



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

Executive Director, Camp HASC

Author of Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva (Mosaica 2021)

Chizuk

In the height of High Holiday celebrations in autumn of 1978, the Lubavitcher Rebbe suffered a heart attack. Dr. Ira Weiss of Chicago, a renowned cardiologist who had written a textbook on heart rhythm analysis, served as the head of the team of doctors who treated the Rebbe. For years following the Rebbe's miraculous recovery, Dr. Weiss continued to maintain a close relationship, attending annual farbrengens and closely monitoring the Rebbe's wellbeing.

One year, Dr. Weiss brought a professional colleague with him, Dr. Gerald Dorros Jr., a world-renowned cardiovascular interventionist from Wisconsin. After the farbrengen and medical consultation, Dr. Dorros had the opportunity of a few private moments with the Rebbe in *yechidus*. Not knowing what to expect from a deeper conversation with the Rebbe, he was surprised when the Rebbe suggested that the doctor should devote himself to preventative medicine: 'Consider treating people who are healthy — not only those who are suffering from illness or in need of emergency medical care. You can make healthy people even more healthy.'

"Are we to believe that we can improve on what the Almighty has done?" replied

the doctor with curiosity. "Of course!" the Rebbe responded. "If a layman can't improve on what the Almighty has created in this world, and if a doctor does not aim to improve on what the Almighty has done, then what are we doing here with our lives?"

Our sedra introduces us to our Torah-defined responsibility in lending a helping hand and issues a prohibition against taking/charging interest on a loan when assist our neighbors and brothers in their time of need:

וְכִי־יָמוּךְ אֶחָיֶךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִזְקַתָּ בּוֹ גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ... אֵל תִּקַּח מֵאוֹתוֹ נֶשֶׁךְ וְתִרְבִּית...

"If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him, whether a convert or a resident, so that he can live with you... Do not take interest from him."

(*Vayikra*, 25:35-6)

Rashi adds detail in his commentary on the verses:

וְהִזְקַתָּ בּוֹ אֵל תַּנִּיחֵהוּ שְׂכִירָד וְיִפֹּל וְיִהְיֶה קָשָׁה לְהַקִּימוֹ, אֶלָּא חִזְקָהוּ מִשְׁעַת מוֹטָת הַיָּד; לָמָּה זֶה דּוֹמָה? לְמַשְׁאוֹי שְׁעַל הַחֲמוֹר, עוֹדָהוּ עַל הַחֲמוֹר אֶחָד תּוֹפֵס בּוֹ וּמַעֲמִידוֹ, נָפֵל לְאָרֶץ, חֲמִשָּׁה אֵין מַעֲמִידִין אוֹתוֹ;

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“Do not allow him to fall down and collapse altogether, in which case it would be difficult to pick him up again [from his dire poverty]. Rather, “support him” while his hand is still faltering [for then it is easier to help him out of his trouble]. To what can this be compared? To a load on a donkey-while it is still on the donkey, one person can grasp it and hold it in place. Once it falls to the ground, however, [even] five people cannot pick it up.”

Before someone becomes completely destitute and is in need of a bail-out, rehabilitation, we must strengthen them, and to be ahead of the curve, anticipating what may happen before it does.

Rambam (*Matnas Aniyim*, 10:7) provides us with even greater detail:

שמונה מעלות יש בצדקה זו למעלה מזו. מעלה גדולה שאין למעלה ממנה זה המעזיק ביד ישראל שמך ונתן

לו מתנה או הלואה או עושה עמו שתפוח או ממציא לו מלאכה כדי לחזק את ידו עד שלא יצטרך לבריות לשאל ועל זה נאמר (ויקרא כה לה) “והחזקת בו גר ותושב וחי עמך” כלומר החזק בו עד שלא יפל ויצטרך:

“There are eight levels in charity, each level surpassing the other. The highest level, beyond which there is none, is a person who supports a Jew who has fallen into poverty [by] giving him a present or a loan, entering into partnership with him, or finding him work so that his hand will be fortified so that he will not have to ask others for a hand-out: ‘You shall support him, the stranger, the resident, and he shall live among you.’ Meaning, support him before he falls and becomes needy.”

Our charge of *v’hechezakta bo*, “strengthen and support one another” is to do so spiritually as well as materially. This includes offering words of encouragement

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or guidance, and whatever resources we may have at our disposal. Perhaps someone can benefit from our social currency, our professional introduction, our listening ear or good word, but the main thing is devoting ourselves to the ‘preventative medicine’ of *v’hechezakta bo*.

Rebbe Moshe Alshich notes that when we are presented with an opportunity to help, we sometimes imagine others with more skills, resources, better connections or greater wealth, to be in a better position to assist. However, in the commandment, אחיך “your brother” is in לשון יחיד, singular form. This means *your* brother or sister, not that of the person with more resources. Our calling is to take others’ potential needs personally, see them as our own brother or sister, and even to imagine that we are the only one able to be of assistance to them. We should not passively assume that others will do our mitzvah for us.

Rebbe Nosson Dovid of Shidlovitz (*Sefer Imrei Binah*, Parshas Behar), writes:

“When one loves another, he can uplift him spiritually. If one is invited to dine with the king, and replies, ‘I don’t want to go unless my friend comes with me’ he

has expressed a deep bond of love, and has manifested the ultimate, inner goal and meaning of the Covenant between Am Yisrael and Hashem. This applies to every Jew. To the degree that a person takes part in manifesting the relationship and strengthening the Covenant between friends and God, he can bring the entire world to perfection.”

Before taking leave of the Rebbe, Dr. Dorros asked one last question: “Are you asking me to attempt to make man a perfect being?” “No,” the Rebbe told him, “that is not what is asked of you.” With a twinkle, he added: “Leave that for Mashiach.”

Dr. Dorros later founded the Dorros-Feuer Interventional Cardiovascular Disease Foundation — and as Medical Director, continues to promote proactive heart health and wellbeing to countless recipients, “making healthy people even more healthy”.

By lifting one another up, and strengthening each other even before we might face an inner or outer challenge, may we merit the restoration — and perfection — of our collective physical and spiritual health, with the coming of Mashiach, soon and in our days. ■



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