

“You Shall Open Your Hand to Him”

The Opening of the Five Fingers of One Who Gives Tzedokeh
Arouses the Source of Bounty from the Letter “Hei”
with which the World Was Created

In this week's parsha, parshas Re'eh, we learn about the mitzveh of Tzedokeh (15, 8): **“כי יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד: לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא שעריך בארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נותן לך, לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ירך מאחיק האביון, כי פתוח תפתח את ירך לו... נתון נתון לו, ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו, כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך בכל”**—“If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him . . . you shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking”.

It is apparent that the holy Torah attaches great significance to the hand with which a person performs the mitzveh of Tzedokeh: **“ולא תקפוץ את ירך”** — you shall not close your hand, **“כי פתוח תפתח את ירך לו”** — you shall open your hand to him. This requires some explanation in view of the fact that many mitzvos aseh, positive commandments, employ the hand — such as the obligation to return a lost item, taking the four species, and so on and so forth. Despite the active participation of the hand in all of these mitzvos, we do not find a similar Scriptural command concerning these other mitzvos as we do here: **“כי פתוח תפתח את ירך”**-- you shall open your hand to him.

“He Gave Him His Hand and He Revived Him”

Let us begin our investigation of this topic by reviewing the Gemoreh (Berachos 5b): **“רבי חייא בר אבא חלש, על לגביה רבי יוחנן, אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין, אמר ליה לא הן ולא שכרן, אמר ליה [רבי יוחנן] הב לי ירך, יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. רבי יוחנן חלש, על לגביה רבי חנינא, אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין, אמר ליה לא הן ולא**

—שכרן, אמר ליה הב לי ירך, יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה” Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba was ill; Rabbi Yochanon went to visit him. He asked him: “Are afflictions dear to you?” He answered him: “Neither they nor their reward.” He (Rabbi Yochanon) said to him: “Give me your hand.” He gave him his hand; and he revived him. Rabbi Yochanon became ill; Rabbi Chanineh went to visit him. He asked him: “Are afflictions dear to you?” He answered him: “Neither they nor their reward.” He said to him: “Give me your hand.” He gave him his hand; and he revived him.

Then the Gemoreh inquires: **“אמאי לוקים רבי יוחנן—לנפשיה”**—why didn't Rabbi Yochanon revive himself? In other words, since Rabbi Yochanon was capable of reviving Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba from his illness, why couldn't he revive himself? The Gemoreh answers: **“אמרי אין חבוש מתיר עצמו—מבית האסורים”**—a captive cannot release himself from prison. In this situation, he required someone else's assistance.

Concerning this matter, we find a powerful question presented by the great Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, ztz"l, in his commentary on Rashi in parshas Vayeira. Concerning Yishmoel, the possuk states (Bereishis 21, 17): **“כי שמע אלקים אל קול הנוער באשר הוא שם”**—G-d has heeded the cry of the youth as he is, there. Rashi comments in the name of the Midrash: **“מכאן שיפה תפלת החולה מתפלת אחרים עליו והיא קודמת להתקבל”**—from here we see that the prayer of the sick person is more effective than the prayers of others on his behalf, and it is answered first.

The Mizrachi points out that this appears to contradict the Gemoreh quoted above. For, we learned that Rabbi Yochanon was unable to revive himself, because “a captive cannot release himself from prison.” If so, how can Rashi state that the prayer of the infirmed is more effective than the prayers of others on his behalf? The Mizrachi answers: **“צריך לומר משום דלא מצי**

“מכוין, אבל במצי מכוין טפי עדיף” —we must conclude that the Gemoreh is referring to a situation where the sick person is unable to focus; however, where he is able to focus and have proper intent then his efforts are preferable.

In his sefer Gur Aryeh (ibid.), however, the Maharal of Prague answers the Mizrahi’s question in a different manner:

“ובודאי דאין זה קושיא, דתפילה לא שייך ביה אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים, דהא תפילה היא והקב”ה מתיר אותו, אבל התם דאמר ליה הב לי ירך ואוקמיה, ופירוש התחזק עצמך ואז יגיע לך עזר אלקים שתהיה חזק, ובזה שייך אין חבוש מתיר עצמו, שאין האדם מתחזק עצמו וצריך אחר לחזקו, אבל תפילה לא שייך זה שהקב”ה שומע תפילתו ומחזקו”.

He writes that there is no difficulty here at all. The concept of “a captive cannot release himself from prison” does not apply to prayer, tefilah. In the case of tefilah, HKB”H releases the person from his bondage; HKB”H hears the person’s prayer and gives him strength. In the Gemoreh’s case, Rabbi Yochanon helps the person find strength, so that HKB”H will come to his aid. We should note that the Baal HaTurim in Tur HaAroch on the Torah (ibid.) already provided us with the very same answer.

יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ Invokes a Powerful Name that Cures the Sick

I have been inspired to elaborate on this subject and to provide a more in depth explanation for this answer provided by the Baal HaTurim and the Gur Aryeh. This explanation is based on the Agra D’Pirka (174), written by the great Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, zy”a, the author of the Bnei Yissoscher. He presents a fascinating idea from our teacher, the Arizal, found in Shaar Maamarei Razal (Beroches ibid.). According to the Arizal, our blessed sages were able to heal a person who was ill by holding their hand and invoking the holy name יל”י by focusing on the first letters of the three words יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ—meaning “he gave him his hand.” This powerful three letter name is the second of the seventy-two names derived from the three pesukim in parshas Beshalach. Here are his hallowed words:

“כבר הודעתוך כי בשם יל”י שהוא שם השני של שם ע”ב, בו העלה משה רבינו ע”ה לארונו של יוסף, וגם סגולת זה השם להקים את החולה מחוליו, ולכן נרמז בראשי תיבות יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ שהוא ראשי תיבות יל”י ובכן ואוקמיה כו’, ולכן צריך שיאמר לחולה הב לי ירך, ואז יתן ידו החולה, ואז יאמר לו המעמיד אותו יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ ואוקמיה, ויכוין בראשי תיבות של השם הנזכר”.

He writes that Moshe Rabeinu, a”h, used this name to raise Yosef’s coffin and it also has the power to heal the sick. Therefore, it is necessary for the healer to tell the sick person to give him his hand. Once the sick person does so, the healer utters the words יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ and revives the person by having in mind the holy three letter name represented by the first letters of those words.

The Agra D’Pirka notes in the name of the Arizal that this powerful name is also derived from the first letters of the words (Tehillim 23, 6 and 93, 5): יִי לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים—Hashem for the length of days. Hence, we see that this name is associated with longevity. So, by holding each other’s hands and focusing on the first letters of the words יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ—the name יל”י—they were able to heal the sick and prolong their lives.

We can now better understand the answer provided by our two great luminaries—the Baal HaTurim and the Gur Aryeh—concerning the question posed regarding Rashi’s comment in the name of the Midrash: “שיפה תפלת החולה מתפלת אחרים” -- עליו והיא קודמת להתקבל” the prayer of the sick person is more effective than the prayers of others on his behalf, and it is answered first. When the sick person himself utilizes the power of tefilah to pray to Hashem, his tefilah certainly takes precedence, since it is coming from a contrite, broken heart. Dovid HaMelech makes this point in Tehillim (34, 19): “קָרוֹב” ה’ לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי לֵב וְאֵת דַּכְּאֵי רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ” Hashem is close to the brokenhearted; and those crushed in spirit, He will save.

Yet, in the case of Rabbi Yochanon and Rabbi Chanineh, they realized by divine inspiration—ruach hakodesh—that the gates of tefilah had been shut and locked. Nevertheless, by invoking the powers inherent in the name יל”י—the power to heal—they succeeded in reviving the sick person. To accomplish this feat, it was necessary to join the right hand of the healer with the right hand of the sick person, fulfilling the condition of יִהְיֶה לְיָהּ יְדִיהּ—he gave him his hand—unleashing the effects of the name יל”י. Seen in this light, we can also understand why: “אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים” -- a captive cannot release himself from prison; the sick person requires another person’s right hand to invoke this holy name in order to affect a cure.

The Goen Chida’s Wonderful Answer

Now, let us enjoy the wonders of the Torah! Based on this foundation of the Arizal’s, we can clarify a puzzling comment of Rashi’s. We learned in the Gemoreh (Sanhedrin 95a) about

The source for these comments is found in the Midrash Tanchuma (Shoftim) addressing the possuk (Devorim 18, 14): **כי הגוים האלה אשר אתה יורש אותם אל מעוננים ואל קסמים ישמעו, ואתה לא כן נתן לך ה' אלקיך**—whereas the other nations which you shall inherit look toward the heavens and give credence to various forms of sorcery, this is not what Hashem, your G-d, has in store for you.

The Midrash explains that this is a reference to the constellations which the other nations believe in; whereas, Bnei Yisroel exist beyond the scope and influence of the zodiac signs.

The G-d of Avrohom Is Superior to the Zodiac Signs

From the Midrash it is apparent that there is an intimate connection between the two events: (1) the changing of Avrom's name to Avrohom and (2) that he was elevated to an existence above and beyond the influence of the zodiac signs. Let us endeavor to reveal the connection between the two. An obvious connection can be found in the Zohar hakadosh (Pinchos 216b), where we learn that this world was created with the letter "hei." The possuk states (Bereishis 2, 4): **אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם**—these are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created (בהבראם). Elucidating the word בהבראם, the Midrash states (B.R. 12, 10): **בה בראם**—they were created by means of the letter "hei." Hence, all of the constellations and zodiac signs were created with the letter "hei," and are sustained by the letter "hei."

It is clear, therefore, that the status of the letter "hei" is superior to that of the stars and constellations and, in fact, controls them. So, by adding the letter "hei" to Avrohom's name, HKB"H elevated him to an existence above the influence of the zodiac signs. Furthermore, the Zohar states that the letter "hei" with which the world was created has the power to affect one's ability to procreate. This fact is alluded to by the possuk (ibid. 47, 23): **הא לכם זרע**—here is seed for you; the possuk associates the word "hei" with seed. Due to the power of the letter "hei" Avrohom was able to produce holy offspring through Yitzchak Avinu.

To embellish the point, the Zohar hakodesh adds that the reason that Avrohom and his offspring were able to connect with the innate power of the letter "hei" was in the merit of their receiving the Torah and fulfilling its precepts. After all, the Torah is composed of five books—the numerical value of the letter "hei."

The sefer Amudehoh Shivah addresses the statement: **"אברם אינו מוליד אברהם מוליד"**-- Avrom will not bear a son, but Avrohom will have a son. So long as his name remained Avrom, without the letter "hei," it reflected a lack of fulfillment of the five books of the Torah. As a consequence, he could not produce offspring, since he remained under the control and influence of the stars and zodiac signs. Once, however, his name was switched to Avrohom, with the addition of the letter "hei," it reflected a fulfillment of the five books of the Torah. As a result, he was connected with the Torah which created the zodiac signs. Thus, he was able to produce offspring contrary to the dictates of nature and his astrological forecast.

The Letter "Hei" Is the Root of Life

Not only does the letter "hei" possess the capacity to influence procreation, it possesses the ability to affect the existence of all creatures. Therefore, damaging the letter "hei" causes the loss of life. The Zohar hakadosh (Nossoi 123a) discusses the letter "hei." It teaches the following: The entire world was created with it. It sustains the heavens and the earth and all of creation. If it is separated from the world for even an instant, everything will be destroyed; the world will cease to exist. The physical body depends on the letter "hei." The absence of the letter "hei" spells death and all that accompanies death—such as tumah and darkness.

Additionally, we learn from the Ohev Yisroel, citing the Rama of Pano, that not only does the letter "hei" influence the future of one's offspring, it also influences one's sustenance. This fact is alluded to by the continuation of the possuk quoted above: **הא לכם זרע וזרעתם את האדמה**—here is seed for you; sow the land. The letter "hei" provides both offspring with a future and physical sustenance.

In summary, we find that the letter "hei" is the source providing an abundance of children, life and sustenance-- **בני, חיי, מזוני**.

The Word "בהבראם" Is an Anagram for באברהם and for בה בראם

It is well-known that the purpose of creation was so that the Almighty could shower kindness and favor upon creation. The Arizal expresses this principle as follows: **כשעלה ברצונו יתברך שמו לברוא את העולם כדי להיטיב לברואיו ויכירו גדולתו**—in appreciation of this kindness and favor, His creatures must

recognize His greatness. Thus, creating the world with the letter “hei”--“**נה' בראם**”—was simply a form of Tzedokeh. Thus, the word “**צדק**” can be broken down to “**צדק ה'**”—alluding to the truth and justice inherent in the letter “hei.”

We have also learned from the Zohar hakodesh (Lech Lecho 88a): “**באתערותא דלתתא אשתכח אתערותא לעילא**”—in order to trigger a particular response from above, it is first necessary to perform an appropriate provocative action down below. The Sheloh hakodesh (Mishpotim) describes this concept based on the Midrash on the possuk in Tehillim (121, 5):

“ה' צלך - מהו ה' צלך, כצלך, מה צלך אם אתה משחק לו הוא משחק לך, ואם אתה בוכה לו הוא בוכה כנגדך, ואם אתה מראה לו פנים זעומות או מסוברות אף הוא נותן לך כך, אף הקב"ה ה' צלך, כשם שאתה הווה עמו הוא הווה עמך.”

“Hashem is your shadow”—He treats you the way you treat Him—in mirror fashion.

So, if we want to trigger an action from HKB”H, we have to perform an appropriate action. If we want to receive HKB”H’s abundant good and favor from the letter “hei,” we must first perform an act of holy service that will cause Him to open His hand, so to speak.

This is clearly spelled out by a Midrash Aggadah presented by the Ramban (Shemos 3, 13): **“וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֵהִיָּהּ - וַיֹּמַר מֹשֶׁה אֵהִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר אֵהִיָּהּ, כִּשְׁמֵ שְׂאֵתָהּ הוּוֹה עִמִּי כִּךְ אֲנִי הוּוֹה עִמָּךְ, אִם פּוֹתַחִין אֶת יָדֵיהֶם וְעוֹשִׂין צְדָקָה אִף אֲנִי אֶפְתַּח אֶת הַיָּד, שְׁנֵאמַר (דְּבָרִים כח יב) יִפְתַּח ה' לְךָ אֶת אוֹצְרוֹ הַטּוֹב”** Elokim said to Moshe **“אֵהִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר אֵהִיָּהּ”** (literally, “I shall be as I shall be”). According to the Midrash, the phrase **“אֵהִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר אֵהִיָּהּ”** conveys the message that just as you behave with Me, so too will I behave with you — if you open your hands and give Tzedokeh, I, too, will open My hand and give of My treasure.

We can now appreciate why the Torah emphasizes the actual opening of one’s hand concerning the mitzveh of Tzedokeh: **כי פתוח תפתח את ידך לו**. First we must open our hands, which have five fingers—corresponding to the numerical value of the letter “hei”—and show mercy to those in need, thereby fulfilling the mitzveh of Tzedokeh. Thus, we trigger a response in kind from HKB”H—reflecting the concept of **“ה' צלך”**--Hashem is your shadow—His actions mirror our actions. HKB”H will also perform an act of **“צדק ה' - צדק”**—releasing the bounty stored above in the letter “hei.” This sequence of events is ever apparent in the possuk: **נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתן לו,**

--כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברוך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשיך ובכל משלח ידך-- you shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking.

How beautifully this explains the connection between the two elucidations presented by the Midrash (B.R. 12, 9) on the possuk: **“אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם”**. First, the Midrash teaches that: **“נהבראם - באברהם”**—the word **נהבראם** is an anagram for **באברהם**—indicating that the heavens and the earth were created in the merit of Avrohom. Immediately afterwards (ibid. 10) the Midrash teaches: **“נהבראם - בהבראם”**—the word **נהבראם** also indicates that the world was created with the letter “hei.” Based on our previous discussion, the connection between these two elucidations is quite clear. In the merit of Avrohom Avinu opening up the five-- “hei”—fingers of his hand to give Tzedokeh to the poor and to fulfill the mitzveh of “hachnosas orchim,” even at the risk of self-sacrifice, he merited unleashing the abundant bounty from its source in the letter “hei”—the letter with which the world was created. This is reflected by the fact that HKB”H added the letter “hei” to his name.

For this very reason, HKB”H beseeches us: **“לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ידך מאחריך האביון, כי פתוח תפתח את ידך לו”**—you shall not harden your heart nor shall you close your hand against your destitute brother. Rather, opening, you shall open your hand to him. Please follow in the footsteps of your father Avrohom who opened his hand with such generosity so that HKB”H ultimately created the world in his merit via the letter “hei”—as we learned from the two midrashim above. In the merit of opening the five—“hei”—fingers of our hands: **“יברוך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשיך ובכל משלח ידך”**—Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking.

The Amazing yet Practical Benefit of “הב לי ירך”—Joining Hands

Continuing along this exalted path, let us now explain the enlightening passage in the Gemoreh depicting Rabbi Yochanon and Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba who became ill and later on a similar situation involving Rabbi Yochanon and Rabbi Chanineh. In both instances, the one who comes to heal addresses the one who is ill: **“אמר ליה חביבין עליך יסורין, אמר ליה לא הן ולא שכרן, אמר ליה הב לי ירך, יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה”**—He asked him: “Are afflictions dear to you?” He answered him: “Neither they nor their reward.” He said to him: “Give me your hand.” He

gave him his hand; and he revived him. When Rabbi Yochanon realized that Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba took ill as a result of the sins of his generation and was in mortal danger, he endeavored to connect him with the life force inherent in the letter “hei”—the letter with which this world was created.

However, he was well aware that it was first necessary to perform a provocative action down below to trigger the desired action from above. To accomplish this, Rabbi Yochanon requested at first that Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba give him his hand: “הב לי ירך”. Knowing that Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba’s holy hand was always open giving Tzedokeh to the poor, he wished to utilize that hand to affect a cure. Yet, due to the transgressions that were prevalent in that generation, his letter “hei” had been tainted; consequently, its positive influence had been compromised. Hence, Rabbi Yochanon wished to achieve a רפואה שלמה—a complete cure and recovery—both for Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba and the damaged letter “hei.” The letters of the word רפואה can be rearranged to form רופא-ה; the word שלמה can be read as שלם-ה; together they signify the healing and restoration of the letter “hei” to its unblemished optimal state.

Realizing that Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba’s hand had been compromised by the sins of his generation, Rabbi Yochanon cleverly joined his own holy hand with Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba’s. His holy hand was also constantly open to all those in need, and his hand had not been tainted. For, it is one of Hashem’s many acts of chesed that the sins of a generation do not affect or sully all of the tzaddikim in a given generation. This chesed is necessary for the survival of the world. By joining hands, Rabbi Yochanon was able to repair the damage done to Rabbi Chiyeh bar Abba’s “hei.”

We can now appreciate why when Rabbi Yochanon became ill himself, he was unable to cure himself. In the words of the Gemoreh: “אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים”. A captive cannot release himself, because his own “hei” has been compromised due to the sins of that generation; therefore, he requires the assistance of a colleague, whose “hei” remains unblemished. By joining hands, the healthy person can revive the sick person by affording his “hei” a רפואה שלמה - רופא ה שלם—a ridding the “hei” of all harmful effects caused by that generation.

Also, by joining hands, these holy personages fulfilled the words of wisdom expressed by the wisest of all men (Koheles 4, 9): “טובים השנים מן האחד אשר יש להם שכר טוב בעמלם, כי אם יפלו האחד יקים את חברו, ואילו האחד שיפול ואין שני להקימו”—two are better than one, for they get a greater return for their labor. For should they fall, one can lift the other; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no one to lift him!

Let us conclude by suggesting how simple folk like us can employ this segulah to heal those who are ill. By opening our hands generously, willingly and frequently in the act of Tzedokeh: “כי פתוח תפתח את ירך לו”—we will in essence be performing a provocative act down below to release the wonderful abundance in store for us above stemming from the heavenly letter “hei.” We will be provided with health, life and sustenance as promised by the possuk: “כי בגלל הדבר הזה” --for in return for this matter, Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking.



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