

Take Care of Your Health

Jewish Ethics: Lesson 4

By Rabbi Yudi Zarchi

Chabad of Markham

Whose body

- 1) Behold, all souls are Mine. (Ezekiel 18:4)

Health

- 2) But beware and watch yourself very well, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest these things depart from your heart, all the days of your life, and you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children. And you shall watch yourselves very well, for you did not see any image on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire. (Deuteronomy 4:9, 15)

Chovel

- 3) R' Elazar Hakappar Beribi says: what does the Torah teach [when it states concerning the Nazir] And he shall atone for him for having sinned against his soul? Against which soul did this man sin? Rather, [because] he deprived himself of wine. Now is the matter not a Kal Vachomer? If this one, who deprived himself of only wine, is called a sinner, someone who deprives himself of all such things, how much more so. (Talmud, Bava Kama 91b)

Safety

- 4) Since maintaining a healthy and sound body is among the ways of God - for one cannot understand nor have any knowledge of the Creator, if he is ill - therefore, he must avoid that which harms the body and accustom himself to that which is healthful and helps the body become stronger. (Rambam, Laws of Dispositions 4:1)
- 5) When you build a new house, you shall make a guard rail for your roof, so that you shall not cause blood [to be spilled] in your house, that the one who falls should fall from it [the roof]. (Deuteronomy 22:8)
- 6) This requirement applies to a roof, and similarly, to any place that might present a danger and cause a person to stumble and die. For example, if a person has a well or a cistern in his courtyard, he must erect a sand wall ten handbreadths high around them or make a cover for them, so that a person will not fall in and die.

Similarly, it is a positive mitzvah to remove any obstacle that could pose a danger to life, and to be very careful regarding these matters, as Deuteronomy 4:9 states: "Beware for yourself; and guard your soul." If a person leaves a dangerous obstacle and does not remove it, he negates the observance of a positive commandment, and violates the negative commandment: "Do not cause blood to be spilled." (Rambam, Laws of Murder and Preservation of Life 11:4)

Danger

- 7) A person should never stand in a dangerous place and say, "a miracle will be performed for me", because the miracle may never be performed for him. And [even] if you find [your way] to say a miracle will be performed for him, it will be deducted from his merits. (Talmud, Shabbos 32a)

Momentary Life

- 8) Now there were four men, stricken with Tzaraat, [at] the entrance of the gate. And they said to each other, "Why are we sitting here until we die? If we propose to enter the city, with the famine in the city, we will die there, and if we stay here we will die. So now, let us go and let us defect to the Aramean camp. If they spare us we will live, and if they kill us we will die." (Kings 2, 7:3-4)

Shomer Peta'im Hashem

- 9) Rav Papa said: Hence, no circumcision may be performed on a cloudy day or on a day when the South wind blows; nor may one be bled on such a day. At the present time, however, since many have trampled [a beaten path] upon it we say (Psalms 116:6) Hashem protects the simple. (Talmud, Yevamot 72a)

For one's livelihood

- 10) You shall give him his wage on his day and not let the sun set over it, for he is poor, and he risks his life for it, so that he should not cry out to the Lord against you, so that there should be sin upon you. (Deuteronomy 24:15) Why did this [worker] climb a [high] ramp [to work], or suspend himself on the tree [to collect fruits], placing himself in mortal danger? [Was it] not for his wage? (Talmud, Bava Metzia 112a)

Doing a Mitzvah

- 11) Why Rabbi Elazar said: Those sent to perform a Mitzvah are not harmed neither on their way [to do the Mitzvah] nor on their return? It was a rickety ladder and a place where harm is ever present, is different. For it is written: But Samuel asked, 'how can I go? If Saul finds out, he will kill me.' (Talmud Chulin 142a)