

PRACTICAL HOR'A'Q'S

A CLOSER
LOOK AT
SOME OF
THE REBBE'S
HORA'OS

MEDICAL TREATMENT THREE DAYS BEFORE SHABBOS

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE REBBE'S
TEACHINGS ON HOW – OR WHETHER
– ONE SHOULD SEEK TREATMENT
WHEN DOING SO MAY HAVE CHILLUL
SHABBOS RAMIFICATIONS

נדפס ע"י ולזכות
הרה"ת ר' שרגא פייוול וזוגתו
מרת דבורה לאה ומשפחתם
שיחיו
מאן

There are many medical procedures which, while necessary or helpful, are not an emergency; not life-threatening if put off for a few days. When scheduling such procedures, the day of the week they're scheduled on can have halachic ramifications. The Rebbe addressed this on several occasions. In 5738*, the Rebbe related that someone asked for a bracha for a medical procedure that would be taking place on Erev Shabbos.

"I answered that I would fulfill his request right away (although the procedure would be in two or three months), but that it is my obligation and privilege to point out a fundamental issue, which is connected with a clear psak from the Torah."

The Rebbe then brought the background and reasoning of this halacha:

"Shulchan Aruch rules that one may not embark on a ship fewer than three days before Shabbos. This is because starting a voyage is a significant change in a person's situation, and can cause emotional discomfort. If it's within three days of Shabbos, the person will enter Shabbos with that discomfort. On the other hand, when he begins his voyage four days before Shabbos, he'll become used to his new surroundings, and his peace of mind will not be affected on Shabbos."

Checking into a hospital, the Rebbe continues, is something that is far more disturbing to one's peace of mind. As soon as the patient checks in, they are required to change into a hospital gown; they lose their autonomy and freedom — going to sleep and waking up when instructed, and so on.

"And so, just as we don't embark on a voyage within three days of the start of Shabbos, because

it causes emotional discomfort, all the more so when it comes to scheduling medical procedures, they should not be scheduled within three days of Shabbos, since it disturbs one's peace of mind."

Then the Rebbe details an even more pressing concern: If one schedules a surgery for Erev Shabbos, even if the surgery is successful and is completed before Shabbos, the patient will very possibly have to be mechalel Shabbos afterwards. Documents will have to be signed, blood will have to be drawn to take tests, etc. Yes, much of this can be delegated to someone else, but even giving one's hand to have blood drawn is an issue.

Now of course, the Rebbe continues, these follow-up procedures are a matter of pikuach nefesh — life and death — and are thus permitted to be done on Shabbos. But why set oneself up for that? Instead, to begin with, the procedure should be scheduled earlier in the week.

Additionally, in some instances, some of these tests may not be a matter of life-and-death, but it can be very difficult to say no to the staff who inform the patient that he must have this test — and so, most people feel they can't refuse and end up allowing these tests to take place on Shabbos. If a Jewish doctor is the one performing these non-crucial tests on Shabbos, that means that the Jewish patient is causing a fellow Jew to be mechalel Shabbos!¹

In a letter to Rabbi Efraim Eliezer Yolles, the av beis din of Philadelphia, the Rebbe listed the concerns with a medical procedure Rabbi Yolles had scheduled for a Friday.

"Regarding the scheduling of the procedure, with all due respect, it should not take place on Erev Shabbos for a number of reasons, including:

"It is more concerning than one

who embarks on a voyage.

"The rules of many hospitals require that on the day after the procedure they perform many tests and write and take notes. Some of these have no connection to healing the person, but instead are for keeping statistics and the like. In a city like Philadelphia, some of these will be done by Jewish people, and for many of them, the patient needs to take an active role.

"In addition — and this is important as well — the present situation is that on Shabbos and Sunday only the newest and most inexperienced doctors are in, not the experts. And [even if their expertise is not required], 'One who has bread in his basket is not the same as one who doesn't'² [and so you should have the procedure done in such a way that the more experienced doctors will be available if needed.]"³

And when a Yid guards Shabbos, Shabbos will protect the Yid, as the Rebbe writes:

"You should ask a rav whether it's permissible at all to have this done close to Shabbos.

"As I am familiar with the doctor you mentioned, and I know that he is a G-d-fearing person, there must have been some sort of misunderstanding here. You should talk to him again — respectfully, for he is a good doctor — and I am certain that he will proceed with the procedure (in keeping with the direction of our Torah) after Shabbos, and will be successful, and the merit of Shabbos will be of help to him." **T**

1. Sichos Kodesh 5738 vol. 2 p. 468.

2. I.e. knowing you have the resources puts one more at ease even if you don't need the resources.

3. Igros Kodesh Vol. 32 p. 203 letter #12,116.