



Parashat Vayetze 5770

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On the Parashah Heavenly and Earthly [Tal Chermon p. 69]

The ladder is Yaakov himself (Nefesh Ha-Chaim 1, 10-19), who is simultaneously both heavenly and earthly. He embodies spirituality which is used to improve the physical world, but he also lives a material existence, which is guided by the spirit. These are the two faces of Yaakov.

The vision is not static. There is dynamic movement as "the angels of G-d ascend and descend it [the ladder]" (Bereshit 28:12). They ascend to heaven to obtain nourishment from the Divine source in order to descend to earth and illuminate it. The righteous are not satisfied with a personally, spiritually, elevating experience, but they return to the mundane world and use their spiritual acquisition to improve it (Moreh Nevuchim 1, 15).

During the Akedah, Avraham Avinu reached the most awesome of spiritual heights. Did Avraham remain in his heavenly state, detached from the rest of the world? No! "And Avraham returned to his young man and they arose and went together to Beer Sheva (Bereshit 22:19)." Despite his soul's leap to terrestrial loftiness, Avraham did not separate himself in any way from his material surroundings. He returned to the young men, in their spiritual state, in order to uplift and elevate them (Olat Re'eiyah vol 1, p. 96).

Rav Aviner on... Medicine – Scientific or Imaginary

["Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Parashat Lech Lecha 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Where do you draw the line between conventional medicine and alternative medicine? If people accept the latter, doesn't it turn into conventional medicine?

Answer: No. Even if the masses accept it, it will still be “alternative,” just with the masses being misled by it. The question is this: Has a particular medical approach been proven scientifically or not, i.e., via experimentation and observation?

Question: But the fact is that alternative medicine works in many cases!

Answer: From a scientific perspective, that is not a bare fact but a fact with an explanation. We are happy that the patient was cured, but one has to make certain that there were no other causes to his cure. For example, there was a black plague two hundred years ago, and, in Turkey, mothers would remove puss from a patient’s abscess, rub it on a knife and make cuts in their other children, to confuse Satan into thinking that those other children had already been smitten by the disease, so that he would leave them alone. The method succeeded. Does that prove that acting against Satan works? Rather, the physician Dr. Edward Jenner ran experiments and proved the vaccination method.

Question: What do I care if the explanation is wrong? Isn’t the main thing that the method works and the patient gets better?

Answer: There is another possibility that such treatments achieve a psychological effect, a “placebo.” In other words, the patient’s belief in the treatment causes the brain to excrete painkillers so that the person feels good. One has to conduct an experiment in which a control group receives a sugar pill while a second group receives the alternative treatment, with neither the patients nor the physicians knowing which group has received which, and one has to prove that the alternative treatment works better than the sugar pill.

Question: What do I care if the treatment works like a placebo as long as the patient feels good?

Answer: Because only the external signs are cured and not the sickness itself, which is liable to get worse, and real medical treatment is thus prevented. For example, alternative medicine kills the pain caused by cancer, but the cancer continues to spread. There was a case in which a homeopathic doctor was convicted in court because he prevented the desirable treatment from being applied. One also has to make sure that the treatment does no harm.

Question: With scientific medicine, not everything has been totally proven either. The fact is that it undergoes change.

Answer: That’s only true regarding the details, but the general theory has been proven. Quite the contrary, the fact that there are changes proves that scientific medicine is always examining itself, criticizing itself and correcting itself. Not so the vast array of imaginary treatments based on the assumption that there are “life energies” whose existence has never been proven. Rather, they are a vestige of the paganism of the Far-East.

Question: But alternative medicine has been introduced into the health clinics and hospitals. Doesn’t that mean that when all is said and done they’ve admitted that it is true?

Answer: No. It’s a calculation of economics and responsibility. Alternative medicine brings in a lot of money that can be used for real treatments. They also employ a responsible approach by which they do not stop the scientific treatment.

Question: Some argue that scientific medicine itself is not so scientific, and that genuine treatments are rejected because they are expensive and unprofitable.

Answer: True, there are cases of physicians chasing after money or honor as in any other profession on earth. Yet since the scientific approach is based on constant self-criticism, distortions will not last long and ultimately the truth will shine forth. This is not the case with illusory medicine that for hundreds of years has been based on false assumptions such as “energies,” which have never been proven in a genuine manner to be more effective than placebos.

Question: How can one argue that such treatments are placebos? They work even on animals that don't know their right paw from their left?

Answer: The animals trust their masters. The animals' behavior, health-wise, is influenced by the psychological state of their owners.

Question: So with infants as well, you've got to interrogate the parents to neutralize the placebo's effect?

Answer: That's, in fact, what we do. Obviously, a simple placebo is much cheaper than any illusory medicine, which likewise causes much harm.

Question: It's true that there are cases in which alternative medicine doesn't work, but there are reasons for that...

Answer: The great principle of scientific investigation is the principle of refutability. In other words, the researcher who suggests a hypothesis has to provide a definitive experiment, such that if he fails, his theory is wrong. Yet imaginary medicine always views itself as right and it always has an excuse for everything, such that it cannot be substantively refuted. For example, here is what happens in homeopathy:

- The situation has improved – a sign that the treatment is working.
- The situation is getting worse – That's a good sign, because the body is being cleansed of poisons.
- There is no improvement – but at least the treatment has stopped the deterioration.
- The patient died – because the alternative treatment was introduced too late, after scientific medicine ruined everything.

Question: Two hundred years ago, a cholera plague broke out in Europe. In the homeopathic hospitals, only 18% died, whereas three times as many died in the regular hospitals.

Answer: This is known. It was due to the lack of hygiene in the regular hospitals, which caused the disease to pass between patients. Today conventional hospitals are clean. 0% die of this disease, whereas in homeopathic hospitals the rate has remained at 18%.

Question: How can alternative medicine be deemed imaginary if it hasn't been investigated?

Answer: It's all been investigated. Every medical treatment on earth, including folk remedies, has been investigated.

Nostradamus's prescription against the plague was investigated by the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Researchers risk their lives in uncivilized areas of the world to hear from witchdoctors how they cure using herbs, to ascertain whether or not there is any truth to it. Nothing is rejected. Yet nothing is accepted without proof. In 1985 the French Health Minister gave orders to investigate the efficacy of homeopathic

treatment following operations in the stomach cavity. 600 patients from twelve hospitals were divided up into four groups. Two groups received different medicines chosen by homeopathic physicians, and two groups received placebos, with neither patients nor physicians knowing who was receiving what. There was no difference between the four groups!

Question: Where in the Torah does it say that we have to use scientific medicine?

Answer: Our great master, Rambam, explained that there are three reliable sources to man's knowledge: 1. The intellect. 2. Experience. 3. Prophecy (Igrot Ha-Rambam, Rav Shilat Edition, p.479). Likewise, the Talmud states several times: "What do I need a verse to prove this? It can be understood logically!" Since we have no code of Jewish Law from Heaven regarding medical matters, what remains is the intellect and logic. With anything else, we are faced with the Torah prohibition against "following the customs of the idolators" (Vayikra 18:3. See Tosafot on Sanhedrin 52b and Tosafot on Avodah Zarah 11b). Indeed, there are about 150 methods of alternative medicine and almost all of them are based on ancient ideologies of the Far East, China, India and Tibet, even if they have been translated into modern terminology. These have not been based on controlled experimentation. Rambam wrote that the forbidden "ways of the Amorites" are practices not dictated by natural investigation, but are corollaries of sorcery (Moreh Nevuchim 3, 37). Heaven help us!

Stories of Rabbenu –

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

The Honor of Women

Our Rabbi gave classes for the yeshiva students at his house, and they set up an amplification system into the apartment next door so that the women could hear. There was sometimes a problem with the system and our Rabbi would wait until they fixed it. He would explain that for the honor of women he was obligated to delay so that they could also hear.

With all of our Rabbi's care regarding issues relating to modesty, our Rabbi was also strict about women's honor. Before Kiddush on Shabbat day, he would ask over and over: "Are all the women here? 'Women are obligated in Kiddush during the day' (Berachot 20b)."

Our Rabbi would instruct his married students that there was also an obligation to provide their wives with spiritual food. In contrast to the general thought that women are exempt from learning Torah, he would emphasize with a smile that this does not apply to learning about faith: "Is faith a time-bound, positive mitzvah?..."

When the Beit Midrash was in the dormitory building, the women's section was close to the entrance to the Beit Midrash. There was a sign: "Women are requested not to linger in the hallway after davening" [in order that women and men not intermingle]. When our Rabbi saw it, he asked that the note be taken down and rewritten in a more

general manner: "The community is requested not to linger in the hallway after davening," in order not to offend the honor of the women.

Our Rabbi was extremely particular not to stare at women. Even when a woman came to him for a long conversation on important matters, he listened to her carefully and responded warmly – his sight was always to the side. The same was when he gave a class to women. He would stand for a woman who was a Torah scholar, but he would not directly look at her. (Ha-Rav Eliyahu Mali – Iturei Cohanim #176)

**From Rav Aviner's Commentary on Birkat Ha-Mazon,
entitled Shir Ha-Ma'alot**

On the Sheva Berachot – "Let the barren city be jubilantly happy"

Just as there is a bond of marriage between a man and wife, this relationship also exists between the Master of the Universe and the Community of Israel. According to Rashi's commentary, the entire book of Shir Ha-Shirim is an allegory based on this idea, and it describes the great love story between Hashem and His Nation, love that is not dependent on anything from both sides. When we sin against Hashem, He continues His bond with us; and as we are required to sacrifice our lives for Hashem's Name, we remain faithful to the Master of the Universe. The groom and bride bind their individual joy with the great hope of the Nation of Israel: "Let the barren city be jubilantly happy" as it says: "If I do not elevate Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Tehillim 137:6). Rabbi David Abudraham wrote: "This blessing was established relating to the rejoicing of the future Jerusalem, which is compared to the joining of a groom and bride, as it says: 'As the groom rejoices over the bride, so shall God rejoice over you'" (Yeshayahu 62:5). We are fortunate that we have merited that in our days the love is coming with the return to Zion, the building of the Land, the establishment of the State and the return of the Torah of holiness to the Holy Land.

Special thank you to Fred Casden for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parshah Sheet



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