

An Explanation of Rabeinu Bachayei's Enigmatic Comment

“ורפוא ירפא” -- “Pei's Are Dotted” Regarding a Doctor's Healing the “רפאני ה' וארפא” -- “HKB"H's Healing They Are Not”

In this week's parsha, parshas Mishpatim, we learn that HKB"H gave permission to human physicians to treat and heal those who are ill. Here are the relevant pesukim (Shemos 21, 18):

“וכי יריבון אנשים והכה איש את רעהו באבן או באגרוף ולא ימות ונפל למשכב, אם יקום ויתהלך בחוץ על משענתו ונקה המכה רק שבתו יתן ורפוא ירפא—when men will quarrel and one will strike his fellow with a stone or a fist, and he will not die but will fall into bed; if he gets up and goes about outside on his own power, the one who struck will be absolved; only for his sitting idle shall he pay, and he shall heal. Apropos the latter passuk, we have learned in the Gemara (B.K. 85a): “דבי רבי ישמעאל אומר, ורפוא ירפא, מכאן שניתן רשות לרפאות” —the school of Rabbi Yishmael says: We learn from the words “ורפוא ירפא” (“and he shall heal”) that permission has been given to the physician to heal. Rashi clarifies: “We do not say that the Merciful One strikes and he heals.”

Let us explain. Had the Torah not given the physician permission to heal, we would have said: Seeing as HKB"H punished this person with an illness, it is inappropriate for a human being to interfere with His decision by healing the person. Tosafot are bothered by the seemingly redundant language: “ורפוא ירפא”. Had the passuk merely employed the term “ורפוא” alone, it would have been understood that the physician was given permission to heal. Hence, in a similar vein, they explain that we might have thought that a physician is only permitted to heal ailments inflicted by human hands; whereas, healing ailments inflicted from above appears to contradict the King's decree. Therefore, we learn from the passuk that even the latter is permitted.

“ורפוא ירפא” as Opposed to “רפאני ה' וארפא”

In this essay, we would like to focus on the commentary of Rabeinu Bachayei. He explains the difference between healing that comes from a human physician as opposed to heavenly ordained healing from HKB"H. Here are his sacred words:

“ורפוא ירפא. כל רפואה בבשר ודם לא מצאנוהו בכל הכתובים כי אם בדגש... אבל בהקב"ה מצינו ברפה, והוא שכתוב (ירמיה יז-יד) רפאני ה' וארפא, וכתוב (תהלים קמז-ג) הרופא לשבורי לב... (שמות טו-כו) כי אני ה' רופאך. והטעם בזה כי הרפואה בבשר ודם אינה אלא על ידי צער וטורח, והוא שיסבול הסם את המשקה המור, אבל רפואה של הקב"ה בנחת אין שם צער כלל, כי (משלי י-כב) ברכת ה' היא תעשיר ולא יוסיף עצב עמה.”

In all of Scriptures, when discussing human healing, the “pei” is dotted . . . whereas when discussing HKB"H's healing, the “pei” is not dotted, as we find in the following pesukim (Yirmiyah 17, 14): “רפאני ה' וארפא” (“Heal me Hashem and I will be healed”), (Tehillim 147, 3): “הרופא לשבורי לב” (“He is the healer of the brokenhearted”) and (Shemos 15, 26): “כי אני ה' רופאך” (“For I am Hashem, your Healer”). This is so, because human healing necessarily involves suffering and bother; the afflicted person must endure the bitter-tasting medicine. HKB"H's healing, however, is easy and pain-free; no suffering is involved. For it states (Mishlei 10, 22): “It is the blessing of Hashem that enriches, and one need not add toil with it.”

It appears that Rabeinu Bachayei's commentary is the source for what Rabbi Chaim Vital writes in Eitz HaDa'as Tov on this week's parsha:

“ורפוא ירפא. הנה רפואה הבאה לאדם על ידי השי"ת איננה על ידי צער, ולכן אין הפ"א דגושה אלא היא רפויה, כמו שכתוב רפאני ה' וארפא, אבל הרפואה הבאה לאדם על ידי בשר ודם, יש ברפואתה צער כנודע, לכן הפ"א של ורפוא ירפא שתיהן דגושות.”

Healing that a person receives from Hashem does not involve suffering. Hence, the "pei" is not dotted, as we find in the phrase "רפאני ה' וארפא". Healing that a person receives from human beings, however, involves suffering, as we all know. Hence, in the phrase "ורפוא ירפא", both "pei"s are dotted.

We find a similar comment from the Ba'al HaTurim in parshas Beshalach regarding the passuk (Shemos 15, 26): "כל המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני ה' רופאך - רופאך, הפ"א רפויה, שרפואה בידי שמים באה בשופי, ושבידי אדם באה בקושי, על כן רופאך" [ירפא] דגוש". He notes that the "pei" in the word "רופאך" is not dotted, indicating that Hashem's healing comes easily and comfortably, whereas human healing is associated with difficulty; therefore, in the passuk in our parsha, the "pei" of "ורפוא" is dotted.

Let us begin with a simple, straightforward explanation. According to the principles of "dikduk"—Hebrew grammar—the six letters בג"ד כפ"ת are sometimes dotted and sometimes not dotted. Without a dot, they are pronounced softly; with a dot, they are pronounced emphatically. Therefore, when healing by means of a human doctor is being discussed, the Torah says "ורפוא ירפא"—both "pei"s are dotted; this implies that the healing is associated with suffering and discomfort. However, when HKB"H is the healer, the Torah says: "רפאני ה' וארפא"—both "pei"s appear without dots, implying that the healing is an act of divine mercy and is free of suffering.

To emphasize this point, let us introduce the following from a letter endorsing the siddur of Rabbi Shabtai Sofer, who was an expert on grammar. His siddur was endorsed by the likes of the Maharsha, the Bach, the Tevuot Shor and other great scholars. They all stress the importance of paying attention to proper grammar when davening. It is important not to interchange the dotted letters with letters that are not dotted, because the dot indicates "din"; while the milder form without a dot indicates "rachamim." Here is an excerpt from their letter:

"גם הפליגו רבותינו ז"ל בענין הדגש והרפה, ואמרו שהדגש הוא דין והרפה הוא רחמים, כמבואר בספר יצירה פרק ד' ובספר הפרדס שער הטעמים (פרק ד"ה רפה דגש), והזהירו מאד שלא לחזק הרפה, ושלא לרפות החזק. וכן היא הלכה בסוקה בשלחן ערוך סי' ס"א סעיף כ"ג, וזה לשונו, צריך לדקדק שלא ירפה החזק ולא יחזק הרפה".

Regarding this matter, they cite the fourth chapter of Sefer Yetzirah and the halachic ruling as it appears in the Shulchan Aruch (61, 23): "**One must be careful not to soften the hard**

and not to harden the soft." In other words, the words of our prayers must be pronounced correctly; we must pay careful attention to whether or not these letters are dotted or not.

This explains Rabeinu Bachayei's comment very nicely. Regarding healing by a human doctor, the Torah says: "ורפוא ירפא"—both "pei"s are dotted (hard "pei"s), indicating that the healing involves "din," and is therefore associated with pain and suffering. Regarding healing from HKB"H, the Torah says: "רפאני ה' וארפא"—there are no dots in the two "pei"s (soft "pei"s), indicating that the healing emanates from "rachamim"; as such, it is not associated with suffering.

Healing from HKB"H Is Permanent

To explain the vast difference between human healing and heavenly healing from HKB"H, let us refer to the powerful words of the Zohar Chadash (Balak 54, column 3). Here is the passage translated into Hebrew:

"פתח ואמר, (ירמיה יז-יד) רפאני ה' וארפא, כיון שאמר רפאני מהו וארפא, כיון שאמר הושיעני מהו ואושעה, כיון שמרפא מי הוא שמכה, אלא כל הרפואות שבעולם בידו של הקב"ה הם, אבל יש מהן שנמסרים ביד שליח, ויש מהן שאינם נמסרים ביד שליח, ואלו שנמסרים בידי שליח מתרפאים, אבל לפעמים המחלה חוזרת, אבל אלו שהקב"ה מרפא, אותה המחלה אינה חוזרת לעולם, ולכן רפאני ה' וארפא, ודאי בלי שום קטרוג כלל".

He began and said: "Heal me Hashem and I will be healed." Since he said "Heal me," why did he add: "And I will be healed"? Since he said: "Save me," why did he add: "And I will be saved"? Since He is the one doing the healing, who is doing the striking? We must conclude that all healing in the world is attributable to HKB"H. However, some is assigned to an agent and some is not assigned to an agent. Those that are assigned to an agent result in a cure; however, sometimes the ailment returns. Those that HKB"H heals, however, that ailment never recurs. Therefore, he prays: "Heal me Hashem, so that I will be healed"—absolutely, without any qualifications.

Thus, we see that HKB"H has two distinct methods of healing mankind. Sometimes He provides the cure by means of a human doctor; in these situations, the malady is liable to recur, chas v'shalom. At other times, HKB"H heals the ailment Himself; in these situations, it is guaranteed that the malady will not recur. To provide a practical explanation pertinent to every individual, let us refer to what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 5a):

”אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר (איכה ג-מ) נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה', פשפש ולא מצא, יתלה בביטול תורה, שנאמר (תהלים צד-יב) אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרגו יה ומתורתך תלמדנו, ואם תלה ולא מצא, בידוע שיסורין של אהבה הם, שנאמר (משלי ג-יב) כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח.”

If a person sees that he is being subjected to hardships, he should scrutinize his actions . . . If he scrutinizes and does not find any shortcomings, he should attribute the hardships to neglect of Torah-study . . . If he does not find himself lacking in this area either, he can rest assured that the hardships emanate from divine love, as it states (Mishlei 3, 12): "For Hashem admonishes the one He loves."

We learn from here that if a person incurs an illness, chas v'shalom, he should realize that HKB"H is punishing him for some transgression. Hence, it is advisable for that person to scrutinize his actions, and perform complete, sincere teshuvah, as it is written (Eichah 3, 40): **"Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem."** Nevertheless, it is a well-known fact that so long as a person is encumbered by suffering and afflictions, it is difficult for him to perform proper teshuvah. Therefore, the holy Admor, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, zy"a, recommends that the afflicted person should commit himself to performing complete teshuvah and to making amends for all of his wrongdoings as soon as HKB"H releases him from his suffering.

He goes on to explain the significance of Rashi's comment regarding the passuk (Tehillim 50, 23): **"זובח תודה יכבדני"**—**he who offers confession honors Me.** Rashi explains: **"One who brings Me an offering of teshuvah and acknowledgement of his transgressions, he honors Me.** Seemingly, Rashi's explanation is surprising. After all, the passuk employs the term **"זובח תודה"**, which implies that it is speaking about a person who brings a korban to express his gratitude to Hashem for rescuing him from his hardships and suffering. Our blessed sages said (Berachos 54b): **"ארבעה צריכין להודות, יורדי הים, הולכי מדבריות, ומי שהיה חולה ונתרפא, ומי שהיה חבוש בבית יורדי הים—four are obligated to express gratitude: Those who journey by sea, those who travel through the desert, someone who was ill and was healed, and someone who was confined in prison.** That being the case, why does Rashi interpret this passuk as referring to a person who offers teshuvah and acknowledgement for his transgressions?

Based on what we have discussed, we can provide an explanation. While a Jew is burdened by hardships and suffering, he is not in a state of mind capable of performing complete teshuvah properly. Therefore, the Almighty has mercy on him. Immediately, when this person begins to perform teshuvah, the Almighty sends him divine assistance. He removes him from his state of suffering on the condition that he will complete the teshuvah he began as soon as his situation improves. It is as if he is receiving a loan until he is capable of repaying it. This then is Rashi's message. A person who brings a "korban-todah" to express his gratitude to HKB"H for extricating him from his state of suffering, must eventually complete the process of teshuvah, which he was previously unable to do properly.

The Doctor Heals so that the Afflicted Person Will Be Able to Complete the Teshuvah Process

This should enlighten us as to the two types of healing which HKB"H provides the ill. If the ill person entertains thoughts of teshuvah, but is yet incapable of completing the process properly, HKB"H heals him by means of a human physician. Albeit, the cure he receives is not absolute, and he is not guaranteed that he will not relapse. This serves as a reminder that he is still obligated to complete his teshuvah-process. Failure to do so could result in a return to his state of infirmity, pending the completion of his teshuvah. If, however, he properly completes the teshuvah-process after being healed by the physician, HKB"H Himself completes the healing process for him. Thus, the person is assured that the affliction will not recur.

Now, this explains why with regards to healing that comes from a human being, it says **"ורפוא ירפא"**—employing two dotted "pei"s, indicating that the attribute of "din" is in effect. Thus, the afflicted person will realize that he is not entirely out of the woods; he is still subject to the element of "din" until he completes the process of teshuvah to Hashem. Only then will he merit true healing, the type that emanates from Hashem, as implied by the phrase: **"רפאני ה' ונרפא"**—where there are no dots in the "pei"s, indicating that total "rachamim" are in effect to provide an absolute cure.

We now have a very nice explanation for the Gemara's elucidation: **"ורפוא ירפא, מכאן שניתן רשות לרפוא לרפאות."** Seeing as a doctor cannot guarantee that the patient's illness will not return, we might have suggested that it would be preferable

that he not be healed until he returns to Hashem by performing complete teshuvah. Therefore, the Torah teaches us that the physician has been given permission to heal. He enables the afflicted person to perform teshuvah in a state of physical health and well-being. With a clear mind, he can merit a complete cure emanating from Hashem—represented by the dotless "pei."

Let us suggest an allusion to illustrate this point. When the "pei" is dotted--"ורפוא ירפא"—it suggests that a concealed locus exists within the "pei." Similarly, within the person in question, there is a blemish, an unhealthy site, that needs to be addressed and corrected. Due to this dot, this unhealthy spot, this person is still subject to the attribute of "din." Yet, when he performs complete teshuvah and eradicates that harmful spot within him, he merits a "refuah sheleimah" from Hashem, as indicated by the phrase: "רפאני ה' ונרפא". The "pei" without a dot implies the attribute of "rachamim," indicating that he has successfully eradicated the harmful spot from within him. Thus, he is worthy of healing from Hashem.

With great pleasure, I would like add an entertaining thought. We cited above Chazal's statement: "אם רואה אדם אם רואה אדם--if a person sees that he is being subjected to hardships, he should scrutinize his actions." Note that they specifically employed the word "יבשפש" that contains both a "pei" with a dot (a hard "pei") and a "pei" without a dot (a soft "pei"). They are alluding to the fact that a person should examine and search for the source of his hardships. Is he truly free of guilt, as represented by the "pei" without an internal dot, in which case the hardships represent "afflictions of love"? Or perhaps the hardships are indicative of a "pei" with an internal dot. The source of his sin still lingers within him and requires him to perform teshuvah. Therefore, Chazal conclude that if his search does not reveal an internal blemished spot indicative of a past transgression, then: "יתלה בביטול תורה. ואם תלה ולא מצא, בידוע שיסורין של אהבה הם"—he should consider that perhaps he has been remiss with regards to the time he has allotted to Torah-study; and if that is not the case, then he can rest assured that his hardships are in fact "afflictions of love."

The Hard "Pei" of פש"ע Must Be Transformed into the Soft "Pei" of שפ"ע

I was struck by a wonderful idea that will help us better understand the comment of Rabeinu Bachayei. He suggested that the difference between healing that comes from a human

physician and healing that comes directly from HKB"H is represented by the dot in the letter "pei." He contrasted the two "pei"s in "ורפוא ירפא"—which are hard—with the two "pei"s in "רפאני ה' ונרפא"—which are soft. Now, our holy sefarim teach us that a sinner must perform complete teshuvah in order to transform the word פש"ע (meaning iniquity) into its anagram שפ"ע (meaning abundance).

We find a source for this idea in the Zohar hakadosh (Nasso 133a) addressing the passuk (Michah 7, 18). "מי אל כמוך נושא עון" —Who is a G-d like You, Who pardons iniquity and overlooks transgressions (פש"ע)? In His infinite mercy and kindness, HKB"H rearranges the letters of פש"ע to form שפ"ע. In Ma'amar Mordechai (Vayeitzei), the great Rabbi Mordechai of Kazmir, zy"a, utilizes this concept to interpret the words of the prophet (Yeshayah 59, 20): "ובא לציון גואל" —at the time of the geulah, HKB"H will return the order of the letters פש"ע to שפ"ע. (The words ולשבי mean and "and to those who return from פש"ע.)

In the siddur Ezor Eliyahu (Rosh HaShanah), this concept is utilized to interpret the words of the tefilah: "באין מליץ" —in the absence of an advocate capable of transforming the letters פש"ע into שפ"ע, we request that HKB"H: "תגיד ליעקב דבר חק ומשפט"—extend to Yaakov an abundant livelihood referred to as "חק". The Gemara teaches us (Beitzah 16a): "חק לישראל דמזוני הוא"—that the term "חק" signifies sustenance. Also, we learn from the Tikunei Zohar (Introduction 17a) that "ומשפט" connotes "rachamim, as opposed to "tzedek," which connotes "din."

It is generally accepted that HKB"H sustains all of creation, as it is written (Nechemiah 9, 6): "ואתה מחיה את כולם" -- and You sustain them all. This is the concept of שפ"ע. HKB"H sustains all creatures by providing them with an abundance of life. Yet, when man betrays Hashem by behaving corruptly, he damages the conduits providing bounty and prosperity. Consequently, פש"ע is transformed into שפ"ע, which is manifested as illness and affliction, chas v'shalom. To remedy this undesirable situation, a person must perform complete teshuvah; thus, he will succeed in causing the letters of פש"ע to revert back to שפ"ע.

Now, we can introduce a novel idea. The difference between the letters of פש"ע and שפ"ע is the "pei." The former has a hard "pei"—indicative of "din"; whereas the latter has a soft "pei"—indicative of "rachamim." Therefore, regarding

healing delivered by means of a human physician, healing which is not absolute, the "pei" is emphasized: "ורפוא ירפא". This alludes to the fact that this person has yet to perform "teshuvah sheleimah" for having ruined the conduit of life represented by the term שפ"ע. It is incumbent upon him to transform the hard "pei" of שפ"ע back into the soft "pei" of שפ"ע. If he should succeed in performing "teshuvah sheleimah"--transforming the perverted combination שפ"ע back into the desired and ideal combination שפ"ע—he will restore the abundant prosperity of life emanating from HKB"H. He will merit complete, absolute healing from Hashem, represented by the "pei" without a dot: "רפאני ה' וארפא".

It Is Necessary to Perform Teshuvah for Causing HKB"H to Punish Us

Continuing this line of thought, let us return to Rabeinu Bachayei's comment. He points out that in the phrase "ורפוא ירפא" both "pei"s are dotted. In contrast, in the phrase "רפאני ה' וארפא", neither "pei" is dotted. Now, we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 4, 2): "בן עזאי אומר, הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה ובורח מן העבירה, שמצוה גוררת מצוה ועבירה גוררת עבירה, ושכר מצוה מוצה." Ben Azai encourages a person to pursue a minor mitzvah just as enthusiastically as a more significant mitzvah; likewise, he advises a person to steer away from a transgression at all costs. For, one mitzvah leads to the performance of another just as one transgression leads to another. He adds that the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the consequence of an "aveirah" is an "aveirah."

Both the Yismach Moshe (Eikev) and the Arvei Nachal (Shoftim 1) interpret this Mishnah based on a concept presented by our early commentaries. It is an accepted principle that HKB"H created His universe, in order to benefit His creations. This is expressed by the Arizal as follows: "כשעלה ברצונו יתברך שמו לברוא את העולם כדי להיטיב לברואיו"-- **when it became His will to create the world, His desire was to benefit His creations.**

So it turns out that when Yisrael fulfill Hashem's mitzvos and are rewarded by HKB"H for doing so, they are pleasing Him, by satisfying His desire to benefit them. However, when they violate the mitzvos, chas v'shalom, not only do

they prevent HKB"H from benefitting them, but they cause Him to punish them for their transgressions. The damage is compounded by the torment they cause HKB"H, forcing Him to punish his children. It is an example of (Yeshayah 63, 9): "בכל צרתם לו צר"—**in all of their suffering, He suffers.**

This then is the message conveyed by Ben Azai: **"You should run to perform a minor mitzvah as you would to perform a significant mitzvah and you should run away from an 'aveirah.' For a mitzvah leads to a mitzvah and an 'aveirah' leads to an 'aveirah.'"** In other words, every mitzvah is intimately associated with another mitzvah. For, by performing the first mitzvah, the person is rewarded by HKB"H. The reward itself is considered a mitzvah, seeing as it gratifies HKB"H to do something good for this person. Conversely, every "aveirah" is intimately associated with another "aveirah." For, as a consequence of the "aveirah," HKB"H punishes the person. Since it agonizes HKB"H to do so, the punishment itself is considered an "aveirah."

Accordingly, when a person sins, he damages the conduit of life; the combination שפ"ע is transformed into שפ"ע. As a result, the person becomes ill and afflicted. Seeing as the consequence of an "aveirah" is an "aveirah"—because the punishment is also an "aveirah"—it turns out that this person is responsible for two שפ"ע's. Hence, this is alluded to by HKB"H when He says in relation to healing delivered by a human being: "ורפוא ירפא"—with two dotted "pei"s. This conveys to the afflicted person that it is still incumbent upon him to make amends for the damage he has caused in the form of two times שפ"ע.

On the other hand, consider what happens when the afflicted person understands the message. After being healed by the human physician, he has the sense to perform teshuvah lovingly. As the Gemara explains (Yoma 86b), this form of teshuvah transforms willful transgressions into meritorious deeds. Now, instead of two times שפ"ע, he is credited with two times שפ"ע—two "pei"s without dots. Now he merits absolute healing directly from HKB"H, two "pei"s without dots: "רפאני ה' וארפא". As a result, the combination of שפ"ע is restored, affording him a new lease on life, so to speak, without any blemish or affliction.

Donated by Family Madeb for the Refuah Shelimah of Lea bat Virgini

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com