



# THE WINGS OF THE SUN

Traditional Jewish Healing in Theory and Practice

By [Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum](#)

---

## Supplementary Readings

### 1. The medicine of Torah must be administered softly

Likutey Moharan I, 164

Why does the Tzaddik tell stories? It's like when a doctor becomes sick and is forced to put himself in the hands of an outstanding specialist. The sick doctor wants to be given the kind of simple treatment he understands.... But the specialist knows very special remedies which he has to give him. Similarly it may happen that a person comes to the outstanding Sage and Tzaddik of the generation, who is the doctor of the ailments of the soul. The person wants the Tzaddik to give him medicines, i.e. spiritual pathways, in accordance with what he understands. But the Tzaddik has far more exalted medicines which he has to give him.

Sometimes it is necessary to give the patient a certain drug, but if the patient receives it just as it is he will undoubtedly die. Therefore the drug in question must be mixed with other things. Similarly, there are people to whom it is impossible to reveal the inner face of the Torah teachings they need for their healing. For the Torah brings healing, as it is written, "It will be health to your navel" (Proverbs 3:8). But the Torah has two powers: it can be either an elixir of life or a fatal poison, as our Rabbis said: "If a person is deserving, it becomes an elixir of life; if not, it becomes a fatal poison" (Yoma 72b). For this reason, if the person is given the teaching the way it is, he will certainly die, because for him, as someone who is as yet unworthy, it is a fatal poison. It is thus essential to clothe the inner face of the teaching within other Torah teachings.

Sometimes this also is too much for the person to bear. The Tzaddik must then clothe his Torah teachings in apparently mundane stories or conversations in order that the person will be able to receive the medicine hidden beneath the surface. For the Torah teaching itself is now clothed within stories and conversations, because it was impossible to give it the way it really is.

### 2. Fever from overeating

Know that fever can be brought on by overeating. For a person who eats more than he needs is like an animal. One of the marks of human dignity is to eat only what one needs. To eat more than that is to act like an animal, who eats and chews the whole day. This can bring on fever, God forbid. Another thing that can cause fever is when a person accidentally eats food containing sparks that have not yet been sufficiently refined for human consumption and are still fit only for animal consumption (unless the person in question is someone very great, who can skip a complete level and elevate such food to the level of human food).

### Fire and Water

For when a person eats like an animal he descends from the level of a man to that of an animal. It is written, "You have caused men to ride over our heads; we've been through fire and water" (Psalms 66:12). "You have caused men to ride over our heads" - i.e. the human level is now above this person, because he has fallen below the human level and descended to that of an animal. As a result, "we've been through fire and water." This is the fever, with its alternating heat and cold.

We can now explain the saying of our Rabbis that "when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the first man, ' And you will eat the grass of the field' (Genesis 3:18), Adam started shaking all over. He said, ' Will I be eating from the same trough as a donkey?' But when he was told, ' By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread' (ibid. v.19), he was relieved and his mind became settled again" (Tanna devei Eliyahu 31). His "shaking all over" is the fever that comes from eating the "grass of the field," which is animal food. "His mind (da'at) became settled again" - because fever signifies a flaw in one's knowledge and awareness of God, da'at. For a person with da'at is able to understand that divine mercy and severity, although apparent opposites, both stem from God's unity, and thus da'at makes harmony between fire and water, whereas in a fever the body temperature is out of balance. The reason why Adam became settled again when he was told, "with the sweat of your brow, etc." is that the remedy for fever is to sweat. That is why "his mind became settled again" - because a settled mind indicates that the fever, which signifies a flaw in da'at, has been cured.

## 3. Epidemics

### Tzaddik #459

Sometimes an epidemic breaks out, and the way it spreads is that one person catches it from another. There are differences in the way such an illness starts. Sometimes a person becomes afflicted directly because of a heavenly decree, without catching the illness from someone who already has it. In other cases, people become sick indirectly - in the sense that they catch the illness from

somebody else. The difference is that in the case of the person who is afflicted directly, the illness manifests itself with its full array of symptoms. Thus, in the case of catarrh, the main symptom is headache, but there are also other symptoms, such as nasal congestion, sneezing, etc. Each of the different symptoms is a sickness in its own right. Whoever is sent the illness directly, as opposed to catching it from others, exhibits all the symptoms in their entirety. However, those who catch the illness from others do not exhibit all the symptoms.

#### 4. Faith in God, not in the means

Likutey Moharan I, 62:6

The most serious error of those who are distant from true faith in God stems from the fact that in the main our knowledge of His Godliness is based on inferences we make about levels that are concealed from us on the basis of what we can see in the visible world. As far as they can see, the universe appears to be governed by the stars and galaxies, and as a result they have fallen into errors of various kinds. Some think that everything in the world is governed only by the laws of nature. Others believe it necessary to worship the intermediary. This was the mistake of those who worshiped the Golden Calf: they wanted to make the calf an intermediary between themselves and God, which is why they wanted to make a god "that will go before us" (Exodus 32:1), i.e. an intermediary.

Very many people fall into errors of this kind, making the means through which something comes about into an intermediary between themselves and God. That is, they believe in God, but they also believe in the intermediary, saying that we have no option but to depend upon a particular means in order to bring something about. For example, they put their faith in their business activities as the cause of their livelihood, putting all the emphasis on their work, as if God would somehow not be able to give them a livelihood without their engaging in business. Similarly people put all the emphasis on the means through which healing comes about - the medicine - as if without medicine God does not have the power to heal. This is not so. The Holy One, blessed be He, is the Cause of all causes, and there is no absolute need for any one particular means. Even while resorting to a given means of trying to bring something about, we must believe only in God, and not put our faith in the means.

And when the prayer of the Tzaddik alters the course of events, negating the apparent inevitability of nature, this is visible evidence that God exists and listens to the prayer of the Tzaddik, reshaping the entire natural order. But all this will be in the future, as our Sages said: "The Tzaddikim will bring the dead back to life" and other wonders (Pesachim 68a).

#### 5. The hands of the angels

Know that from every single word that came from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, an angel was created (Chagigah 14a). And every single word was divided into many sparks "as a hammer smashes a rock" (Jeremiah 23:29 and see Shabbat 88b), and many, many angels were created corresponding to the multitude of sparks. A word consisting of many sparks created a ruling angel who is chief over all the angels created from the sparks, and these secondary angels make up his camp.

Each individual angel is in charge of something. Even the trees and herbs all have captains over them, as our Sages said: "There isn't a single blade of grass down below that does not have an angel in the world above overseeing it" (Bereshit Rabbah 10). Each angel receives vitality from the Word of God (i.e. the Torah) that brought it into being, and in turn sends vitality into the thing it is in charge of, be it a blade of grass or something else. The two powers of the angel - to receive and to dispense - are called "hands." With the "right hand" the angel receives vitality, and with the "left hand" it gives it over, "striking [the blade of grass] and saying 'Grow!'" (Bereshit Rabbah ibid.) The blow is in the category of the left hand.

### Faith in the Sages

Thus all remedies depend on the Torah, which is "health to all one's flesh" (Proverbs 4:22). For the Torah gives power to the angels, which in turn hand it over to the herbs and plants, whose power to cure comes from the Torah. But when a person lacks faith in the Sages and breaks the enactments they instituted as a protective fence around the Torah, there is no cure for his illness. As the Rabbis commented in one such case, "Perhaps a 'snake of the Rabbis' bit him and there's no cure" (Shabbat 110a). For someone who breaks a rabbinic "fence" disempowers the hands of the angels to the exact degree that he veers from the path laid down by the Rabbis. In commanding us to adhere to the teachings of the rabbis, the Torah says, "You must not turn aside from the thing they tell you either to the right hand or to the left" (Deuteronomy 17:11). If a person veers from the path of rabbinic teachings to the right, he disempowers the right hand of the angel, and it has no power to receive. If he veers to the left, this disempowers the left hand of the angel, which is then unable to give. When one or other of the hands of the angel is harmed, this person has no cure: the herb he needs for his cure has no healing power, because it has nothing to give it power.

"Every sickness and every plague which is not written in the book of this law" (Deuteronomy 28:61) - this refers to the "death of a Torah scholar," i.e. the death caused to a person by the Torah scholars, in the sense that the illness that strikes a person for contravening the teachings of the Rabbis has no cure, and he dies of the illness. This is the death that comes through "a plague which is not written in the book of this law," because the teachings of the Oral Law, which are not written in the Torah scroll, were entrusted to the Sages, and we are commanded to listen to them. There are cases of people who despise the words of the Sages and do not believe in them, because it seems to them that

what the Sages say does not conform with the letter of the Torah. As a result, these people are afflicted with an illness which has no cure, and die from it....

### Rectifying the angel's hands

"He draws the mighty with his power; he rises up, and he does not believe in his life" (Job 24:22). The Sages are called "alive," as the Rabbis said (Berakhot 18a-b): "' Benayah the son of Yehoyada, the son of a living man' (Samuel II, 23:20) - even after death the tzaddikim are called alive." However, when a person does not have faith in the Sages, he falls prey to a sickness so serious that "he does not believe in his life," i.e. nobody believes he will recover from this illness and live, because there is no cure for his wound. The remedy is for him to elevate his fallen faith and believe in the Sages. This is alluded to in the words of the verse in Job: "he rises up, and he does not believe in his life" - i.e. whereas before, he did not believe "in his life," i.e. in the Sages, who are called alive, he now raises up this fallen faith, and through this "he rises up," i.e. he rises out of this illness which was so severe that until now nobody could believe that there could be any remedy for his wound.

And through his very faith he is healed, because through faith in the Sages he repairs the hands of the angels, which are now able to receive power and channel it to the plants and herbs he needs for his cure. This is alluded to in the first words of the above-quoted verse from Job, "He draws the mighty with his power (kocho)": the "mighty" are the angels. Now each one has his power (Ko'aCh) restored, i.e. the twenty-eight phalanges of the two hands (the numerical value of the letters Kaph Chet is 28), and is thus able to send power to everything which is under its command. This person can then be cured, because the words of the Sages rectify the hands.

## 6. Healing from matzah

Likutey Moharan I, 56:8-9

"Matzah brings healing" (Zohar II, 183b). The reason is that matzah signifies conflict for the sake of Heaven [the Aramaic root matza denotes struggle]. Such conflict eventually leads to enhanced awareness and understanding of God and to greater harmony. This is why matzah brings healing, because harmony and peace bring healing, as it is written, "Peace! Peace to the one who is far off and the one who is close, says God... and I will heal him" (Isaiah 57:19). For the main cause of illness, God forbid, is a lack of harmony. The four basic elements making up the body are in conflict, with one element rising up against another. Therefore peace brings healing. And this explains why matzah is called "the bread of the poor" (Deuteronomy 16:3) - because "a person is only poor if he has no awareness of God" (Nedarim 41a). This is the root of illness. Thus Yonadav asked the sick Amnon, "Why, son of the king, are you so poor?" (Samuel II, 13:4). Matzah - Godly awareness - is the remedy, and this is why it is called the "bread of the poor" - because it is the remedy for "poverty."

## 7. Healing a wound

Likutey Moharan II, 4:12

The Torah contains the remedy for all maladies, and all the ideas discussed earlier in the main body of this discourse (not translated here) are bound up with healing. Charity brings healing, as it is written, "To you who fear My name the sun of charity will rise, with healing in its wings" (Malachi 3:20). The holy elder (ZaKeN) - "this one has acquired (Zeh KaNah) wisdom" (Kiddushin 32b) - brings healing, as it is written, "The tongue of the wise is health" (Proverbs 12:18).

. brings healing, as it is written, "God has sent me to bind up the broken hearted... to proclaim a year of favor" (Isaiah 61:1-2). And the act of creation brings healing, as it is written, "Healing came to the work in their hands" (Chronicles II, 24:13).

For the healing of a wound comes about in stages. In the first instance the wound must be opened. Next it is necessary to apply a drawing agency in order to draw out the infected blood and fluids from inside the wound. After this, all the blood must be cleansed until no impurities are left, so that the blood can circulate normally without obstruction. For when the blood circulates normally around the body, when it reaches a spot that is injured, i.e. the place of the wound, the blood is held up there, and all the impurities in the blood collect in that place. That is what normally happens: all the various different kinds of impurities in the blood collect in the place of the injury, and then the blood is obstructed there and is unable to circulate freely. For the blood circulates around the entire body in a fixed manner so many times an hour. But when there are impurities in the blood, the blood is held up at the injured spot and is unable to circulate properly. This is why it is necessary to cleanse and purify the blood. Finally, the mouth of the wound must be closed.

Each of these stages of healing is accomplished by means of the concepts discussed in the lesson. Charity causes the wound to open, as it is written, "Do not close your hand to your needy brother. You must open up your hand..." (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). The drawing power is wisdom, as it is written, "The power to draw wisdom is more precious than pearls (PeNiNim)" (Job 28:18) - wisdom draws out that which is hidden from deep, deep inside (miliPhNey umiliPhNim) (see Yerushalmi Shabbat 10 on Proverbs 3:15). That is, wisdom draws out and removes the damage from deep inside, from all the innermost places.

The three pilgrim festivals are when God's will and favor are revealed, and it is through this that the blood is cleansed and purified so that it can then circulate normally. The concept of the pilgrim or "foot" festival (ReGeL) is bound up with that of the spring known as Ayn RoGeL (Kings I, 1:9), which was so called because the launderers used to tread the garments with their feet under the water in order to remove the dirt (see Rashi ad loc.). That is, through the foot festival, when God's favor is revealed, the blood is cleansed and purified and can then circulate normally. This is why the festival is also called ChaG, which has the connotation of circulation, as in "He sits above the circle (ChuG) of the

earth" (Isaiah 40:22).

The act of creation involves the concept of mercy, for "the world was built with mercy" (Psalms 89:3). All the above stages bring about the flow of God's mercy, which then sustains the world, freeing the Jewish People for their spiritual mission: "and you will be called the priests of God" (Isaiah 61:6). Through the priest, who is the embodiment of mercy, the mouth of the wound is closed, as it is written, "And the priest will close up the wound" (Leviticus 13:4). For through mercy (i.e. the priest), the wound is totally closed and healed completely.

## 8. The month of Iyar: A time to heal

Likutey Moharan I, 277

All medicines come from the earth. Therefore during the season when the earth gives forth her bounty and puts strength into all the trees and plants, i.e. during the month of Iyar when the fruits ripen, all medicinal plants have greater power, because the earth then puts strength into them. However at other times, even if one were to take exactly the same medicines, they would not have the same power. This is why people take medicines in the month of Iyar - May.

The principal location is the Land of Israel, because all the different countries receive from the residue of the Land of Israel (Ta'anit 10a). The Land of Israel has two aspects: sometimes it is called the Land of Canaan, at other times it is simply called the Land. At times of conflict it is called the Land of Canaan. The name Canaan implies KaN 'ANI, "here is a poor person," as the Rabbis commented on the verse (Zechariah 14:21): "And on that day there will no longer be any Canaanite in the house of God" - "there is no one poor here." Canaan thus implies "here is a poor person." The reason is because of conflict, for "one controversy destroys a hundred livelihoods (see Sh'ney Luchot HaBrit 142a). Thus the Torah tells us that "there was strife between the shepherds of Abram's cattle and the shepherds of Lot's cattle," and immediately afterwards it is written: "the Canaanite... then lived in the land" (Genesis 13:7). It was because of the strife and conflict that the "Canaanite" was present, and the land is then called the Land of Canaan.

But when there is peace it is simply called the Land, and then "the land gives her bounty" (Psalms 67:7), i.e. the earth gives her power to all the fruits of the land, and all the medicinal plants and herbs have strength. For this reason the Hebrew letters making up the name of the month of Iyar (יָאֵר) are the initial letters of the words 'וְיָשׁוּבּוּ יְעִיבוֹשׁוּ רֹגָא' (Oyvai Yoshuvu Yeivoshu Roga), "my enemies will turn back, they will be ashamed suddenly" (ibid. 6:11). For this is the season for all the medicines, which are bound up with the concept of peace - "the land gives her bounty" - the opposite of conflict, which is the concept of the Land of Canaan.

The letters making up the name of אני, Iyar, are also the initial letters in the verse אני יהוה רופאך (Ani YHVH Rof'ekha), "I am HaShem your healer" (Exodus 15:26).

## 9. Sweetening pain with divine awareness

Likutey Moharan I, 250

Know that the only reason why we feel pain and suffering is because of a lack of da'at, awareness of and connection with God. Someone who possesses da'at knows that everything is sent by God, and feels no pain or suffering, because "God gave and God took" (Job 1:21). It is true that there is a certain kind of suffering that is inevitable. This is the pain felt when the soul leaves the body, the pain of illness that comes when the soul begins to separate itself from the body. The soul is so tightly bound to the body in this life that one inevitably feels pain at the moment of separation.

Nevertheless, this suffering is very easy to bear if one knows clearly that everything is under God's providence. And this applies all the more to other forms of pain and suffering, which a person who possesses da'at does not feel at all. The main reason why a person feels pain and suffering is because his da'at is taken from him so that he will feel the pain.

### Exile and the law of nature

The main reason for the suffering of the Jewish People in exile is that they have fallen from da'at and attribute everything to nature, chance and fate. This is why they experience pain and suffering. It has come upon them because they live amidst the non-Jews and have learned from them. They see the gentiles in their hour of ascendancy, while the Jews are lowly and despised. As a result the Jews have been influenced by the non-Jews and attribute everything to nature or chance.

This is the only reason for their suffering, because if they had the da'at to understand that everything is under God's providence they would feel no pain at all. The truth is that the Jewish People are beyond nature. It is only when they sin that they fall under the law of nature, just like the nations of the world, who are governed by nature and are subject to the stellar influences. The Jews then experience exile and suffering. The main reason for their exile and pain is that they lack da'at and attribute everything to nature....

### Providence and prayer

In time to come, at the end of history in its present form, "nature" as we think of it will disappear, and the world will be governed only by providence, "For the heavens will vanish away like smoke and the earth will be worn out like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6). What this means is that the natural order as governed by the system of stars and planets will no longer operate as such. The expression



"vanish away" in the verse signifies that all the constellations will be thrown into confusion and mixed up. Stellar influences and "fate" will no longer dominate; everything will be governed only by God's providence. The Jewish People will then be in the ascendant....

Through prayer we have the power to channel God's providence in a way that goes beyond nature. Nature may dictate one thing, but prayer has the power to change nature. This is "greatness" - "For what great nation is there that has God so near to them as HaShem our God whenever we call on Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7) This is our greatness - that God hears our prayers and alters the course of nature through His providence. Thus Yehoram, King of Israel, said to Gehazi, "Please tell me the great things that Elisha did" (Kings II, 8:4), for "Whatever Elisha did, he accomplished through prayer" (Megilah 27a). Thus prayer, which gives us access to the realm of miracles and providence, the very opposite of nature, is "great."

Why do we cry when in pain?

Why do people shed tears when in pain? Tears draw down God's providence. This we learn from the rabbinic interpretation of the verse, "And the clouds return after the rain" (Ecclesiastes 12:2) - "This refers to a person's eyesight, which becomes weaker through crying [literally, the vision goes after the tears]" (Shabbat 151a). From this we learn that tears take away part of one's vision. The fact that tears weaken a person's eyesight and take part of it away means that the vision is drawn into the tears. And this is why people shed tears when in pain. When a person feels pain and suffering, it means he needs God's providence to be saved. This is why people cry - so as to thereby bring down and reveal God's watchful providence. For the providence and vision are drawn into the tears. This is why "Hezekiah wept sorely [literally, a great weeping]" (Isaiah 38:3) when he fell sick. Through his tears he drew down God's watchful providence, which is the concept of "greatness" and prayer.

[BACK TO WINGS OF THE SUN HOMEPAGE](#)

[AZAMRA HOMEPAGE](#)

By Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Greenbaum  
© AZAMRA INSTITUTE 5767 - 2007 All rights reserved