

Heart Disease

“What are you cooking, Imma?”
 “Liver, Chaim.”
 “It smells delicious, Imma. May I have a taste?”
 “You surely may, Chaim. However, don’t be surprised if it is a bit difficult to chew.”

Chaim takes the piece of liver and begins chewing.

“It is very difficult to chew, Imma. Did you cook it enough?”

“I roasted it to get the blood out and then I cooked it. Liver is unique among meats, the more you cook it, the harder it gets. Therefore, this liver is tough. I am planning to grind it to make chopped liver.”

“Sounds yummy, Imma. The Medrash Rabba says exactly what you said about liver.”

“Very interesting Chaim. In what context?”

“It is speaking about Paroh. Hashem ‘hardened his heart’. The verse uses the word *‘hichbaditi’*, which is the same as the word *‘koved’* - liver. Just as a liver becomes hard with cooking, so too Paroh’s heart became hard. The Medrash continues to explain that this is the reason why he did not listen to Hashem’s words. Imma, I always wanted to know what is the connection between the two - a hard heart, and not listening to Hashem. We always think of a hard-hearted person as cruel or unfeeling, but not unable to listen.”

“A bba told me a wonderful Devar Torah on this very subject, Chaim. Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt”l the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva quotes a verse and a Medrash in Koheles (1:15) to explain the subject. ‘I spoke with my heart,’ says Shlomo HaMelech. ‘The heart sees...the heart hears...the heart speaks...’ says the Medrash. It goes on to list 58 actions that the heart performs, bringing a verse to prove each one.”

“Fascinating. The heart is the center of the person’s existence.”

“Correct. Rav Yerucham concludes that when the heart is healthy, everything is right with the person. He sees, hears, speaks, and does everything else properly. However, when his heart is sick, he cannot hear. That was Paroh’s problem. His inability to hear the word of Hashem was due to his ‘heart disease’. The symptom of his illness was confusion. First Paroh said, ‘Who is Hashem, that I should heed His voice?’ (Shemos 5:2). He did not recognize The Almighty. Then he said, ‘Pray to Hashem to remove the frogs from me and my people’ (Shemos 8:4). He changed his mind and did recognize Him. Later the Torah relates that he did not listen to Moshe and Aharon (Shemos 8:11). Then he changed his mind again! ‘I sinned this time. Hashem is the Tsaddik, and I and my nation are guilty’ (Shemos 9:27). He kept

flipping back and forth. That is because his heart was not straight.”

“I see, Imma. Is it still true in our days?”

“Yes, Chaim. Rav Yerucham goes on to describe a person who is ill, trying to get comfortable in bed. He lays on his right side, and then shifts to his left. He is still uneasy. He finally feels a little better on his back. Then he props his feet and head up with pillows, and he relieves most of his discomfort. Is he uncomfortable because he cannot find the right position? Not at all. He feels badly because he is sick. If he were healthy, he would feel good in any position. So too with the heart. A person who is confused due to an unhealthy heart, can claim that he is not happy or motivated because of his environment. The food is bad, someone hurt my feelings, I am tired, etc. However, these are only symptoms of ‘spiritual heart disease’. The person with a spiritually healthy heart will be okay in all situations.”

“Therefore, the cure must work on the root of the illness - the heart.”

“Exactly, Chaim. Learning Torah, especially *mussar* (ethical values) will straighten a person’s heart. This is the key to his spiritual health.”

*Kinderlach . . .
 The heart is the center of it all. A healthy person has a healthy heart. Strengthen your heart! Do spiritual exercises! Learn Hashem’s Torah! Its’ kedusha (holiness) purifies your heart. Learn mussar. Its’ teachings guide you on the straight path. Kinderlach, keep your heart spiritually strong and everything will be okay.*



The Little Things

“Thank you for taking us on this outing to the botanical gardens, Abba.”

“It really is beautiful here, kinderlach. There are so many plants and flowers to see. Each one has a little plaque describing it. What is that small shrub over there?”

“It is called *eizov* (hyssop).”

“What does the plaque say about the *eizov*?”

“This small shrub is rather insignificant. It does not have much practical use, being neither tall, beautiful, nor fragrant.”

“Insignificant?!? Why, that plaque could not be farther from the truth! This ‘insignificant’ *eizov* redeemed Klal Yisrael from Mitzraim!”

“That is incredible. In what way, Abba?”

“It was part of the *avodah* (service) of the first *Korbon Pesach*. Bnei Yisrael were instructed to *shecht* the *korbon*, then use *eizov* to spread its blood on the doorposts of the house. When the Angel of Death came at midnight to kill the *bechoros* (first born), he would skip over those homes with blood on the doorposts. Thus they were saved.”

“Amazing, Abba.”

“The Medrash Rabba then lists two other mitzvos involving the humble *eizov*: purification of the *metzora*, and burning of the *Parah Adumah*.”

“Wow. The *eizov* must be very special to be involved in these mitzvos of *taharah* (purity).”

“It is. Shlomo HaMelech equates it to the mighty cedar in the verse, ‘He spoke of the trees from the cedar of Lebanon to the *eizov* which grows out of the wall’ (Melachim I 5:13). The Medrash concludes by relating that large and small things are equal before The Almighty. He performs miracles with the smallest things. He used the *eizov*, the lowliest of trees, to redeem Yisrael.”

“We have learned an important lesson today, Abba. Who would have thought that a little bush could be involved in such exalted mitzvos? We must treat even the smallest things with respect. If they are important in the eyes of Hashem, then we must care about them also.”

“Kinderlach, I could not have said it better myself.”

*Kinderlach . . .
 Small things can be used for great mitzvos. A few pieces of string can be used to tie tzitzis, which protect us from all aveiyros and remind us of all 613 mitzvos. Some oil and wicks can become Shabbos lights, which bring peace into the home. Grapes, which come from a tree that cannot even stand on it own, are used to make wine. We sanctify our Holy Days, weddings, and bris milah over a cup of wine. Water, which costs nothing, was used for the mitzvah of nisuch hamayim in the times of the Beis HaMikdash. This mitzvah brought intense joy to Klal Yisrael on the Chag of Succos. Just flour and water are used to bake the matza that we eat on Pesach. Kinderlach, treat even the smallest thing properly. It may be more important than you think.*

Parasha Questions

- Who would go out of Mitzraim to serve Hashem? (10:9)
- Which type of wind blew in the *arbeh*? (10:13 and Rashi)
- What part of the day is called *“bein ha’arbaim”*? (Rashi 12:6)
- What must be done with the leftover meat from the *Korbon Pesach*? (12:10)