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Parshas Lech Lecha ✍️ Rabbi Dovid Rokach

Attitude of Gratitude

The *Parsha* begins with a command for *Avraham Avinu* to travel away from his homeland as well as a promise of great reward:

Go for yourself from your land, from your birthplace, and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will elevate your name. (Beraishis 12:1-2)

Undertaking to abandon the comfort and security of home for an unknown destination is considered one of ten significant tests endured by *Avraham Avinu*. (*Avos* 5:4) It would seem, however, that the purpose of this test was diminished by the fact that a reward was promised. Why was the test of *lech lecha* accompanied by a promise of reward?

A principal source of our obligation to serve *Hashem* is a sense of gratitude for the unlimited kindness we receive from Him. (*Chovos Halvavos, Shar Avodas Elokim 6*) This concept is demonstrated by the fact that different groups are responsible for different sets of commandments in proportion to the magnitude of *Hashem's* kindness towards each of them. For example, all of mankind owes gratitude for being alive and all must observe at least the seven Noahide laws. *Klal Yisrael* received additional kindness, including redemption from Egypt, and is thus responsible for many more *mitzvos*. Within *Klal Yisrael*, the special status enjoyed by *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* brings with it numerous obligations unique to these groups. On a personal level, each individual is likewise expected to increase his *avodas Hashem* in gratitude for any special blessings enjoyed by himself and his family.

When *Avraham Avinu* was tested, he was being asked to serve *Hashem* on a far higher level than anyone else alive at the time. It follows that this greater responsibility should be motivated by a sense of gratitude for proportionately greater privileges, as explained above. Although *Avraham Avinu* had not

yet received the great rewards promised for leaving his homeland, the opportunity to obtain such privileges was sufficient reason for gratitude. This made it possible for the extraordinary self-sacrifice expected of *Avraham Avinu* to be motivated by gratitude for the extraordinary kindness *Hashem* promised to him and his descendents.

The proportional relationship between responsibility and privilege conveys an additional lesson. Rav Avigdor Miller *zt"l* notes that it is inappropriate for one to exert effort performing *mitzvos* with the feeling that he is doing "favors" for *Hashem*. Such an attitude overlooks the fact that nothing we ever do could suffice to repay the immense debt of gratitude we owe for *Hashem's* infinite kindness. Even if the kindness in question were limited to giving us life and in return we served *Hashem* with all our abilities, we would merely be covering a small fraction of our debt rather than doing any "favors." Nevertheless, *Hashem* increases the magnitude of His kindness in proportion to the level of service expected from each individual. This helps us recognize our fundamental obligation to serve *Hashem* in gratitude.

A similar idea is expressed by the explanation given in *Ki Savo* why suffering is sometimes brought upon *Klal Yisrael*:

Because you did not serve Hashem with joy and a good heart when everything was abundant. (Dvarim 28:47)

If abundant blessings do not accomplish their intended purpose of motivating us to serve *Hashem* in gratitude, these blessings can be taken away. May we be *zoche* to overcome any tests standing in the way of our *avodas Hashem* through a deep sense of gratitude for *Hashem's* continued kindness in our present *galus* and His promise of even greater kindness with the anticipated *geula shlama*.

Rabbi Rokach learns daily at the kollel.

Refuah on Shabbos

Rabbi Shlomo Francis

While many hilchos Shabbos are relevant to caring for a sick person on Shabbos, the primary focus of this article is the gezeras sh'chikas samamonim, the rabbinical enactment prohibiting taking medicine and performing medical treatments on Shabbos. Chazal feared that when a person is beset with a pain or illness, he might act irrationally and transgress the Shabbos prohibition of sh'chikas samamonim, grinding medicinal herbs. Even today, when the use of herbs is not common, the enactment still applies (see Igr'M O'Ch 3:53).

In order to properly apply the prohibition of sh'chikas samamonim, one must recognize the categories of illnesses and the different halachik rules that apply to each category.

Choleh sheyeish bo sakano, a life threatening illness

In case of life threatening disease one must perform all actions even issurei dioraisah when necessary to bring the life threatening condition under control. This article can not cover all circumstances of life threatening diseases. One must familiarize oneself with these laws as one may not waste time consulting with an halachik authority if an emergency situation arises.

Nofel limishkav, one who is bedridden due to his illness

The poskim define this as anyone who feels so sick that one would normally stay in bed (e.g. someone with a severe cold or the flu), even if he pushes himself to go about his usual activities. If one is suffering a severe localized pain to the extent that he feels weak all over, or to the extent that he must exert great effort to stay on his feet or to function normally he would be considered a nofel limishkav.

The Torah does not exempt a sick person from Torah prohibitions unless his life is at risk. However, Chazal permitted three significant leniencies in order to provide treatment and care for a person who is nofel limishkav:

1. One is permitted to ask a non-Jew to perform even Torah prohibitions when necessary to obtain a refuah for a nofel limishkav.
2. The rabbinic prohibition of sh'chikas samamonim does not apply to a nofel limishkav. One may, therefore, take medication and perform other medical procedures to cure or relieve the pain of a nofel limishkav provided that no other prohibitions are involved (i.e. smearing ointments or causing the loss of blood).

3. One is permitted to transgress almost any issur d'rabonon provided that he does so with a shinui (i.e. in an abnormal and inferior fashion). One should consult with a halachik authority to ascertain that he is utilizing a halachikly significant shinui and to assure that the desired refuah will be obtained with the minimum acts of issur.

Meichush bial ma, minor ailment

Illnesses or pains that are not serious enough to cause one to stay in bed are categorized as meichush bi'alma-minor ailments. One suffering from such ailments is not given the leniencies of a nofel limishkav, and it is forbidden for him to transgress any issur dirabonon to relieve his pain. Even medication or medical procedures not involving any melocha are forbidden due to the gezeiras sh'chikas samamonim. In a case of significant pain that is not serious enough to be categorized as a nofel limishkav, one may be permitted to ask a non-Jew to perform an issur dirabonon on his behalf (sh'vus d'shvus bimokom tzar). One should consult a rav for guidance.

Foods or vitamins

A sick person may eat ordinary foods in a normal manner even if they have curative qualities and his intention is solely to cure his ailment. The topic of taking vitamins and supplements on Shabbos is complex and there are many different opinions amongst the gedolei haposkim. For the sake of brevity we will only present the approach of Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein. For practical halacha limaasa one should consult his rav. Vitamins do not have the status of food therefore they may not be taken to cure an illness. For example, one suffering from a cold may not take a supplement intended to shorten the duration of the cold. However, a healthy person may take a supplement intended to prevent the onset of a cold. The Magen Avrohom states that even a healthy person may not engage in acts of refuah. According to R' Moshe this means that even a healthy individual may not take a supplement to improve his health (i.e. to increase one's energy level or strength, as opposed to preventing illness). Supplements intended to improve ones health are only considered refuah if one anticipates a significant and noticeable effect similar to the effects of medicine on a sick person. A subtle improvement in ones health similar to the effect of an improved diet is not classified as a refuah. One who is on a reduced calorie diet may take a multi vitamin multi mineral to supplement the elements deficient in his diet provided that his intention is only to replace elements missing from his diet and not to improve his health.

Rabbi Francis learns full-time at the kollel.