



## How Does Following the Torah Generate Global Healing?

### My Personal Healing When Becoming Torah Observant

I can personally testify that Torah brings healing in its wings. Since childhood, I have suffered severe skin problems – itchy, peeling, dry, cracked skin, with my hands breaking out in blisters. Within a year after becoming Torah observant, I found great healing, and the symptoms drastically decreased. My sister was amazed when she came to visit and beheld my hands. I attribute the healing to living a life of emunah (faith). Skin ailments are often stress related. Therefore, our skin and the rest of us, too, receive healing when we learn to have emunah in Hashem – letting go, letting G-d, and trusting that He will take care of matters. Knowing that, ultimately, all will turn out for the best, whether we currently recognize it or not. When I got engaged, my family and secular friends warned me that the prescribed hair-covering for Torah observant, married women, would be detrimental to my hair. “Without sunlight and fresh air, your hair will suffer and fall off,” they said. This premonition, thankfully, turned out to be utterly false. During the first seven years of our marriage, both my husband and I immersed ourselves in the Torah. Neither of us made a living. When people asked us how we managed financially, we always turned our eyes heavenwards, exclaiming “Hashem!” As one of the Diaspora Yeshiva Kollel families, we received our monthly Yad Eliezer baskets, consisting of white flour, white noodles, white sugar, canned corn and olives etc. As you can imagine, it was the kind of food I, as a health-conscious individual, would normally never touch, or even bring close to my lips! Yet, this was the heaven-sent food available to us, on our limited budget. I used to console myself with emunah, believing that the merit of learning Torah would make up for the negative effect of the unhealthy food. I learned the story about how one Friday Rabbi Chanina’s daughter accidentally lit the Shabbat candles with vinegar instead of oil. She did not realize her mistake until after Shabbat had already entered, and so was very distressed about it. Rabbi Chanina told her that just as Hashem makes oil burn, He can make vinegar burn. The candles burned throughout all of Shabbat, and when Shabbat ended, they used the flame for Havdalah (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit* 25a). Learning from Rabbi Chanina, I used to say, “Just as Hashem fills cold-pressed, pure olive oil with healthy nutrients, so can He transform unhealthy hydrogenated, refined canola oil to become highly beneficial for those immersed in Torah!”

### If You Aren’t Feeling Well – Learn Torah!

In *Parashat Yitro*, the Israelites were healed in preparation for receiving the Torah.

Hashem said, “How can I give the Torah, which is whole and complete, to people with defects?” Therefore, Hashem healed them before giving them the Torah. How do we know that the blind were able to see? Because it states, “All the people saw...” (*Shemot* 20:15). Whoever was deaf was able to hear as it states, “...We will do, and we will hear” (*Shemot* 24:7). Whoever was limping became healed as it states, “They stood firmly at the bottom of the mountain” (*Shemot* 19:17); (*Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim* 19:675).

Not only did Hashem heal us in preparation for receiving the Torah, He also continues to heal us through the Torah itself. When it happens that one of my students isn’t feeling the best, and she

wants to excuse herself from class, I always tell her, "If you aren't feeling well, that's the best reason to come to class!" Then I quote the Talmud, "If you have a headache – even a migraine – engage in Torah study, as it is stated: "For they [the words of Torah are a wreath of grace for your head and a necklace for your neck" (*Mishlei* 1:9). If you have a sore throat, engage in Torah, as it is stated: "And chains about your neck" (*ibid.*). If you have an upset stomach or period cramps, immerse yourself in Torah, as it is stated: "It shall be health to your navel" (*Ibid.* 3:8). If your bones bother you, engage in Torah study, as it is stated: "And marrow to your bones" (*Ibid.* 3:8). Even if your entire body hurts you, come to class, as it is stated: "And health to all their flesh" (*Ibid.* 4:22); (Based on *Babylonian Talmud, Iruvin* 54a).

### Talmud Learning Sharpens the Mind

Being engaged in Torah learning also helps prevent cognitive decline. Especially, learning Talmud can play an effective role in preventing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. [According to Dr. Ben Keene, MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist in London, UK, "The regular study of gemara in a pair or group provides both social interaction and cognitive exercise. There is evidence that both regular cognitive activity and social engagement are neuro-protective."](#)

It is now well-known, that South Korea encourages their children to learn Talmud in order to sharpen their brains. Their logic being, that since Jews are smart, and Jews learn Talmud, therefore, learning Talmud will make South Koreans smart too. If they keep it up into old age, South Korea will probably be very successful at reducing dementia. Moreover, the Jewish Torah learning culture is becoming a model for continuous medical education. In an article titled, [Nurturing a Society of Learners: Suggestions from Traditional Jewish Pedagogy for Medical Education, Jacob Urkin, M.D., M.P.H., Edward Fram, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Allen Jotkowitz, M.D., M.H.A., and Sody Naimer, M.D.](#) write that in the Jewish culture of Torah learning, developed over the generations, many educational methods are similar to modern ones. Some of the pedagogic principles developed successfully in Judaism should be considered for adaptation in medical education.

### What if Keeping Certain Torah Laws Contradicts the Healing Sciences?

Rabbeinu Yona explains that the Torah strengthens your health, as it states, "fear of G-d will add days..." (*Mishlei* 10:27). Often, scientific research proves the validity of Torah and Halacha. For example, [circumcision reduces the risk of urinary tract infections in infants, and the risk of HIV infection by 50-60 percent.](#) Yet, it does happen that Torah law and health discoveries clash. In that case, I always rely on the Torah sages, whose wisdom overrides modern research, (both conventional and 'new-agey') which, anyway, often develops new discoveries that contradict the previous. King Salomon, the wisest of all men, wrote about the Torah:

**ספר משלי פרק ג פסוק ח רפאות תהי לְשִׁרְךָ וְשִׁקּוּי לְעִצְמוֹתֶיךָ:**

"It shall be healing for your navel and marrow for your bones" (*Mishlei* 3:8).

Taking precautions to keep the Torah will never cause harm. Rather, keeping the mitzvot will benefit and heal you (Metzudat David, *Mishlei* 3:8). Malbim explains that, even when Torah laws of wisdom go against nature, don't be concerned that adhering to the ways of Torah wisdom, will harm your body. Rather, the Torah wisdom and its mitzvot warn against living an indulgent lifestyle. It guides you to holiness by separating you from excess food, which will maintain your health and heal your ailments. Do not think that abstinence from pleasure and lust, required by the Torah, will dry out the marrow in your bones. On the contrary, the way of Torah will become "marrow for your bones." For it will strengthen your physical health and rescue your bones. This is due both to the way of nature – because excess weakens the body – and due to divine supervision (Malbim, *Mishlei* 3:8).

### Returning Through Torah Generates Global Health

In his commentary on *Mishlei* 3:8, The Vilna Gaon emphasizes that the Torah teaches us repentance, which is the greatest healer. Repentance will bring healing to your flesh, as it states, "He will return and be healed" (*Yeshu'ahu* 6:10). When we repent and stop transgressing the mitzvot, it is considered as if we performed mitzvot and we, therefore, receive their reward. This is the meaning of "marrow for your bones." The negative mitzvot are associated with your navel and the positive mitzvot with your bones. This is because the bones corresponds to the 248 limbs of the body that are linked to the 248 positive mitzvot, whereas the flesh corresponds to the 365 ligaments or sinews. Therefore, "flesh" which is related to the word for navel, *שָׂרֵךְ/sarecha* corresponds to the negative mitzvot whereas the bones correspond to the positive mitzvot (Grah).

לְשָׂרֵךְ//l'sarecha – "to your navel"	לְעֲצְמוֹתַיךְ//l'atzmoteicha – "to your bones"
בָּשָׂר/basar – The flesh of the 365 sinews	עֲצָמוֹת/atzamot – the 248 bones are the limbs
Negative mitzvot	Positive mitzvot

Living according to the Torah way, teaches us to constantly work on ourselves and keep growing, so that we can be a proper vessel for Hashem's light. Just as the Torah preceded the world, so was repentance created even before the creation of the world (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 3). The Hebrew word for repentance, תְּשׁוּבָה/teshuvah, literally means 'return.' Teshuvah can return us and bring us back to our pristine state of purity. If nothing else works, then teshuvah is the hidden button that fixes all problems. It is like the reset button on an electronic device, that returns it to the factory settings –when it was new, before we misused it. May we all return to the true ways of Torah and bring healing upon ourselves and the entire world!