficial for your father *shlita* to increase his study sessions in our Torah, the Torah of Life.

It is through Torah that “He has implanted in us eternal life.” One of the meanings of this passage is that even though we live within this corporeal world, we live a true [eternal] life — something that should be felt within one's physical body as well.

This is also in keeping with the ruling of the Rambam in *Hilchos Deos*, the beginning of ch. 4, where he states that “maintaining a healthy and whole body is an integral part of *avodas Hashem*.”¹¹

Chitas—A Source of Divine Blessings

I received your *pidyon nefesh* in which you ask that Divine mercy be aroused for you so that you should be in good health. I will read the *pidyon nefesh* at the holy resting place of my father-in-law, the Rebbe, for the fulfillment of your heart's desire for good in all that you require.

It is known that in order to receive blessings from on High, we must create here below, [i.e., in this physical world,] the proper vessels into which these blessings will flow. Torah is the [most appropriate] vehicle for receiving any and all blessings.

I therefore suggest that you take upon yourself — *bli neder* — the observance of the three daily lessons [known as *Chitas*], established by my father-in-law, the Rebbe, an observance that applies to all *anash*, our Chassidic brotherhood.

...Observance of the above will surely serve as a fit vehicle to draw down and receive Hashem's blessings.¹²



YISROEL ZEVI GOLDSHMID

Strengthening Bitachon

Overall, the Rebbe always encourages us to strengthen our bitachon in Hashem as a means to merit His brachos manifest in our lives for whatever it is that we need, especially good health. Even from a logical perspective, the serenity provided by the feeling of bitachon is invaluable in maintaining good physical health.¹³

Importance of Bitachon for Good Health

...[It is true] medically as well, that the greater one's degree of *bitachon*, the greater one's amount of energy, and the better one's health and spirits — all this increases a person's accomplishments and success.¹⁴

Complete Faith and Trust in Hashem

I duly received the telephone message as well as the letter regarding the state of your health, and I will remember you in prayer at the holy resting place of my father-in-law, the Rebbe, of sainted memory, in accordance with your request.

It is surely unnecessary to emphasize to you the importance of *bitachon* — complete trust in Hashem — not just as an abstract belief, but in a way that truly permeates one's whole being.

For, in addition to this being one of the very fundamentals of our faith and way of life, it is also a channel to receive Hashem's blessings, especially for the success of your medical treatment, which has to be undertaken in the natural order, inasmuch as our holy Torah itself gives authority and power to doctors to heal and cure.

You surely also know that [living one's] daily life in accordance with the will of Hashem is the channel through which Jews receive Hashem's blessings in all needs, and additional efforts in this direction bring additional Divine blessings.¹⁵ **T**

1. Available at chabad.org/2306807. Henceforth in the footnotes, "Vol." and "ch." are in reference to this series.
2. Vol. 1, ch. 1. Igros Kodesh vol. 4, p. 341.
3. Vol. 1, ch. 1. Igros Kodesh vol. 8, p. 141.
4. Vol. 1, ch. 2. From a letter of the Rebbe dated 15 Iyar 5724.
5. Vol. 1, ch. 2. Igros Kodesh vol. 15, p. 177.
6. Vol. 1, ch. 4. Igros Kodesh vol. 8, p. 39.
7. Tzaddik L'Melech, vol. 7, p. 219.
8. Vol. 2, Part I, ch. 4. Igros Kodesh vol. 19, p. 89.
9. Vol. 2, Part I, ch. 4. Igros Kodesh vol. 12, p. 448.
10. Vol. 2, Part I, ch. 4. Igros Kodesh vol. 17, p. 169.
11. Vol. 1, ch. 8. Igros Kodesh vol. 7, p. 141.
12. Vol. 1, ch. 8. Igros Kodesh vol. 5, p. 51.
13. See *Safe and Secure, the Serenity of Bitachon*, Derher Adar 5781.
14. Vol. 1, ch. 5. Igros Kodesh vol. 18, p. 236.
15. Vol. 1, ch. 5. From a letter of the Rebbe dated Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5733.