



## What Does the Torah Say about Sunbathing?

### The Healing Power of Sunlight

I love to bask in the sun, especially in the gentle morning sunlight. More than thirty years ago, I remember my French neighbor in Yishuv Metzad warning me, that if I continued to sunbathe, my face would get premature wrinkles. Although I knew she was right, I wasn't going to give up on feeling the warm rays of the sun caressing my face. So, here I am today at the age of sixty, wrinkled but healthy, never giving up on any opportunity to sit in the sun. I even purchased an outdoor-optimized laptop model, to be able to sit in the sun and work. Oh well, it didn't exactly work out the way I had hoped. So, I try to spend at least most of Shabbat on my hammock in the sun, and pray outdoors, daily. In Denmark, where the sun is a rare commodity, whenever a clear sunny day is discerned, people move their table and chairs onto their balcony, patio or garden to take their main meal in the sun. Sunlight sparks the release of the 'feel good' hormone, serotonin, a natural mood-lifter that prevents or alleviates depression. Besides harmonizing body temperature and strengthening libido, serotonin also turns into melatonin at night, which helps us sleep more deeply. My beloved teacher, Shoshanna Harrari, shared with me, that exposing the back of the knees to direct sunlight relieves jet lag. Now, I see scientists are also discussing what they call [a bizarre cure for jet lag and insomnia – shining a bright light on the backs of the knees](#). In tandem with my other supplements, I try to get my daily 15-20 minutes of direct sunshine either early morning or later in the afternoon. In order to release the desired serotonin, it's recommended to sunbathe with closed eyes, without sunglasses. Some people avoid the sun, due to concern about skin cancer. In an article called [Don't let the phony melanoma scare keep you out of the sun](#), Sam Shuster explains that most skin 'cancers' are benign: they don't spread or kill. Their cancerous name is a historical misnomer. Thus, despite 'solarphobic' fear, melanomas do not predominate in sun-exposed skin. On the contrary, all created beings owe their existence and continued growth to the rays of the sun.

### Vital 'Sunshine Vitamin' D

During the first three days of creation, the world was illuminated directly by Hashem's light. When the sun was created, the original *אוֹר/or* – 'light' became transformed to *מֵאוֹר/ma'or* – 'light vessel' or 'luminary' (Malbim, *Bereishit* 1:14). Since the original light was too strong for any living being to endure, it was set aside to shine miraculously for the Righteous in the future to come. The rest of the light, Hashem gathered inside the sun, which serves as a confining vessel for the light, contracting its light and heat, making it usable for created beings. Since then, all nature, including humanity is solar-powered. Deprived of sunlight, man loses physical vigor and strength. Take away sunlight and all life on earth would soon perish. The most well-known healing power associated with sunlight is that it provides vitamin D. Sunlight is our primary source of vitamin D. 75 % of the vitamin D we need comes from the sun. Only a quarter of our vitamin D needs derive from our diet. The body is better able to use the vitamin D it makes itself, than that which it gets from the diet. Your skin makes vitamin D from casual sun exposure, from as little as five to 15 minutes of sunshine per day, two to three times per week on the face and hands. Exposing our skin to sunlight enables our body to produce vitamin D from cholesterol. Most people are unaware of being vitamin D deficient, because the symptoms are often subtle and non-specific. It's hard to know if they're caused by low vitamin D levels or something else. Yet, [vitamin D deficiency is a global health problem caused mainly by insufficient exposure to sunlight. It is](#)

[estimated that 1 billion people have vitamin D deficiency worldwide](#). Some of the symptoms include low immune function and increased risk of illness or infections, depression, excessive fatigue, bone pain and lower back pain. Hair loss in women may also be a symptom of vitamin D deficiency. Since vitamin D helps absorb calcium, adequate vitamin D is important for preserving bone mass as we get older.

## The Healing Wings of the Sun

It is not surprising that the Torah describes sunlight as bringing healing in its wings:

**ספר מלאכי פרק ג פסוק כ וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יְרֵאִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צִדְקָה וּמִרְפָּא בְּכַנְפֶיהָ וַיֵּצְאֲתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם כְּעֶגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק:**  
 “And the sun of mercy shall rise with healing in its wings for you who fear My Name. Then will you go forth and be fat as fatted calves” (*Malachi 3:20*).

I love the imagery of ‘healing wings.’ It reminds me of how mother birds protect their chicks from both predators and the cold. Likewise, the Shechina – the Indwelling Feminine Presence uses the wings of the sun to protect and heal the righteous, who are devoted to Hashem. The meaning of “in its wings” is that the rays that emanate from the sun spread out on the face of the earth as if they were wings (Ibn Ezra *ibid.*). The tzaddikim that serve Hashem with love are like a shining sun. Its warmth brings healing in its wings from the divine light. This light, will in the future be revealed as healing light for the righteous, and as burning fire for the wicked (Malbim, *ibid.*). After his circumcision, Avraham “was sitting in the opening of his tent, in the heat of the day” (*Bereishit 18:10*). Rashi explains, IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY, to mean that Hashem took the sun out of its sheath, so as not to trouble him with wayfarers. Yet, it is also possible that Hashem took the sun out of its sheath in order to heal Avraham from the wound of his circumcision. Yet, Avraham, in his righteousness, cared more about welcoming guests than to sit in the sun in order to be healed (*Toldot Yitzchak, Parashat Vayera*). Sunlight has been well-known for its wound-healing properties since antiquity. Even before the time of ancient Egypt, doctors and natural healers relied on sunlight to mend wounds, treat bone diseases and lung infections. [Before antibiotics, sunlight was used to speed up the healing of wounds because it is an efficient germ killer, writes Dr. Marga Boyani](#)

## Hashem’s Faithful Servant, the Sun – Heals Ya’acov and His Descendants

In *Parashat Vayislach*, Ya’acov wrestles with Esau’s angel. Although, he emerged victorious, the angel sprained Ya’acov’s thigh. Although many commentators explain the wound as a spiritual wound, trying to block Ya’acov’s voice of Torah, he was also injured physically, as the Torah makes clear:

**ספר בראשית פרק לב פסוק לב וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צָלַע עַל יָרְכוֹ:**  
 “Then the sun rose for him when he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh” (*Bereishit 32:32*).

Rashi notices the expression “the sun shone for him” and asks why the sun rose specifically for him? How did it benefit him? He explains that he was only limping when the sun began to rise, but immediately afterwards he was healed (*Siftei Chachamim*). The sun rose for him, to heal his limping, as it is states, “The sun of mercy, with healing in its wings” (*Malachi 3:20*). When Ya’acov originally left Beersheba, the sun set two hours earlier than its usual time, so that when he arrived at Beit El, Ya’acov would sleep in this auspicious place and experience his prophetic dream. Those hours that it hastened to set for him when he left Beersheba, it hastened to rise for him upon his return (Rashi). Couldn’t Hashem have healed Ya’acov’s limp directly, without having to use the sun? I believe Hashem specifically used the sun to heal Ya’acov, in order to teach his descendants

– including our generation – a vital lesson. The שמש/*shemesh* – ‘sun’ – as its name indicates, is Hashem’s devoted servant. Although we relate to Hashem as Infinite Light, and the light of the sun resembles Hashem in its brightness, the sun is not G-d. It is only His servant. Hashem uses the sun as a vessel and interface between His infinite light, and mortal beings, who are limited by a coarse body. He imbues the sun with only a fraction of His divine light – the exact amount that heals righteous people – who always go for the light. Yet, those who aren’t worthy, will become scorched by this same sun, as the Midrash teaches: Rabbi Berchia said, didn’t the sun shine for everyone? No, it shone for Ya’acov alone, to heal him. The same sun which healed our father Ya’acov, would burn Esau and his princes. Hashem said to him, this is going to be a sign for your children. The same way that the sun heals you, but burns Esav and his princes, so will it heal your descendants, while burning the idol-worshippers. As it states, “For behold, the sun is coming, glowing like a furnace, and all the audacious sinners and all the perpetrators of wickedness shall be stubble. And the sun that comes shall burn them up so that it will leave them neither root nor branch, says Hashem of Hosts” (*Malachi* 3:19); (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 78:5).

### The Return of Direct Divine Light at the End of Days

After Ya’acov passed Peniel limping, the sun rose and healed him. It will be the same way in the future to come, as it states, “The sun of righteousness shall rise for you, with healing in its wings...” (*Sforno, Bereishit* 32:32). In the future to come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will remove the sun from its sheath, and the righteous will be healed by it, because they act faithfully like the sun, without allowing the deterrents of life to impede them. Rather, they deliberately perform their tasks in service to Hashem. However, the wicked will be punished by the same sun, because their many excuses, impediments and delays render them guilty. The righteous will not only be healed by the sun, but they will even be rejuvenated by it, as it is states: “...And you shall go forth and leap as calves of the stall” (*Aperiyaon, Bereishit* 32:32). At the time of Mashiach, the original Divine Light will return to the world once again, and the righteous will be able to benefit from it. If the sun contains such incredible healing powers, who can imagine the immense healing of the ‘original Divine Light’?