



## *“Pfizer, Moderna & The Inevitability of The Vaccine”*

*Drasha by Rabbi Goldstein*

Baruch HaShem in the past few weeks, as the major drug companies, Pfizer, Moderna submitted for emergency approval from the FDA, it seems like we should begin to have one in very short order. What is beginning to loom large is the logistics of delivering nearly 100 million doses to the American public, especially with the Moderna vaccine needed to be stored at -94 degrees Fahrenheit, a temperature cold enough to harden ice cream into a spoon-breaking block of ice, and that only specialized freezers can produce. But Baruch HaShem the harder problem to solve, the vaccine itself seems to be basically ready.

However From the beginning of the Pandemic I have been struck by the aura of inevitability surrounding the creation of a vaccine for the novel Coronavirus. People causal conversations reflected a certitude and assuredness that one would be produced- and it was only a question of how long. If you think about this historically it is truly incredible. Polio for example reached epidemic proportions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in [In 1935, a vaccination was attempted](#), first on monkeys and then on children in California. Though this vaccine yielded poor results, two more decades of research paved the way for the development of vaccines by Jonas Salk in 1953. Work on the first flu vaccine began in the 1930s and it wasn't until 1945 that the first vaccine was approved for use in the US. And yet, all around us, everyone felt that of course within a year things would be back to normal.

Now of course this progress is natural and part of the incredible scientific developments of our time. But the truth is in the same way that this little microscopic bug from across the world paralyzed our nation and claimed so many lives, it could easily have defied our current scientific knowledge. Think about it , its called the novel coronavirus which means that its an entirely new strain that had not previously been known to humans. So I think , as religious people, we must give ourselves a dose of humility and recognize that it is only through HaShem's great benevolence that he has endowed modern science with the tools to eradicate this disease.



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But nonetheless, this sense of inevitability does speak to a concern that occupied the great King of Ancient Israel King Chizkiyahu. The Talmud related the following story. There used to exist a Book called the Sefer HaRefuot, the Book of Cures. The Book of Healing. It was based on cures that had been handed down from generation to generation from Moses. However King Chizkiyahu hid the book and prevented people from accessing the book. And the sages praised him for this action. Why is this praiseworthy? Surely healing is a good thing? Rashi explains that this book enabled people to cure any ailment instantaneously. Such a book needed to be hidden because sickness has its place in the divine scheme of things – ill health reminds us of our human frailty and turns our attention back to Hashem. Therefore, when the ability to instantly restore good health counteracted the religious benefits of sickness, Hizkiyahu removed the Book of Cures.

Now this is not a judgment that you or I could make. And the truth is that I have always struggled with this Gemara. However, the underlying concern is valid. If cures are too attainable, if we feel we have mastered the world, we have mastered science- that a vaccines is absolutely inevitable- then we are lacking something in our faith in G-d.

The Jewish way is to recognize the doctor, the scientist, modern medicine as tools that he has given us to help be agents of his will. They are meant to help us execute our mission as Jews to bring spirituality to this world and make it a better place. To the extent that we recognize that the source of



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our incredible innovation is HaShem- to that extent we further these aims. To the extent that we omit Hashem from this process, we are less deserving.

Rav Hutner, the great mystic and Rosh Yeshiva wrote a letter to a young man who was going to medical school who was struggling with transitioning from the world of the Yeshiva to the world of the University. In the letter, he paints an image of a Jewish doctor. A person of compassion. Who deeply cares about his patients. Who is constantly performing acts of chessed by alleviating the pain they may find themselves in. Prior to the surgery he pray for the success of the surgery and after the surgery he prays for his patients. Indeed I know doctors who keep a list of their patients who saya tehilim for them on an ongoing basis.

In this week’s parsha the Torah describes first Yaakovs battle with the Angel. Yaakov is left alone with angle and they wrestle the entire night. He is wounded on his leg. He emerges victorious but limping. As a result for all time the Jews are commanded not to eat the sciatic nerve because that it where Yaakov was wounded. And if you fast forward in the parsha, immediately following the confrontation with Elsav and his retun to Eretz Yisrael the Torah says VaYavo Yaakov Shalem Ir Shechem- the Yaakov emerged complete, whole when he reentered the city of Shechem. And Roshi comments That Shalem means he was comeplete. That throughout his ordeal with Eisava nd Lavan, that he was complete in his Torah, that throughout his commitment to Torah study and spirituality remained firm and he was complete in his



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body. Complete in body and complete in soul. Completeness goes together. physical healing needs to go with spiritual healing. Spiritual healing enables physical healing.

This is the story of Yaakov in this week’s parsha and it is a very important lesson for all of us. As people of faith we realize that it is only by G-d’s grace that he has given our scientists and doctors the ability to use the vaccine. So let’s be sure that when we talk about Moderna, Pfizer, Dr. Fauci, Operation Warp Speed and anything else- let’s not forget to say and G-d too.