

רקח מרקחת
פרשת אחרי מות-קדושים

I heard the following מעשה told by ר' שלום שבדרון on tape. There was once a בחור that came to learn in ראדין that had a terrible מחלה. The doctors said he was incurable, so he came to the חפץ חיים and pleaded for an עצה or a ברכה. The חפץ חיים told him that he must go to a certain town and ask the רב there for a ברכה. The חפץ חיים promised that he would then be healed. But there is one תנאי - he must agree never to tell anyone of what had happened. So the young man gave his word. He travelled to the town, got a ברכה, and indeed returned to health.

Many years passed. The man married, and remained in good health. But then his sister-in-law contracted that same disease. His wife urged him to divulge the cure that worked to heal him. He refused to say, but she continued to insist so he had no choice but to tell the whole story. Just a short while later, he came down with the מחלה once again. So he went back to the חפץ חיים in ראדין. Crying, he told over what happened. The חפץ חיים gave a krechtz. He said, "I'm sorry but there's nothing I can do. The first time around, I fasted and davened for forty days, but now I am old and it's impossible for me to fast."

It's a מחלוקת ראשונים how to understand the מצוה of ממוך לרעה. According to the רמב"ם it is to be taken literally. The רמב"ן disagrees and writes that it is a הפלגה (exaggeration) and the idea is not to have קנאה but rather to want good for other people.

Clearly the חפץ חיים sided with the פשט of ממש! To fast forty days for another person while trying to conceal that he was deserving of the credit. The באה התורה, פרק י"א מסילת ישרים writes in וכללה כלל שהכל נכלל בו "ואהבת לרעך כמוך", כמוך- בלי שום הפרש, כמוך- בלי חלוקים, בלי תחבולות ומזמות, כמוך- ממש!

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Last week, we discussed the מדרש that says, אם זכה אדם אומרים לו אתה קדמת למלאכי השרת, ואם לאו אומרים לו זבוב קדמך דברי תורה. The words of חז"ל translated literally are quite harsh. Although sometimes קשין כגידין, in this case the פשט we quoted from the מפרשי המדרש took all the bite out of it.

Another clarification, when we referred to the situation of a person whose גוף is in control, the intention was the גוף controlling the נשמה. Meaning someone who follows תאוות הגוף like מאכלות etc. We weren't referring to tending to one's health and happiness; that is certainly permissible and commendable.

I would like to add another thought in regards to the מדרש. It is interesting to note that ריש לקיש was a bandit in his youth. Through the guidance of ר' יוחנן he left thievery and began to study תורה, eventually becoming a תלמיד חבר. ר' יוחנן of ריש לקיש is expressing here just how far he came, from a מצב of זבוב קדמך to אתה קדמת למלאכי השרת. א גוט שבת!