

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVI: Beshalach (Ex. 13:17–17:16)

Essay 14. G-d won't hit Israel with the diseases brought upon Egypt

פסוק "כִּלְהִמְחִלָּה אֲשֶׁר־שִׁמְתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא־אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' רִפְאֶךָ".

There is a verse: “He said, ‘If you will heed the L-rd your G-d diligently, doing what is upright in His sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, [then] **any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, I will not bring upon you, for I, the L-rd, am your healer**’ ” (Ex. 15:26).

Question: If G-d won't put illnesses upon us, why would we need a healer?

כתב השלחן ערוך חושן משפט (סימן ת"כ סעיף כ"א) אם אמר לו המזיק אני ארפא אותך אין שומעין לו אלא מביא רופא אומן ומרפאהו בשכר עכ"ל. והקב"ה הוא רופא שלנו, ואם חס ושלום יחבול בנו הוא אינו יכול לרפאתנו, ולכן אינו חובל בנו, והינו הטעם ש"לא־אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ" "כִּלְהִמְחִלָּה" וכו', מפני "כי אני ה' רפאך".

Answer 1: **The Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat (siman 420, se'if 21) writes, “If one who caused harm said to the victim, ‘I will heal you’ or says he has a doctor that will heal him for free, we would not listen to him. Rather, we would bring an expert doctor who will heal him for payment.”** I.e., the one who caused harm will have to pay for an expert to heal his victim. He may want to save money by treating and healing the victim himself, but we don't compel the victim to trust the one who harmed him in the first place.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, is our healer, and if, G-d forbid, He will injure us, He would not be able to heal us, for this would be against the halacha from the Shulchan Aruch. **Therefore, He does not hurt us, and this is the meaning of “I will not bring upon you” “any of the diseases” etc., because “I, the L-rd, am your healer.”**

Thus, Ex. 15:26 refers to G-d as our healer to allude to this halacha, to explain why G-d would not place these illnesses upon us, for example, if we were to sin. For even if He would want to heal us, if we were to repent, we would not be obliged to accept the healing from Him, per the halacha, as He was the one who had caused the harm.

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וְזֶהוּ טַעַם הַמִּדְרָשׁ בְּשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק "שְׁנֵי שְׂדֵיךְ", "וְנִגְףָה ה' אֶת־מִצְרַיִם נִגְףָה וְרַפְּאָה" אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: אֵין הַקַּב"ה מַכָּה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא אִם כֵּן בּוֹרָא לְהֵם רַפּוּאָה תַחֲלָה, שְׁנֵאמַר: "כִּרְפָּאֵי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל", אָבֵל הָאוֹמוֹת הַעוֹלָם מִתְחַלְלָה מִלְקָה אוֹתָם וְאַחַר כֵּן מִרְפָּא שְׁנֵאמַר וְכוּ' עכ"ל. מִשּׁוּם דְּעַל כְּרִתּוּד צְרִיךְ לְבִרּוּא הַרַפּוּאָה קוֹדֵם הַמַּכָּה כְּדִי שְׁתַּבֵּא מֵאֲלֵיהָ, דְּלֹאֲסַח שְׂהֵכָה אוֹתָם הִנֵּה הוּא הַרּוּפָא וְהוּא אֵינוֹ יְכוֹל לְרַפְּאֵתָם אִם שְׁיִרְצוּ בּוֹ הֵם בְּעֶצְמָם.

This is the meaning of the midrash in Song of Songs Rabbah, on the verse, “Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, browsing among the lilies” (Song of Songs 4:5). The midrash states:

“The L-rd will afflict Egypt, afflict and heal the Egyptians; when they turn back to the L-rd, He will respond to their entreaties and heal them” (Isaiah 19:22). Reish Lakish said: The Holy One, blessed be He, does not strike Israel unless He has first created a remedy for them, as it is said, “When I would heal Israel, the guilt of Ephraim reveals itself” (Hosea 7:1).¹ But [regarding] the nations of the world, first He beats them and afterward He heals, as it is said, “The L-rd will afflict Egypt, afflict and heal.”

- Megillah 13b²

This rule is because [G-d] necessarily has to create a remedy prior to the blow against Israel, in order that [the healing] will come of itself, i.e., a person’s body will heal on its own, or a human doctor will be able to heal him. For after He hits them, He is the healer and He is not able to heal them, as per the halachah, they can’t be compelled to accept Him as their healer, unless they themselves want Him to heal them, despite the halacha that they are not obliged to accept healing from the one who has harmed them.

וְזוֹהִי כּוֹנֵנַת הַכְּתוּב "רַפְּאֵנִי ה' וְאַרְפָּא", אַף עַל פִּי שְׂאֵתָה חֲבַלְתָּ בִּי, עִם כָּל זֶה "רַפְּאֵנִי" וְכוּ', "כִּי תִהְלֹתִי אֶתָּה", וְזֶהוּ חִידוּשׁ הַכְּתוּב "מִחֲצַתִּי וְנָאֵנִי אֶרְפָּא". וְהִנֵּי מִלֵּי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, אָבֵל עִם הָאוֹמוֹת כְּתִיב "נִגְףָה וְרַפְּאָה", דְּמִשְׁמַע נִגּוּף עַל יְדֵי מִשְׁחִית וְרַפְּאָה עַל יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ.

This is the intent of the Scripture, “Heal me, O L-rd, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for You are my praise” (Jer. 17:14). Even though You have hurt me, and I am not obliged to accept Your help, nevertheless, “Heal me,” “for You are my praise.” This is the novelty of the Scripture, “I wounded and I will heal” (Deut. 32:39). These are the words that apply for Israel, but with the nations, it is written, “afflict and heal,” with the meaning being “afflict by a destructive [angel]”, and “heal by an agent.”

¹ I.e., after revealing the guilt of Ephraim, G-d will then punish Israel, but from the beginning of the verse, He had already established a remedy.

² While some elements of this quotation appear in Song of Songs Rabbah 4:5, Megillah 13b is a much better match as being the source.

ועוד יש לומר לתרץ הקושיא הנופלת על הפסוק דאם לא ישים אין צורך לרפואה. אלא לפי שהמכות שפאו על המצרים היו לעונש ולנקמה, כדכתיב "לעשות נקמה בגוים", וכתיב "בהכבדי בפרעה" נכו' "וידעתם כי אני" נכו'. אמנם הייסורין שיבואו עליהם לא יהיו בדרך זה, אלא כדי לרפאתם כדי שתשוב בתשובה ולא תשוב לחטוא עוד. ועיין עוד לקמן בסמוך.

Answer 2: There is another solution for the question that falls upon the verse, that if He doesn't place an affliction on them Himself, then there is no need for a healing.

Rather, the plagues that came upon the Egyptians were for punishment and revenge, as it is written, "to impose retribution upon the nations" (Ps. 149:7). Also, it is written, "when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen" (Ex. 14:18), "they will know that I am the L-rd."³

However, the sufferings that will come upon you, Israel, won't be in this way, for punishment and revenge, but rather will be to heal you spiritually, so that you will return in repentance and won't return to sin again. See more below, in the adjoining essay.

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³ The words, "and they will know that I am the L-rd" appear in Ex. 6:7, 10:2, and 16:12. However, as the Zera Shimshon has just quoted part of Ex. 14:18, it is possible that Rabbi Nachmani was thinking of the beginning of that verse: "וידעו מצרים כי אני ה'". The full verse 14:18 reads: "Let the Egyptians know that I am the L-rd, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."