

כַּשְׁחָלָה רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַגָּדוֹל, אָמַר לְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא

When Rabbi Eliezer Fell Ill

THE TEACHING

When Rabbi Eliezer the Great fell ill, he told Rabbi Akiva: “חֲמָה עֲזָה בְּעוֹלָם”, “there is fierce wrath in the world.” For there was no one then who could make a redemption (פְּדִיוֹן) to sweeten the judgment (הַמִּתִּיק). (הַדִּין).

Only after the pidyon and the sweetening does the doctor (רופא) have permission to heal: first the sweetening, then the cure.

MAIN POINTS

- A cure is decreed above: “שִׁיתְרַפָּא עַל־יְדֵי סֵם פְּלוּנִי וְעַל־יְדֵי אִישׁ פְּלוּנִי, בְּיוֹם פְּלוּנִי”, “through a particular remedy, a particular person, on a particular day.” So how can a doctor know which remedy will work?
- Under strict judgment (מִדַּת הַדִּין) the illness must last until its set day, so only those exact causes can cure it, and only then.
- A pidyon sweetens the judgment and cancels the decree. In the space before a new judgment, the doctor can heal with any good remedy.
- So “וְרַפָּא וְרַפָּא” (שמות כא:יט), both words together, has the numerical value of פְּדִיוֹן נֶפֶשׁ. And the Sages say: “מִכָּאן שֶׁנִּתְּנָה תּוֹרָה רְשׁוּת לְרופָא לְרַפְּאוֹת”, from here, after the pidyon.
- Even the vowels agree: וְרַפָּא with a חוֹלָם is the sweetening; וְרַפָּא with a צִירִי is the remedy, “הֲצָרִי אֵין בְּגִלְעָד אִם רַפָּא אֵין שָׁם” (ירמיה ח:כב), “is there no balm in Gilead, is there no doctor there?”

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Give tzedakah and pray first. Then go to the doctor, with faith.

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