

## CLASS 7

### I. Studying neuroscience helps us fulfill our responsibilities as Jews.

- A. SLEEP
- B. DREAMS
- C. LEARNING AND MEMORY

### II. Understanding neurological functioning helps us become better people

- A. Children and brain development
- B. Adults and brain development

### III. Neuroscience and Neshamah

- A. The brain apart from the “me”
- B. The brain as the “residence” for the *neshamah*
- C. Primary human activity and the goal of our lives is rooted in the use of the mind

### IV. The Brain in the Torah

- A. Where is the word *מוח* mentioned explicitly in the Torah?
- B. To what part(s) of the body does the Torah attribute thoughts and emotions?
  - 1. The Heart (samples of verses)
  - 2. The Kidneys
  - 3. Samples of allusions in the Torah to the role of the brain:
  - 4. The Sages knew that thought is in the brain
- C. Approaches to explaining the Torah’s attribution of intellectual capacities to organs other than the brain

### V. Torah perspectives on Neurological and Mental Health

- A. Where does the Torah mention neurological or mental health disorders?

DISORDERS CAUSED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS:

1. In the context of communal chastisement for rejecting the word of Hashem:

Devarim 28:28

יִכָּזֶה יְהוָה בְּשִׁגְעוֹן וּבְעִוְרוֹן וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב.  
Hashem will strike you with insanity, with lack of awareness,  
and with confusion of the mind.

2. In the context of a secondary outcome from environmental stimuli:

Devarim 28:34

וְהָיִיתָ מְשֻׁגָּע מִמַּרְאֵה עֵינֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה.  
You will go insane from the vision before your eyes that you  
will behold.

3. As a result of physical illness:

Nidah 13a

ושנטרפה דעתה היינו שוטה שנטרפה דעתה מחמת חולי.  
“One who went out of her mind” – but this is the same as a  
“Shotah” (so why do both need to be mentioned in the  
Mishnah)?! [This refers to] one who went out of her mind as a  
result of physical illness.

4. As a result of a lifestyle characterized by inactivity, or lack of purpose:

Kesuvos 59b

שֶׁהַבְּטָלָה מְבִיאָה לִידֵי שִׁיעֻמוּם.  
רש"י: שיעמום. שיגעון.  
... For extreme idleness brings to a state of *Shi'amum*.  
Rashi: “*Shi'amum*” – this is “*Shiga'on*” (insanity).

5. A one-time phenomenon

Shmuel I 16:14, 23

יְרוּחַ ה' סָרָה מֵעַם שָׁאוּל וּבָעִתּוֹ רוּחַ רָעָה מָאֵת ה'.  
כִּד וְהָיָה בְּהֵיוֹת רוּחַ־אֱלֹהִים אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְלָקַח דָּוִד אֶת־הַכְּנֹר וַיִּגַּן בְּיָדוֹ וְרוּחַ  
לְשָׁאוּל וְטוֹב לוֹ וְסָרָה מֵעַלְיוֹ רוּחַ הַרָעָה.

14) And the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord frightened him.

...

23) And it would be, that when the spirit of God was upon Saul, that David would take the harp, and would play with his hand, and Saul would be

relieved, and it would be good for him, the spirit of evil would depart from him.

#### DISORDERS CAUSED BY INTERNAL FACTORS:

6. The condition called "Shoteh" (literally, "imbecile" or "fool")

Chagigah 3b-4a

דעתו אמר יהי רצון שיחזרו עיני יוסי למקומן  
וחזרו ת"ר איזהו שוטה היוצא יחידי בלילה  
והלך בבית הקברות והמקרע את כסותו איתמר רב הונא אמר עד שיהו  
כולן בבת אחת ר' יוחנן אמר "אפי' באחת מהן היכי דמי אי דעביד להו דרך  
שמות אפי' בחדא נמי אי דלא עביד להו דרך שמות אפילו כולהו נמי לא  
לעולם דקא עביד להו דרך שמות והלך בבית הקברות אימור כדי שתשרה עליו  
רוח טומאה הוא דקא עביד והיוצא יחידי בלילה אימור גנדיפס אחדיה והמקרע  
את כסותו אימור בעל מחשבות הוא כיון דעבדינהו לכולהו הוה להו

כמי שנגח שור חמור וגמל ונעשה מועד  
לכל אמר רב פפא אי שמיע ליה לרב הונא  
הא דתניא<sup>6</sup> אי זהו שוטה זה המאבד כל מה  
שנותנים לו הוה הדר ביה איבעיא להו כי  
הוה הדר ביה ממקרע כסותו הוא דהוה הדר  
ביה דדמיא להא או דלמא מכולהו הוה  
הדר תיקו: וטומטום ואנדרוגינום כו': תנו

רש"י: איזהו שוטה. האמור בכל מקום שפטור מן המצות ומן העונש ואין  
קנינו קנין ואין ממכרו ממכר.

The Sages taught: Who is classified as a "Shoteh"? -One who goes out alone at night, one who sleeps in a cemetery, and one who tears his clothing. Rav Huna said: [He is not considered a Shoteh] until all of these [signs are present] at the same time. Rabbi Yochanan says: [He is considered a Shoteh] even with one of them. What is the case? If he performs these acts in the manner of insanity, then even with one [of these signs it should suffice to show that he is a Shoteh]! If he does not perform them in a manner of insanity, then even [if he does] all of them, he should not [be deemed a Shoteh]! Really, it is referring to when he performs them in a manner of insanity [but each action alone could be explained rationally]: One who sleeps in the cemetery, we could say that he is doing so in order to bring upon himself an impure spirit [in order to practice necromancy]; one who goes out alone at night, we could say that a fever seized him [and he needs to cool himself]; and one who tears his clothing, we could say that he is deeply engaged in thought [and he does not notice what his hands are doing, as

they tear his clothing unintentionally]. One he does all of these acts [we do not attribute a rational explanation to all of them, and thus they are attributed to a condition of insanity].... Rav Papa said: If Rav Huna had heard that which was taught in a Beraisa, "Who is a Shoteh? One who destroys whatever is given to him," he would have retracted [his statement that one is a Shoteh only if he performs three actions of insanity]....

#### 8. Infection of the brain or meninges, cranial surgery

a. Kesuvos 77b (describing the pre-op and surgery to remove a parasite from the meninges)

b. Gittin 56b (describing the Divine punishment meted out to the Roman general, Titus, of a parasitical brain intrusion)

c. Chulin 42b (and Tosfos there, אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל), discussing what type of perforation to the cranium, and the multiple layers of the meninges (such as the dura mater and pia mater) will result in death to a human and to an animal)

#### 9. Tremors

a. Chulin 24b (when a Kohen or Levite reaches old age at which he quivers, he is retired from his service in the Beit ha'Mikdash)

b. Bava Basra 167a (how a forger was able to forge the signature of a Sage who suffered from tremors)

#### 10. Addiction

a. Pesachim 113a (the Sages' directives to avoid addictive substances)

b. The Halachic authorities' rulings on substance use and abuse (including nicotine, alcohol, marijuana, drugs, and internet addiction)

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:35)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Maadanei Shlomo, p. 431)

Rav Shmuel ha'Levi Wozner (Shevet ha'Levi, 1:295)

Rav Chaim Yosef David Weiss (u'Vacharta ba'Chaim, chs. 5 and 6)

#### 11. Epilepsy ("נכפה")

a. Mishnah, Bechoros 7:5

b. Pesachim 112b (describing immoral acts which may be subject to a Divine punishment of being smitten with epilepsy)

c. Shabbos 61a (describing wearing an amulet (in a public domain on Shabbos) in order to prevent an epileptic seizure (see Rashi there who notes that epilepsy may be genetic).

d. Rambam, Hilchos Edus (the Laws of Testimony) 9:9

#### משנה תורה, הלכות עדות ט"ט

השוטה פסול לעדות מן התורה לפי שאינו בן מצות. ולא שוטה  
שהוא מהלך ערם ומשבר כלים וזורק אבנים בלבד. אלא כל מי  
שנטרפה דעתו ונמצאת דעתו משבשת תמיד בדבר מן הדברים אף

על פי שהוא מדבר ושואל כענין בשאר דברים הרי זה פסול ובכלל שוטים יחשב.  
הנכפה בעת כפיתו פסול ובעת שהוא בריא קשר. ואחד הנכפה מזמן לזמן או הנכפה תמיד בלא עת קבוע. והוא שלא תהיה דעתו משבשת תמיד שהרי יש שם נכפים שגם בעת בריאותם דעתם מטרפת עליהם. וצריך להתישב בעדות הנכפין הרבה.

A Shoteh is invalidated from testifying by Torah law, for he is not obligated in the Mitzvos. We are not speaking only about only a Shoteh who walks around naked, destroys utensils and throws stones indiscriminately. Rather, anyone whose mind is disturbed and continually confused when it comes to certain matters even though he can speak and ask relevant questions regarding other matters, such a person is disqualified from testimony and is in the category of a Shoteh.

An epileptic in the midst of a seizure is unacceptable as a witness. At a time when he is healthy, he is acceptable. This applies both with regard to an epileptic who has seizures infrequently, and one who continuously has seizures with no fixed time for them – [when he is healthy, he is eligible for testifying] provided that his mind is not constantly in a state of confusion, for there are epileptics whose minds are disturbed even when they are healthy. One must give much consideration with regard to testimony of epileptics.

B. How does the Torah advise us to respond to illness in the mind?

#### 1. Treatment

##### a. Seeking professional help

###### Shemos 21:19

אם יקום והתהלך בחוץ על-משענתו ונקה המכה רק שבתו יתן  
ירפא ירפא.

“... and he shall surely heal him.”

###### Berachos 60a

דתי דבי רבי ישמעאל ורפא ירפא מכאן שניתנה רשות לרופא  
לרפאות.

... As was taught by the academy of Rabbi Yishmael:  
“and he shall surely heal him” (Shemos 21:19) – from  
here [we learn] that permission is given to the doctor  
to provide medical care.

###### Rambam, Perush ha'Mishnayos, Nedarim 4:4

...לפי שהוא מצוה ר"ל חיוב הרופא מן התורה לרפאות חולי  
ישראל וזה נכלל בפי' מ"ש הפסוק (דברים כב) והשבותו לו  
לרפאות את גופו שהוא כשרואה אותו מסוכן ויכול להצילו או  
בגופו או בממונו או בחמתו.

... For it is a mitzvah, that is to say, an obligation from the Torah for the doctor to heal the sick of Israel... when he says someone in danger and he is able to save him either with his body, his money, or with his wisdom.

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 336:1 ("The Laws of the Doctor")

נתנה התורה רשות לרופא לרפאות ומצוה היא ובכלל פיקוח נפש הוא ואם מונע עצמו הרי זה שופך דמים ואפי' יש לו מי שירפאנו שלא מן הכל אדם זוכה להתרפאות ומיהו לא יתעסק ברפואה אא"כ הוא בקי ולא יהא שם גדול ממנו שאם לא כן הרי זה שופך דמים ואם ריפא שלא ברשות בית דין חייב בתשלומין אפי' אם הוא בקי ואם ריפא ברשות ב"ד וטעה והזיק פטור מדיני אדם וחייב בדיני שמים ואם המית ונודע לו ששגג גולה על ידו.

The Torah granted the physician permission to heal, and it is an obligation, and it is included in the category of the mitzvah to save a life....

Midrash Shmuel, Parshah 4

מעשה ברבי ישמעאל ורבי עקיבא שהיו מהלכין בחוצות ירושלים והיה עמהן אדם אחד, פגע בהם אדם חולה, אמר להן רבותי אמרו לי במה אתרפא, אמרו לו קח לך כר וכך עד שתתרפא, אמר להן אותו האיש שהיה עמהן מי הכה אותו בחולי, אמרו לו הקדוש ברוך הוא, אמר להן ואתם הכנסתם עצמכם בדבר שאינו שלכם, הוא הכה ואתם מרפאין, אמרו לו מה מלאכתך, אמר להן עובד אדמה אני והרי המגל ביד, אמרו לו מי ברא את האדמה, מי ברא את הכרם, אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא, אמרו לו ואתה מכניס עצמך בדבר שאינו שלך, הוא ברא אותו ואת אוכל פריין שלו, אמר להן אין אתם רואין המגל בידי אלולי שאני יוצא וחורשו [ומכסחון] ומזבלו ומנכשו לא העלה מאומה, אמרו לו שוטה שבעולם ממלאכתך לא שמעת מה שכתוב אנוש כחציר ימיו, כשם שהעץ אם אינו נזבל ומתנכש ונחרש אינו עולה, ואם עלה ולא שתה מים אינו חי והוא מת, כך הגוף הוא העץ, הזבל הוא הסם, איש אדמה הוא הרופא....

Rebbi Yishmael and Rebbi Akiva were walking through the streets of Jerusalem, accompanied by another man, and they and met a sick man.

He asked them, "My teachers – tell me, how can I be healed?"

They answered, "Take such and such until you will be healed."

The man accompanying them said to the Sages, "Who afflicted him?"

They said to him, "The Holy One, blessed is He."

He said to them, "And you are interfering in a matter which is not yours? Hashem afflicted him and you are healing?!"

They said to him, "What is your occupation?"

He said to them, "I am a worker of the land; here in my hand is my sickle."

They said to him, "But Who created the land?"

He said to them, "The Holy One, blessed is He."

They said to him, "And you are interfering in a matter which his not yours? Hashem created the land and you consume its fruit?!"

He said to them, "Don't you see the sickle in my hand? If I would not go out and plow it and clear it and fertilize it and weed it, it would not produce anything!"

They said to him, "Fool of the world! From your own work do you not hear what the verse states, 'As for man, his days are like grass; [like a flower of the field, so does he sprout]' (Tehillim 103:15)?! – Just as the tree will not grow if the field is not fertilized and weeded and plowed, and if it does not but is not irrigated with water it will not live but will die, so, too, the body – it is the tree, the fertilizer is the medicine, the man of the land is the doctor..."

See Berachos 60a, and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 230:4 (and Mishnah Berurah there), for the short prayer that one should recite when he goes to a doctor:

"May it be Your will, Hashem my G-d, that this activity be healing for me, and that You will heal me, for You are the faithful G-d of healing, and Your healing is truth."

"יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שיהא עסק זה לי לרפואה, ותרפאני. כי אל רופא נאמן אתה ורפואתך אמת."

#### b. Social support

##### Mishlei 12:25

דאגה בלב איש ישחנה ודבר טוב ישמחה.

If there is anxiety in a man's heart, let him cast it down, and a good word will bring it joy.

##### Yoma 75a

"דאגה בלב איש ישחנה" רבי אמי ורבי אסי, חד אמר ישחנה מדעתו וחד אמר ישחנה לאחרים.

"If there is anxiety in a man's heart, "ישחנה" – Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi [have two opinions about what this means]: One says "he shall remove it from his mind," and one says "he shall speak it out to others."

##### Avos 1:6

יהושע בן פרחיה אומר, עשה לך רב, וקנה לך חבר, והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות.

Yehoshua ben Perachyah says: Establish for yourself a Rav, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every person favorably.

#### c. Prayer

##### Eruvin 41b

חשיכה: גמ' ת"ר ג' דברים מעבירין את האדם על דעתו ועל דעת קונו אלו הן עוברי כוכבים ורוח רעה ודקדוקי עניות למאי נפקא מינה למיבעי רחמי עליהו ג' אין רואין פני

The Sages taught: Three things cause a person to act contrary to his own will and to act contrary to the will of his Creator. They are: [The persecution from] the idolators, a "Ru'ach Ra'ah", and the pangs of extreme poverty. What is the practical difference [in knowing this information]? -[It is important to know this information] so that one will pray [appropriately] for those people.

#### Bava Basra 116a

איש יושב בביתו ויש בו חולה ויש בו ענין  
כי על זה בחרת מעוני דרש ר' פנחס בר חמא כל שיש לו חולה בתוך ביתו ילך  
אצל חכם ויבקש עליו רחמים שנא' חמת מלך מלאכי מות ואיש חכם יכפרנה:

Rebbi Pinchas bar Chama taught: Anyone who has a sick person in his home, he shall go to a Chacham and ask him to pray for mercy for him, as it says, "The king's wrath is [like] messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it" (Mishlei 16:14).

#### Prayer for the Sick (Siddur)

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב משה ואהרן דוד ושלמה  
הוא יברך וירפא את החולה... רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף,  
השפא בעגלא ובזמן קריב, ונאמר אמן.

#### Birkas ha'Gomel

Tzitz Eliezer, vol. 12, 18:8

ומדי עסקי בנושא זה של ברכת הגומל ראיתי לרב חשוב אחד  
מרבני ארץ ישראל שכתב לפסוק בנוגע לחולי נפש שנתרפא  
בזהו לשונו: "ומסתברא לי שגם מי שחלה בחולי נפש אף שאין  
המחלה יכולה לגרום לסכנת חיים מ"מ הנרפא חייב לברך, וגם  
זה בגדר חולה ונתרפא... בדין שהנרפא חייב לברך ברכת  
הגומל, ברם יתכן לפטור אותו מטעם שאין רפואתו ברורה  
שעלולה לחזור אליו מחלתו הקודמת ונמצא דעדיין לא נתרפא,  
אבל כל שברור לנו שהמחלה לא תחזור מן הדין שיברך..."

And while I am discussing this topic of the blessing of "ha'Gomel," [I will mention] that I saw one esteemed rabbi of the rabbis in the land of Israel who wrote a ruling regarding a person who suffered from mental illness and was healed, as follows: "It seems logical to me that also one who was ill with mental illness -- even though the illness did not pose a threat to life -- nevertheless the one who was healed is obligated to recite the blessing [of 'ha'Gomel'], for he, too, is in the category of 'a sick person who was healed,' for behold we desecrate Shabbos for the healing of this type of sickness, as the Halachic authorities have clarified, for it is in the category of danger to life, or that it could



come to a danger of life indirectly, so according to the law one who was healed is obligated to recite the blessing of 'ha'Gomel.' However, it may be that he is exempt because his healing is not definite, as his previous illness is prone to return to him and it is found that he is still not cured. But as long as it is clear to us that the illness will not return, the law is that he should recite the blessing."

Now, his primary assumption that this is also in the category of "a sick person who was healed" is certainly correct, as it is clear from the Halachic authorities that it is considered in the category of danger from a number of perspectives and we desecrate the Shabbos for it (see what I wrote in Tzitz Eliezer 4:13, and see also the book Eshel Avraham on tractate Chulin, Peros Ginosar #65). However, this that he then writes that "it is possible that he is exempt because his healing is not definite as it his previous illness is prone to return to him and it is found that he is still not cured," he overlooked an explicit Halachic ruling in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 219:8) who rules: "[Upon recovery from] any illness one must recite the blessing... and there is no difference whether he has a lasting illness which comes back from time to time, or whether it is not lasting." The Mishnah Berurah there (#26) explains that this means that "you should not say that since the illness returns occasionally, that is a sign that it poses no danger. Rather, it is not so; on the contrary, any illness which is lasting tends to get stronger, and even though he was saved from it many times miraculously, that was due to Divine mercy 'and not every moment does a miracle occur.'" This is based on the responsa of the Rashba.... Thus it is explicit that even when it clear to him that the illness will return, nevertheless every time he is saved from it he needs to recite the blessing.... If so, learn from there also in the case of mental illness, that since he experiences bouts of relapses, it is considered a danger to him from a number of perspectives, and if so there is no difference whether the illness might return to him or not; every time he recovers and returns to his regular strength and health of mind, he must recite "ha'Gomel."

## 2. Halachic implications

a. Classifying mental illness as a חולה for purposes of Halachic exemption and violation (both ritual and financial)

(E.g. Rambam, Hilchos Mechirah (the Laws of Sale) 29:4)

b. Compassion, kindness, caring

Sotah 14a

ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא: מאי דכתיב: 'אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו' (דברים יג, ה)? וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: 'כי ה' אלקיך אש אוכלה הוא' (דברים ד, כד)! אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא...

... *What is the meaning of what is written, "After Hashem your God you shall walk" (Devarim 13:5)? Is it possible for a man to walk after the Divine presence? Isn't it written, "For Hashem your God is an all-consuming fire" (Devarim 4:24)! Rather, it means that you shall walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed is He.*

Shabbos 133b

אבא שאול אומר: 'ואנוהו' (שמות טו, ב) - הו דומה לו: מה הוא חנון ורחום, אף אתה היה חנון ורחום.

... The word "v'Anveihu" (Shemos 15:2) means, you shall make yourself similar to Him: Just as He is giving and merciful, so shall you be giving and merciful.

Rambam, Sefer ha'Mitzvos, Positive Commandment #8

והמצוה השמינית היא שצונו להדמות בו יתעלה לפי יכלתנו והוא אמרו "והלכת בדרכיו". וכבר כפל צווי זה ואמר "ללכת בכל דרכיו". ובא בפירוש זה מה הקדוש ברוך הוא נקרא רחום אף אתה היה רחום מה הקב"ה נקרא חנון אף אתה היה חנון מה הקב"ה נקרא צדיק אף אתה היה צדיק מה הקב"ה נקרא חסיד אף אתה היה חסיד וזה לשון ספרי (ס"פ עקב).  
וכבר נכפל הצווי הזה בלשון אחר ואמר "אחרי י"י א-להיכם תלכו", ובא בפירוש גם כן (סוטה י"ד) שענינו להדמות בפעולות הטובות...."

The 8th mitzvah is that we are commanded to emulate God, blessed be He, to the best of our ability.

The source of this commandment is God's statement, "And you shall walk in His paths" (Devarim 28:9).

This commandment is repeated in the verse, "To walk in all His ways" (Devarim 11:22). This is explained in the words of the Sifri (Parshas Ekev): "Just as God is called merciful, so too, you must be merciful. Just as God is called kind, so too, you must be kind. Just as God is called righteous, so too, you must be righteous. Just as God is called pious, so too, you must be pious."

This commandment is also repeated in the verse, "Walk after Hashem your God" (Devarim 13:5). This

too is explained (Sotah 14a) as emulating the good deeds and fine attributes which are used to allegorically describe God, Who is immeasurably exalted over everything.

Suggested readings for Class 7:

*“Permission Given to a Doctor to Heal” – Across the Generations...* Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Gesundheit, MD PhD. See [www.jewishmedicalethics.org](http://www.jewishmedicalethics.org) and [https://www.yu.edu/sites/default/files/legacy/uploadedFiles/Academics/Seminary/RIETS/Programs/Jewish\\_Medical\\_Ethics/Verapo\\_Yerapey/Permission%20Given%20to%20a%20Doctor%20to%20Heal-%20Across%20the%20Generations%20and%20in%20the%20Thought%20of%20Rav%20Avraham%20Yitzchak%20Ha-Kohen%20Kook.pdf](https://www.yu.edu/sites/default/files/legacy/uploadedFiles/Academics/Seminary/RIETS/Programs/Jewish_Medical_Ethics/Verapo_Yerapey/Permission%20Given%20to%20a%20Doctor%20to%20Heal-%20Across%20the%20Generations%20and%20in%20the%20Thought%20of%20Rav%20Avraham%20Yitzchak%20Ha-Kohen%20Kook.pdf)

*Neurology in the Bible and the Talmud.* Prof. Moshe Feinsod. In *Handbook of Clinical Neurology*, vol. 95.

*Lists of Mental Health Resources for the Orthodox Jewish community:*  
<https://jewishnurses.org/mental-health-resources/>  
<https://www.atzmi.org/resources>  
<https://www.refuathanefesh.org/resources/>