



Parashat Terumah 5772 - #223

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Davening for Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv

Question: Should we pray for Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv to heal from his illness, or – as one Rabbi suggested – should we pray for Hashem to take his soul on High since he is suffering so much?

Answer: It is correct that the Ran writes in Nedarim (40a d.h. Ain. And see Baba Metzia 84) that if a person is suffering terribly and seems to have no hope of recovery, it is permissible to pray for him to die. The source for this idea is the Gemara at the end of Ketubot (104a), where it is told that Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi was suffering terribly; his maidservant saw and prayed that he should die. Even though she was not a Torah scholar, but a maidservant, the Sages greatly respected her and the Ran rules according to her example. In Shut Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 5 Ramat Rachel #5, 7:49 Kuntres Even Yaakov chap. 13, 9:47), it is written that this applies only if one is davening for the benefit of the sick person who is suffering a fatal illness, and not in order to lighten our own burden. It is clear that our intent in this case it is to lighten the burden on Ha-Rav Elyashiv.

The Ran writes that it is permissible to pray for a person's end in such a situation, but he does not write that one is obligated to do so. After all, the Gemara itself relates that while the maidservant prayed that Rebbe should die, the Sages prayed that he should not die. In the book "Midbar Shur," in his eulogy for Ha-Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, Maran Ha-Rav Kook asks: Why did the Sages pray that he should not die? Their view is difficult to understand. After all, Rebbe Yehudah Ha-Nasi was bed-ridden, suffering, could not teach or give halachic rulings, and was seemingly of no benefit to this world. If he would ascend on High, he would continue to teach Torah there. So why didn't they pray for him to die? Maran Ha-Rav Kook explains that the influence of a great Torah scholar is not only through his teaching, halachic rulings, etc., but also in the presence of his holy soul in this world. The fact that his soul is located in this world brings blessing, even when he is unable to provide practical benefit, is closed in a room and cannot converse with others. This is similar to the Vilna Gaon, who for many years was closed in a room learning Torah. This world with Rebbe Yehudah Ha-Nasi is not the same as a world without Rebbe Yehudah Ha-Nasi.

When Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah taught us this idea, he would say that Maran Ha-Rav Kook also suffered greatly, and he told him: Each and every moment that Abba is in this

world, despite the suffering, he brings it light. And our Rabbenu would relate this with tears in his eyes.

If so, the same applies in our case. This world with the Ha-Tzadik, Ha-Gaon, Ha-Gadol, Ha-Rav Elyashiv is not the same as a world without him, even though he is currently unable to teach, give rulings, etc. The Rabbis who called on us to pray for Ha-Rav Elyashiv's healing are therefore correct, and we hope that he will truly be healed and will once again actively bring the blessing of Torah and holiness to this world.

May Hashem send him a speedy and complete recovery.

Rav Aviner on... Winter Q&A Guarding Against Spreading Sickness

A Sick Person Going to Shul

Question: If someone is sick with coughing and sneezing, and is spreading germs in shul, doesn't he have an obligation to stay home?

Answer: One who infects another person with this type of illness is exempt from any fine, since it is "Gerama" – an indirect cause. The germs do not directly penetrate a person's body, but are spread throughout the room, and afterwards are breathed in. This is not considered a "certain" injury since it is not guaranteed that another person will become sick: perhaps he will not breathe the germs in; or perhaps he is immune to them. One who infects another person is therefore exempt from paying a fine. It is clear, however, that it is forbidden for a person to injure another, even indirectly, even with germs, which are like arrows. In the book "Kehillot Yaacov," the Steipler Gaon discusses similar cases, such as one who damages through witchcraft (Kehillot Yaacov, Baba Kama #39, #44 in the new edition at the end of the chapter). Therefore, someone who is coughing and sneezing should not go to shul, but should daven at home on his own. For the same reason, one should not send children with infectious sicknesses to nursery school or school, unless a doctor decides that it is better for young children to be infected with this sickness than to wait until they are older.

Asking Someone to Remove a Used Tissue from the Table

Question: If a person wipes his nose and places the used tissue on a table on which food is going to be served, is it permissible to point it out to him, or should one refrain out of a concern of embarrassing him?

Answer: It is certainly forbidden to put a used tissue on the table and, in general it is forbidden since it disgusts another person, as it is written: "For every deed, G-d will judge, on everything which is hidden" (Kohelet 12:13). The Talmud in Chagigah (5a) says, "This is one who kills a louse in front of another person and he is disgusted by it... This is one who spits in front of another person and he is disgusted by it." "On everything" means even on a small thing. "Which is hidden" means even if the person who is disgusted does not inform the other person what he caused, since there was no problem in doing such a thing in his eyes. Therefore, one must certainly tell him, but it must be with gentleness and wisdom, as with every instance of giving rebuke. If, however, despite this he is still hurt or insulted, this is not our responsibility, since we acted according to the law, and he placed himself in this position.

Pointing Out to Someone to Clean their Nose

Question: Is it appropriate to tell someone that his nose is not clean or is there a concern for embarrassment?

Answer: This is similar to the previous question. Again, one should act with wisdom.

Kissing the Torah by Hand

Question: Isn't it preferable to kiss the Torah with your hand, and not your mouth, during the winter since it is unclear whether the others kissing it are sick?

Answer: It appears that the chance of contracting an illness this way is remote. We therefore leave it to the discretion of each person.

Windows Open or Shut in Shul

Question: According to doctors, it is important to have windows open in order to ventilate rooms and halls. If one of the people davening says that he is cold, does he take precedence over the others, when there is a danger of becoming sick because of lack of ventilation?

Answer: We follow the accepted practice of people in all of these matters - it is forbidden to act in a way which injures another person or which is difficult for him to endure (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:39 in the Rama). It therefore seems that the general rule is: In the summer, if someone wants to open the window, it is opened, even if the majority wanted it closed. And in the winter, if someone wants to close the window, it is closed, even if the majority wants it open. However, since doctors have established that there is a need for ventilation and that germs, not cold weather, cause the common cold, there is a need for ventilation in every place. This rule also applies in catering halls, Yeshivot, school classrooms, buses and similar enclosed spaces.

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