A Chassidisher

Derher

א חסידישער דערהער

"אני ה' רופאך"

THE REBBE'S APPROACH TO PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MEDICINE

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CHOSSID, MASHPIA OF TOMCHEI TEMIMIM, TOMIM

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"אני ה' רופאך"

GEZUNT AND BITACHON

The Rebbe's approach to physical health, and the efficiency (and limits) of medical doctors

There are those who have simple ways of living. Some people recognize only the physical, denying any higher power and putting all their energy and efforts into the physical aspect of things. When someone is sick they run to the best doctors; when someone dies, they say it was by chance; if you want to make a living, you've got to work hard and get lucky.

Others believe in a higher power and see everything in this world as a reflection of the above. When they need money, they pray; when someone is sick, they pray; they believe that going to doctors is heresy. When someone passes away, they have left for a better place.

Yiddishkeit doesn't afford us the luxury of simple philosophies. On the one hand, it is a foundation of our belief that everything comes directly from Hashem, who administers every single thing that happens in every area of creation. If you want to change something in your life, you have to daven and strengthen your *bitachon*. At the same time, Hashem wants us to channel everything in the physical world: to watch our health; to go to doctors—the best ones at that; and to go out and work for a living.

The Torah expects us to keep a delicate balance: That we be fully anchored in our belief, but proactive in the world; to see the spiritual in everything that happens, but take responsibility for our actions.

Nowhere is this more crucial than in medicine and healing, where a person's attitude and mindset have such an effect on their approach and wellbeing. Much of the Rebbe's guidance in medicine is about finding the right balance; to understand the place of modern medicine, to approach it with a Jewish attitude, and recognize who our true Healer is.

לע"נ
אבינו הרה"ח הרה"ת
ר' **יוסף מנחם מענדל**
ב"ר **יצחק** ע"ה
ולע"נ אמנו מרת **זיסל דבורה**
בת ר' **אלי'** הכהן ע"ה
טענענבוים
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'



THE ATTITUDE

The fundamental Jewish attitude to health is that nothing is by chance; everything comes from Hashem. As the *possuk* tells us, אני ה' רופאך, I am Hashem your healer. When a person is sick, the ultimate address is Hashem, and the most powerful medicine is to strengthen one's connection to Hashem by davening to Him, strengthening one's *bitachon*, and observing Torah and mitzvos.

But that doesn't mean that one shouldn't go to doctors. It is part of His plan that we use medicine, as the *Beraisa* tells us (and it is cited by Rashi), ורפא ירפא, מכאן שניתנה רשות לרופא לרפאות: Torah granted permission for the doctor to heal (meaning: the Torah mandates that an injured person must be reimbursed for his medical bills, implying that medicine is an authentic method of healing according to Torah)[1]. And, the Rebbe adds, this doesn't only mean that a doctor is *allowed* to practice medicine, but even more so, that Hashem gives him the *power* to do so.[2] Furthermore, when a person is sick, he is *commanded* to go to the doctor, as the *possuk* tells us: ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם, guard yourself very carefully.[3] The doctor also has a mitzvah, to help his patients as a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, saving lives.[4]

We go to doctors like everyone else, but our attitude couldn't be more different. We don't go to them because we believe that they have the power to affect our lives; we go to them because Hashem *told* us to do so. Hashem is the One who heals us, but He does it through His instruments. And the more *bitachon* we have, the more we see this in a revealed manner.

As the Rebbe writes to a person whose wife was afraid of going to the hospital: "Hashem created the world and He runs it…הוא אמר ויהי, הוא צוה ויעמוד—nothing in the world happens without Hashem and everything that Hashem wants—happens. It's just that Hashem wants a natural *keli* to be made, meaning that things should happen in a natural way.

"When a Yid, man or woman, feels unwell and a doctor needs to be called, that doesn't mean that the doctor will do as he desires—rather Hashem chooses the doctor to be His shliach to fulfill this shlichus.

"When we have *bitachon* that Hashem runs the world—without any doubt—then we merit to see this with our physical eyes: That at every step of the way, Hashem is holding our hand and leading us for our own benefit, physically and spiritually."[5]

From this perspective, the doctor is both more powerful and less powerful: *Philosophically*, the doctor has no power at all. But *practically*, we must follow his instructions to the letter. (It should be noted; there are guidelines the Rebbe laid out on how to choose your doctor, how many doctors to ask, and what to do in the event of a disagreement among doctors themselves, etc., see below. But ultimately, we are bound to their instructions.)

"In areas regarding physical health," the Rebbe writes, "our holy and living Torah tells us that we must follow the words of the doctor… for he is only a *shliach*. Obviously, you can tell the doctor what your own opinion is, including the one that you wrote to me, but once he hears your opinion, you must follow his decision, whether you agree with it or not. A doctor is no more than a *shliach* who is working with the power and ability that Torah gave him; coming from the Torah, it is for the benefit of your body and soul. If you don't understand it, or if you disagree, there is nothing to be surprised about: Torah is the wisdom and the will of Hashem; it's not surprising that humans do not understand everything in Torah."

The importance of going to doctors when we're ill stems from the fact that we are *commanded* to keep ourselves healthy. As the Rambam says, "For the body to be healthy and complete is from the ways of [serving] Hashem." This is even more important according to Chassidus, which teaches us that the body is not a barrier to our *avodas Hashem* that must be beat down (as was the approach of Mussar), rather it is an important partner in our service of Hashem, and it must be taken care of. As the Maggid said, "A small hole in the body is a great hole in the *neshama*."[6]

The Rebbe writes in another letter: "It shouldn't matter how you fulfill Hashem's will—as long as you do so unconditionally. When Hashem tells you to listen to the doctor, that's what you have to do, and you should be content with the opportunity to listen to Hashem, so you must do it with joy."[7]

As the Rambam says, "For the body to be healthy and complete is from the ways of [serving] Hashem." The Maggid said, "A small hole in the body is a great hole in the neshama."

A HALACHIC PERSPECTIVE ON GOING TO DOCTORS

Shulchan Aruch tells us the *halacha* is that "Torah granted permission for the doctor to heal, and it is a mitzvah. It is part of *pikuach nefesh*, and one who [is able to heal and] abstains from doing so is guilty of murder."

However, there were great Rishonim who held that not always should a person go to a doctor. For example:

The **Ramban**[8] holds that ideally, a person should depend on Hashem: If he gets sick it is because Hashem decided to punish him, and if he is healed, it is also by Hashem's will. But when a person seeks out doctors, then Hashem leaves him to the forces of nature.

The **Ibn Ezra**[9] holds that it depends on the type of illness: *External* illnesses should be treated by doctors; internal illnesses should be left up to Hashem. So when the *possuk* tells us that an injured person must be reimbursed for his medical bills, it's only referring to external injury.

One of the proofs that has been cited against using doctors is from the fact that Chizkiyahu hid the "Book of Medications."[10] This book was authored by Shlomo Hamelech and held the secrets to healing every illness, but because eventually people started relying only on the book and not on Hashem, Chizkiyahu buried it.

However, the **Rambam**[11] writes strongly against the above approaches to medicine. "According to their warped opinion," he says, "a person who is hungry and eats bread, which will certainly heal his horrible illness of hunger, did he not depend on Hashem?! We would obviously dismiss them as fools! Just as we thank Hashem when we eat for providing us with sustenance, we also thank Him for providing us with medicines that heal us." He goes on to explain that the "Book of Healing" was a book of sorcery or a book of poisons, and that's why it was hidden.

In practice: The *halacha* follows the Rambam, as the Rebbe says in a letter, "It is the accepted *halacha* by Yidden to follow the Rambam—to use medicines and to put our trust in Hashem that He will send His healing through this person and this medicine…"[12]

DOCTORS HAVE PERMISSION FOR ONE THING

But we only trust doctors for the thing that Torah told us to trust them: to heal. Prognosis and predictions of a person's chances are not in a doctor's purview, as the Rebbe often pointed out to people.

Rebbetzin Rivkah, the wife of the Rebbe Maharash, had a serious illness in her kidneys when she was 18-years-old, and the doctor gave up on her getting better. In response, the Tzemach Tzedek, her father-in-law, said that a doctor has permission to heal—but he has no permission to *not* heal, or to give up on the patient.

The Rebbe would often quote this to people who had heard grim predictions from doctors. "The doctors are in charge of nothing else [other than healing]; when you hear something grim from a doctor, you shouldn't give it any attention. You must take it as a *nisayon,* a test from Hashem—he is testing your and your husband's *emunah* and *bitachon*. The sooner you strengthen your *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem, the sooner you will see your daughter getting better, with your physical eyes."[13]

(In another letter, the Rebbe explained that this is common sense: "In our day and age, when there are new treatments coming out every day, and there are new medicines discovered, it is against basic logic to make such predictions."[14])

HE WILL OUTLIVE THE DOCTOR

Rabbi Yechiel Ziskind was a *bochur* in 770 when he was diagnosed with the dreaded disease of polio. It was 5715*, the same year that a vaccine was introduced, but it was too late for him. He caught a bad case of the disease, which started as a cold, but progressed from there.

He was taken to the Kingston Avenue Hospital, and was put into an iron lung (which compressed his paralyzed chest and enabled him to breathe), with only his head sticking out. He was very, very sick.

"There was a doctor there," he related, "who had a very arrogant way of talking. He told my brother and father, 'G-d knows if he'll make it through the next 12 hours.'

"They went and told the Rebbe. The Rebbe gestured with his hand, and he became very emotional, and said, '*Er vet em iberleben*—he will outlive him [the doctor].'"

He made it through the next 12 hours, but he was still very ill. His friends, Kehos Weiss, Mottel Zajac, and Berel Baumgarten, would visit him every day. They would put tefillin on him and daven with him, because he was too sick to do anything. The doctor told them, "Leave him alone, he's a goner! Let him die in peace." They came to tell the Rebbe what the doctor had said. The Rebbe said the same thing: "He will outlive him."

Tragically, that's exactly what happened. That doctor himself caught polio a few days later and died.

Yechiel stayed in the iron lung through the summer and whenever the Rebbe distributed *kos shel bracha* he would always give some to his father to bring to him.

It took over two years, but eventually he recovered. "It took a while, a long time, but *b'chasdei Hashem*, I'm here today." Afterwards, he had to use a wheelchair for a while, and then he used crutches. One day, while he was still in his wheelchair, his family accompanied



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*5715 - 1955

him to yeshiva. "While we were in the hallway, the Rebbe was heading to the shul for Maariv. When he spotted us, he immediately turned around and invited us into his office.

"During that *yechidus*, he told me, 'In my opinion, you will become completely healthy.' Then he asked me, 'Reb Yechiel, what's going on with a *shidduch*?'

"'The Rebbe means now?' I asked. 'Not now,' the Rebbe said, 'because it's already a quarter to one in the morning. It's a bit late. But tomorrow you should start working on it.'

"'But I have debts,' I countered, explaining that I had just bought a car, and certainly I didn't have the income to support a wife and family.

"To this the Rebbe responded, 'Don't worry. Hashem sustains two and a half billion people in the world; he'll sustain a few more.'

"At this juncture, my father asked, 'The Rebbe means in his current condition?'

"The Rebbe gave me an amazing answer. 'Your condition is obvious. *Vilstu, iz gut. Vilstu nit…* She can decide if it's for her or not. But I know of cases where the issues are hidden, and people don't say… In your situation there's nothing to reveal, it's all very clear.'

"Then the Rebbe said to me, '*Es vet zain noch a trit in yam*–It will just be another step in your journey. Just as G-d helped you to survive, He will help you to get married, as well.'

"The next day, a woman called my aunt saying she saw me and she thought she had a match for me, a girl who had also recovered from polio. And that was my wife *aleha hashalom*."[44]

DON'T GET CAUGHT UP

So when we follow doctors, we must remember we are doing so because the Torah instructs us to do so, and we must always remember that doctors are but instruments in the hands of the true healer. "You must fulfill the directives of the doctor, but that's only on a practical level; your trust should be in Hashem, who will heal you."

> "You must do what Torah commanded you—to fulfill the directives of the doctor. Your mind and heart should be invested in strengthening your bitachon in Hashem..."

"It's a shame that you looked into medical books in the field that you believe you are sick with. In my opinion, you must do what Torah commanded you—to fulfill the directives of the doctor. Your mind and heart—meaning your thoughts—should be invested in strengthening your *bitachon* in Hashem, "who heals all and does wonders." Don't get involved in *chochmas harefuah*, that isn't your job, especially if it affects your mood and depresses you… *Tracht gut vet zain gut*, think good and it will be good."[15]

"You write the opinion of the doctors, and it is shocking that my words are being twisted… I said and wrote that they should *follow* the directives of the specialists, and I also said and wrote many times that they *shouldn't* be worried about their opinions… and in these two areas *the opposite* is being done: They are not following the directives of the specialists, and on the other hand they are becoming distressed from the doctors' opinion. What can I do? Their free choice cannot be taken away…"[16]

REACHING THE TRUE HEALER: SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Trust Hashem

Being that the true healing comes from Hashem and His *brachos*, the most important thing we can do is strengthen our *bitachon* in Him, which causes us to see His hand in a revealed way.[17]

Sometimes this is the physical solution as well: There were many times when people told the Rebbe that they were nervous about various ailments and pains (especially regarding their heart), and he replied that it was (mostly) caused by their anxiety and

worries; and that if they would only put their trust in Hashem—"that Hashem created the world… and creates it at every moment and runs it as he wishes… and that in your personal life as well, Hashem is the *baal habos* and He will guide you in the correct path"[18]—then their issues would go away on their own. (The Rebbe did sometimes tell people to check with specialists to assuage their fears.)[19]

Sometimes there is unfortunately nothing medically that can be done. When people would come to the Rebbe depressed and discouraged from a chronic condition they were dealing with, the Rebbe would uplift them and encourage them to live a complete and meaningful life—full of trust in Hashem without being dragged down by their challenges.[20]

Writing to the Rebbe

It should be self understood that a person in need of anything, especially regarding health, must turn to the *rosh b'nei Yisroel*. In fact, this is not just a Chassidishe thing; it is a clear *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch,[21] that someone who has a sick person in their home should request that the sage of the city daven for him. Indeed, there are thousands of stories of Yidden who have been helped, often in miraculous ways, when writing to the Rebbe before Gimmel Tammuz, as well as after. It is nearly impossible to find a family in Lubavitch that wasn't profoundly touched in some way by the Rebbe's *brachos*, whether it is regarding having children or other health matters. Although the Rabbeim of Chabad were not generally keen on displaying *mofsim*—that was left for the Chagas Chassidim—in our generation we merited that the Rebbe demonstrated miracles on a constant basis, some more revealed than others.

The Rabbeim have given us specific guidance in how to write to the Rebbe in critical situations. In addition to asking for *brachos* in a time of need, the Rebbe very much appreciated when people sent him *besuros tovos*, good news that things had worked out.[22]

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Torah and mitzvos—the conduits for blessings

In order to receive Hashem's *brachos*, we must create good *keilim*—conduits—and these are Torah and mitzvos. As the Rebbe writes to someone, "I hope that *bli neder* you will take upon yourself to strengthen your Torah and mitzvos observance. The stronger and faster that you do so, the more of Hashem's *brachos* you will receive, and faster."[23]

The Rebbe explained that this isn't only a *spiritual* thing; the health of the body is intimately connected with the health and serenity of the *neshama*, and when a Yid's spiritual limbs and organs are healthy and complete—by fulfilling Torah and mitzvos—it translates into physical health.

There are also certain specific mitzvos that are done for healing. The following is a partial list of directives given to many people over the years, but in the Rebbe's letters one can find many others, and for specific issues one should look up in the Rebbe's letters or consult a rabbinic authority.

- **Tehillim and Tzedakah:** The Rebbe writes: *"Heilen heilt der Aibershter*—Hashem is the one who does the actual healing, and he does this partially through a doctor. But He designated that the *primary* medicine for Yidden is tzedakah, *maasim tovim*, and a *kapitel* Tehillim."[24] The Rebbe often told people to give to the tzedakah of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, and that women should do so before lighting Shabbos candles.
- **Tefillin and Mezuzos:** The Rebbe would often instruct people to check their tefillin and mezuzos if they had not been checked in the past 12 (or sometimes 10) months. If someone wasn't already putting on tefillin daily, the Rebbe would encourage him to begin doing so. There were even instances where the Rebbe told someone to have a mezuzah by the bedside, in a double casing.[25]
- **Chitas:** The Rebbe would sometimes tell people to start learning Chitas.[26]
- **Kashrus:** When there was a health concern, the Rebbe would often tell people to be more diligent in *kashrus*.[27]

GUIDELINES FOR SEEING DOCTORS

The general directive

In the *sichos* of Shevat 5748*, the Rebbe said that after so many years of leadership, the Rebbe has trained us and given us the power that חושי התלמיד נעשו כחושי הרב, the talents of the student resemble those of his teacher, and we are able to find answers and guidance for everything in our lives from his teachings.

At that time, the Rebbe gave specific guidelines of how to resolve certain general issues:

"In medical issues, follow the guidance of a specialist (and even better—two specialists; if there's a difference of opinion, ask a third and follow the majority)."[28] In another *sicha* during that period, the Rebbe said that one should be treated by a *rofeh yedid*, "A doctor with whom you are good friends, who will hear everything you say, and will devote himself—as a friend—to healing you."[29]

The Rebbe added that with proper *hiskashrus*, we will not even need to go to doctors, for we would merit the ultimate healing—a scenario in which sickness never comes to begin with.

Specific guidelines:

There are certain guidelines that can be gleaned from the Rebbe's letters and from stories, but their application is inherently limited. First of all, as the Rebbe often reminded Chassidim, a directive to one person cannot be taken as a general rule for others. Furthermore, when dealing with stories of the Rebbe, the natural and the miraculous are often intertwined, and it is sometimes impossible to know what is a natural directive and what is miraculous intervention for this specific individual.

The first two guidelines below are mentioned in the above sicha*, but come with more elaboration in the letters.*

Go to a specialist: As mentioned above, the Rebbe often told people to consult with specialists in the specifically relevant area.[30] "It is surprising that you are consulting with a doctor of internal medicine, not a specialist in your issue. Although *teshua b'rov yoetz*, it is obvious that your primary advisor must be a specialist."[31] (There were also instances where the dcotors' opinions varied, and the Rebbe advised consulting with a family doctor—whom the patient trusted—on how to proceed[32].)

Get a second opinion: Very often, especially when people were considering invasive or risky procedures, the Rebbe would tell them to get a second opinion (and sometimes more). If there was a disagreement between the two, a third opinion should be consulted and followed.[33]

As the Rebbe explains in one letter: "In everything related to operations—which is something that cannot be undone—one must seek the opinion of specialists in this specific area, at least two, and better yet three... This is also valid according to the directives of our Torah, the living Torah—an opinion of two or three people has exponentially more power than the opinion of one. Common sense agrees with this as well. A human being, no matter who he is, is inherently limited; but through a consultation with two or three people together, *'teshua b'rov yoetz.'*"[34]

I COULDN'T IMAGINE GOING AGAINST DOCTOR BENDER

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop is an American rav and Dean Emeritus of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. In 5718-19* his mother suddenly became very ill, losing her eyesight and having terrible headaches. The doctors realized that she had suffered a stroke: "She was lying on the floor and groped for the telephone. She called her closest friend, whose son was a neurosurgeon. In the meantime, I got in touch with Dr. Bender, who was the world renowned chief of neurology at Mt. Sinai Medical Center. He said, 'Bring her to my hospital, Mt. Sinai, and I'll take care of her.' They brought her in and took all kinds of tests, but they could not find the cause.

"Dr. Bender said that he wanted to take a brain angiogram. That was the beginning of angiograms, and many people had died during the procedure. I had a great *rosh yeshiva* who

*5748 - 1988, 5718-9 - 1958-9

was given an angiogram, and he ended up in a coma for a year and a half afterwards. But Dr. Bender insisted on it. He became very upset when my mother said, 'Call Rabbi Putterman!' Rabbi Putterman came, and she says, 'Do me a favor, go to the Rebbe.'

"He went to the Rebbe, and he said this: 'Find a doctor who says you shouldn't take the test.' We went back to Dr. Bender, and he became very angry and started to yell at us, 'Are you crazy?! How could she refuse the angiogram?!'

"My father also thought it was foolish to refuse. At that time the Rebbe was still young… especially in light of Dr. Bender's history!"

Dr. Bender insisted that this angiogram could find things in the brain that they didn't know about and that could be helped, but the family argued that she was very stubborn and there was no changing her mind. Finally, Dr. Bender said that he would only allow one of two very prestigious doctors to check her: Dr. Houston Merrit (a pioneering neurologist whose patients included President Eisenhower), or Dr. Samuel B. Wortis, the dean of the NYU Medical School.

They called Dr. Wortis, and he said he could come in the afternoon. "I can't imagine going against Dr. Bender," he said. "I can't imagine *anybody* going against Dr. Bender."

"He went through the record for about three quarters of an hour and suddenly he started to walk the halls back and forth by himself. We didn't know what he was doing! He said, 'I'm thinking whether I can go against Bender. I have to weigh whether I think that this angiogram would discover anything that really could change her condition. I think the odds that we'll find something we don't know about are minimal, I don't think it's worth doing the angiogram.'"

"We didn't take that test, and a few weeks afterwards, my mother's vision returned."

The less invasive, the better: The Rebbe would often counsel people that, when looking for treatment, they should opt for the less invasive route. The Rebbe himself would sometimes give them ideas of what to suggest to the doctors as well.[35] (It must be emphasized, however, that this doesn't mean that the Rebbe *always* discouraged invasive or risky procedures; in fact, we find instances where the Rebbe did encourage people to do things that were *more* risky or invasive than the doctors themselves were comfortable with.[36] Every situation must be addressed on its own merits.)

This was especially true regarding mental health: In the past, it was common for serious mental health issues to be treated with drastic measures, including a surgery that would detach one part of the brain from the rest (a lobotomy), and shock therapy that would place people into comas. Although these were methods that many prominent physicians recommended, the Rebbe would always discourage these methods (sometimes even getting into sticky situations with doctors over it).[37] Eventually, these practices were disavowed by the medical community as well.

(It should be noted that the subject of mental health in the Rebbe's teachings is vast and beyond the scope of this article. We will אי"ה *explore it in a forthcoming issue.)*

Don't offend them

The Rebbe bolstered many people's courage to advocate for themselves to their medical providers, whether it was regarding getting a second opinion, suggesting a different approach, or pointing out when something seemed wrong; but he often cautioned people to do so in a way that would not offend the doctor.[38]

Experimental Care

In letters, we find that the Rebbe cautioned people not to allow themselves to be used for experimental procedures that hadn't been fully proven to work.[39] On the other hand, we find many letters where the Rebbe is finding out about the newest developments in the medical world, and he encouraged people to try new approaches that were proven successful. For example, the Rebbe told people to try chiropractic methods (although he added that, "I must say that I'm not excited about this approach"), because it has been proven to help.[40]



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Preventative and Positive Care

The Rebbe often spoke about the concept that in an ideal world, a doctor would be busy with preventative medicine, with keeping people healthy. This is, indeed, the hallmark of a true doctor: someone who guides his patients to a lifestyle in which they don't get sick in the first place.[41]

The Rebbe also encouraged doctors to emphasize the positivity of things, not the negative. As the Rebbe told Professor Mordechai Shani, director of Tel Hashomer Hospital in Israel, "Don't sanctify illness, sanctify health. Make the hospital a place where an individual goes to improve his health, not a place where he goes because he is sick."[42] The Rebbe would often say that hospitals should be called *batei refuah*, houses of healing, rather than *batei cholim*, houses of the sick, and gave directors of hospitals practical suggestions to improve the bedside manner of their doctors.[43]

THE POWER OF CHITAS

During my early childhood, growing up in London, my father was largely absent. He was very ill and hospitalized most of the time, so my mother had to go to work, while I was looked after by my grandparents. I remember repeatedly asking my mother, "Where is Daddy?" Her answer was always: "He will be home soon." And I kept pressing, "When?" with her responding, "I don't know."

But around the time I turned five, something changed. In the beginning of 1958, my father was released from the hospital, and we went to live in Gateshead. That is where life returned to normal, I went to school and all was well.

Years went by and eventually, when my father was in his late sixties, he developed cancer and passed away. During the week of *shiva* my younger brother Simcha told me and my other brothers a story. He said, "I can't hold myself back any longer. I have to share with you what happened while Daddy was in hospice. I couldn't tell you before because the person who told me this wanted to keep it a secret."

Simcha then went on to relate that during his last days, my father had a visitor, Reb Yisrael Rudzinski, who had gone through the camps with him during World War II. Reb Yisrael was a Bobover Chossid, a tailor by profession, and he was among my father's closest friends, the survivors who shared every family celebration with us. When he came to visit my father for what turned out to be their final meeting, my brother left the two of them to speak together in private.

Reb Yisrael was a special person, a very deep and caring person, and coming out of my father's room, he saw that my brother looked depressed. So, in trying to give my brother courage for what lay ahead, he told him this story.

"Do you know your father was not well when he was young?" Reb Yisrael asked my brother. My brother said he knew about it but it happened before he was born.

Reb Yisrael continued, "When your father was very sick, I once visited your mother and your grandparents. They showed me a letter which they had just received from the hospital following a doctors' conference about your father. This letter said that the doctors felt the need to operate on him, but there was a chance that, as a result of their interventions, he could fall into a vegetative state."

My grandparents asked Reb Yisrael for his opinion. "Who am I to answer such a question?" he replied, suggesting that this was a matter for a top leader in the Jewish world. He offered to send a letter on their behalf to every major rabbinic figure at the time.

He ended up sending 23 letters, explaining the situation and asking if they should go ahead with the operation or not. He sent out so many letters because he was not sure who might reply. After the war, there was so much sadness and so many questions of loss and heartache that the rabbis constantly had to deal with.

But he did receive one reply; the only one who responded was the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Rebbe wrote that his heart pained him to hear about such suffering, but that he felt unable to answer the question. However, he wanted to put forward a suggestion he had heard from his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, that a person who studies Chitas daily will see salvation.

Since the Rebbe was the only one who responded, Reb Yisrael decided to call him directly. After much effort—as in those days long-distance calls were not so easy—he got through to the Rebbe's office and asked the secretary to please tell the Rebbe that his advice could not be followed because my father was simply too ill to study Chitas. "If so," the answer came back, "let a family member do it on his behalf."

"But he lost his whole family in the war," Reb Yisrael said. "He has no one."

"If that's the case, the Rebbe recommends that a friend do it," he was told.

Although he was not a Lubavitcher, Reb Yisrael followed the directive of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and became that friend who studied Chitas for my father. This is what he told my brother.

After six weeks, my father showed a marked improvement, and the doctors began to consider releasing him from the hospital. And after another six weeks, they did release him.

From that point on, until he reached old age, my father was fine; he held down a job, provided for our family and was actively involved in the local Jewish community.

In that momentous conversation, Reb Yisrael told my brother another astonishing thing: "I have not stopped reciting Chitas for the past 40 years. And I certainly intend to continue."[45]

1. See Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deia *siman* 336 and *nosei keilim.*
2. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 296.
3. See Hisvaaduyos 5748 vol. 1, p. 240 fn. 127.
4. Shulchan Aruch Ibid.
5. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 275-6.
6. Igros Kodesh vol. 7 p. 194.
7. Likkutei Sichos vol 36 p. 273
8. Vayikra 26,11.
9. Shemos 21,19
10. Mishnayos Pesachim perek 4 mishnah 9.
11. Mishnayos Pesachim ibid.
12. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 271. See Likkutei Sichos Ibid p. 272 for another interpretation of the Book of Medications.
13. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 284.
14. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 282.
15. Igros Kodesh vol. 3 Igeres 472
16. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 286
17. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 281
18. Igros Kodesh vol. 4 p. 599
19. For the above see Igros Kodesh vol. 3 *Igeres* 700, 730; vol. 11 *Igeres* 3,492;
20. See e.g. Living Torah program 630 *Path to Success.*
21. Yore Deah *siman* 335 *seif* 10.
22. See Sefer Hasichos 5699 p. 366. Igros Kodesh vol. 3 p. 54. *Good News*, Derher Adar 5775. *Bearer of Good News*, Derher Weekly, Tetzaveh 5771.
23. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 288.
24. Ibid. p. 289.
25. See e.g. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 299.
26. Ibid. p. 282.
27. Ibid. p. 322.
28. Sefer Hasichos 5748 vol. 1 p. 240.
29. Toras Menachem 5748 vol. 2 p. 341.
30. Likkutei Sichos vol 36 p. 276-280.
31. Ibid. p. 277.
32. Ibid. p. 278-9.
33. Ibid. p. 318.
34. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 302-303.
35. See e.g. Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 301; 304.
36. See e.g. Here's My Story *Your Son will Live*, about a brain injection.
37. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 36 p. 307-309 about lobotomy; p. 330-331 about shock therapy.
38. Ibid. p. 306
39. Ibid. p. 301
40. Ibid. p. 311-312
41. Toras Menachem 5748 vol. 1? p. 345
42. Here's My Story, *Patient Empowerment*
43. Here's My Story, *A Holistic Approach*
44. Living Torah program 589 *A Bright Future;* Here's My Story *The Incredible Midnight Question.*
45. Aharon Denderowitz, Here's My Story *The Power of Chitas.*

MAINOS



GET BUSY

In this note, the Rebbe responds to a woman who was worried about her complicated health situation:

כנראה עיקר הסיבה למצבה–הוא זה שמתבוננת במצבה בתמידות. וככל שתסיח דעתה יותר מזה–יוטב המצב ויתוסף בהצלחת עניני הרפואה שמתעסקת בהם.

ולהקל בהיסח הדעת–ה"ז ע"י שתהי' עסוקה בענין אחר לגמרי–איזה שיהי' (משרה, לימודים, עזר לבחורות ביר"ש וכיו"ב).

ואם תסיח דעת לגמרי–במשך זמן קצר תתרפא.

קבלה.

אזכיר עוה"פ עה"צ.

It seems that the principal cause of your situation—is that you ruminate about your situation **constantly**. The more you take your mind **off** of it—the better it will become and the medical avenues you are involved with will be more successful.

In order to make this easier—you should **keep busy** with something completely different—no matter what it is (a job, studies, assisting girls in *yiras shamyaim*, **and the like**.)

If you take your mind off of it **completely** — within a short time you will be healed.

[Instruction to the secretary to send] a receipt.

I will mention you again at the *tziyun*.

TRUST

התחזקות בבטחון אמיתי בהשם–נוסף על העיקר שזהו מיסודי אמונתנו–ה"ז ג"כ רפואה באופן ישר להנ"ל (וגם הרופאים מודים בזה). חת"ת. אזכיר עה"צ.

By strengthening your **sincere** trust in Hashem—in addition to the fact that this is one of the pillars of our faith [Yiddishkeit]—this would also serve **directly** as a remedy to the [health issue] mentioned above. (The doctors acknowledge this as well).

[Be diligent about the study of] Chitas.

I will mention you at the *tziyun*.

BE HAPPY! (IT HELPS)

In response to a woman who asked, what is the best way for her to recover from an illness—the Rebbe writes:

מענתה מפורש בתוה"ק ורפא ירפא–כעצת רופא(ים) בשטח זה. וכפשוט ועיקר בטחון בהשם הרופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות.

ע"פ ידיעתי - שמחת החולה מועילה לבריאותו

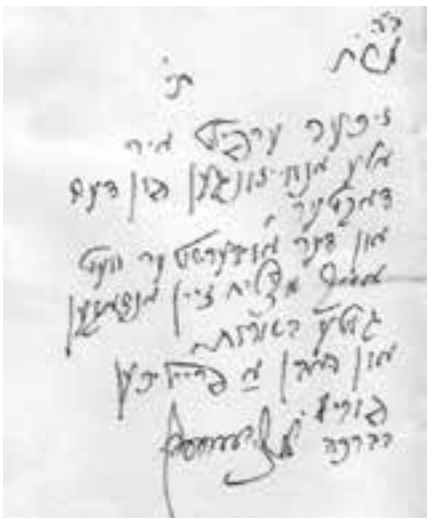
Her answer is clearly stated in our holy Torah—*v'rapo yerapei*—[follow] the advice of the doctor(s) in this field.

It is obvious, and this is the main thing: strengthen your trust in Hashem, who heals all flesh and does wondrous things.

To the best of my knowledge—when a patient is happy it helps them get healthier.

GOOD NEWS

Draft of a letter written in the Rebbe's holy handwriting to a woman who needed a bracha for health:



ב"ה

מרת . . תי'

זיכער ערפילט איר אלע אנווייזונגען פון דעם דאקטער, און דער אויבערשטער וועט אייך מצליח זיין אנזאגען גוטע בשורות, און האבן אַ פריילִיכען פורים.

בברכה

[חי"ק]

B"H. Mrs. . . *tichye,*

You are certainly following all the instructions of the doctor, and Hashem will help you succeed in bearing good news, and to have a happy Purim.

With blessing,

[The Rebbe's signature]

TEACH TZEDAKA

The Rebbe's handwritten response after being notified that one of anash *was hospitalized with a heart attack:*

מהיר

כדאי שיביאו לו לשם א צדקה פושקע ופעמיים בימות החול (לפני שחרית ומנחה) יתרום לתוכה מטבע.

ומה טוב שיעורר שאר הנמצאים שם שיעשו כן גם הם [זה שייך גם לאינם יהודים] וזכות כהנ"ל תעמוד לו בכהנ"ל.

אזכיר עה"צ

Urgent

It would be worthwhile that a *tzedaka*-box should be brought there for him, and twice daily (before Shacharis and Mincha), he should contribute a coin to it.

Even better would be if he would inspire all the others there to do the same as well [this applies to non-Jews too]. The merit of all this [him and others giving tzedaka] will stand in his good stead for all of the abovementioned [health complications].

I will mention this at the *tziyun*.