



Footsteps of our Fathers - Perek 2 Mishna 13
PUTTING A SMILE ON THE JAB
Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Finally, the envelope slipped through my door. We had worried that mine had gotten lost in the vast maws of the postal system, or that I had been forgotten altogether. So, I ripped it open with mixed but positive expectations. Yes, it has arrived, I had not been forgotten nor been lost in the mix of some paper storm. My appointment for the second vaccination had been made, and in just a few days I would receive the magic sap of life protecting vaccine.

The day arrived, my son in law drove me to the vaccination center and I was presented with what is a very English sight, a long line (queue...I'm trying to be bi lingual here) that neatly stretched around the block. It was an interesting group, all of a mature age, this being strictly for second jab invitees and hence no younger than three score and ten years. Everyone wore a mask, so smiles could only be shared with the eyes, yet everyone seemed in good humour. One masked lady asked if I was Rabbi Rubin, after admitting that I was guilty as charged, she told me how much she admired my articles in the Tribune and that she even had one of my books. I always get a bit embarrassed when faced with a true admirer and mumbled my thanks for her kind words. She then asked if I was going to write about my visit to the jab center and I just smiled. (something she could not see owing to my mask). As we shuffled ever closer to the doors, I calmly thought to myself, 'what ever could I write about on such a pedestrian errand as getting a shot in the arm?' Then as I got closer it began, laughter could be heard, it was a soft yet raucous sort of laughing, the sort you hear when people who are a bit anxious suddenly hear a good natured 'kibitz'. I soon realised that the volunteers who were ushering us along were like a group of gentle jesters. Laughing, telling stories about the adventures of working in the vaccination centre, (like losing a shipment of vaccine whilst having hundreds of folk waiting outside) and sharing their good natured observations about the general foibles of humanity, especially those about to be poked in the arm with a needle. I wouldn't have been surprised if they didn't just suddenly break out in song and dance, singing rhyming 'Gramen' about the joys of getting 'the jab'.



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As my turn came, I was ushered into the small room where the masked 'injector' (what else should I call them) welcomed me into his lair. 'Hi, I'm, and he mumbled a name I didn't really catch, please have a seat. We then went through the paper work, wherein I had to pronounce the name Yitzchok with determined clarity which as always ended being pronounced 'Yitshkok' as is usual for first time scribes of English Hebrew transliteration. With this all done we moved on to the main event. Sleeve duly rolled up, needle glistening with potential, the scratch and swab swipe done with aplomb and voila I had joined the ranks of the twice vaccinated with pride. As I gathered my belongings I turned to the injector and said, 'Be blessed', to which he replied, 'thank you so much, no one ever blesses me and I can use all the blessings I can get.' I smiled and told him, 'we have something called a mitzvah, that is the term we use to describe an act that G-d has commanded us to do. Giving people this vaccine is certainly a great mitzvah and every time you give a jab you earn more merit.' I don't know who felt better with this, he or myself, for I definitely thanked Hashem for giving me this opportunity to create a bit of Kiddush Hashem.

The rule is that after being vaccinated one must sit in the hallway for fifteen minutes just in case you have a reaction.

I sat down, enjoying the further high-spirited banter from the merry band of volunteers. I left the place quite inspired, reminded of a sweet dvar Torah I recently came across.

Chazal tell us that part of the reason why the Leviim sang whilst those bringing sacrifices over their sinful acts fulfilled their repentance was to bring a sense of uplift to these remorseful souls. Although each sacrifice had to be brought with a broken heart over their misdeeds, the Eibishter did not want the guilt to turn into depression. As our tzadikim often taught, 'not to be depressed is never mentioned in the Torah as a sin, but the sins that depression bring is greater than any single other action.'

Serving up jabs can certainly cause stress for all concerned, the positive atmosphere set by those volunteers hopefully takes the edge off those in that line. To hear that the Injector had never heard that he is blessed is a shame, and I was pleased I raised his spirits.

In Avos (2:13) we learn of a fascinating discussion between Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and his five primary disciples. He challenged them to go out and discern which is the good path to which a man should cling. The sages each returned with their own insights, with Rabbi Elazar saying: A Good Heart. The Rebbe exclaimed that "I prefer the words of Elazar to all the others, for all your words are included in his words." From this we can deduce that having a Good Heart is paramount to all the other pathways in life.

The Imrei Emes Ztl speaks about this and explains:

The Torah warns us that a timid and fainthearted soldier will 'melt' the hearts of his comrades and cause them to flee. If this is the power that a 'bad heart' possesses, imagine the capacity for good that a 'good heart' has. One good Jewish heart can elevate many other hearts. The Rebbe then brings a passage from Tehillim to prove his point, (111:1) 'I will thank Hashem with all my hearts'....which means that David Hamelech is saying, I will move all hearts through the purity and enthusiasm of my own.

Our world is in dire need of the songs of the Leviim and the warm blessings of the Kohanim. 'Yiddisha Hertzta' must act to bring warmth and strength to our loved ones and to the wider world as well. Perhaps we are all here to add hope to one another and all mankind, and with this be Zocheh to witness the Geulah.

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