



ISRAEL BIBLE CENTER  
מכון התנ"ך בישראל

*Health Lessons From*  
**THE BIBLE**



**HOLY  
BIBLE**

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CHAPTER

01

*Take Care:  
Health Lessons  
from the Torah*



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In times of physical, social, and medical uncertainty, we can take steps to protect ourselves and promote recovery. For some time now, these steps include hand-washing and social distancing. The ancient Israelites also had ways to diagnose and remedy illnesses, and they even practiced social distancing to ensure collective health.



For the skin ailment known as *tzara'at*, the priests would examine the patient to ascertain the right healing procedure (see Leviticus 13-14). While the prescriptions in Leviticus are for the sake of the body, Deuteronomy links *tzara'at* to the principle of setting one's mind on the Lord. In this way, the Torah highlights the need to take care of our spiritual health alongside our physical well-being; a meditation on Scripture and remembrance of God support the spirit, just as proper medical care supports the body.

According to Leviticus, the skin ailment of *tzara'at* necessitates priestly examination. If a spot on the skin “has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of one's body, it is a case of *tzara'at*” (13:3).

Those who exhibit possible symptoms of *tzara'at* are isolated, sometimes for a period of 14 days: “If the spot is white... but appears no deeper than the skin... the priest shall shut up the stricken person for seven days.... And if the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall shut up [the person] for another seven days” (13:4-5).

In ancient Israel, the people knew the value of personal separation for the sake of health safety. Leviticus preserves a divine precedent for the kind of social-distancing that we can, and should, practice today.



Deuteronomy also highlights the importance of following the tzara'at instructions: "Take care (*hishamer*) in a case of tzara'at, that you observe diligently (*lishmor meod*), and do according to all that the Levitical priests shall direct you" (24:8). The Hebrew words for "take care" and "observe" come from שמר (*shamar*), which means to "keep" or "guard."



The charge to “take care” (*hishamer*) in this verse is the last of ten such instances in Deuteronomy—most of which remind readers to “take care” in their relationship with God.

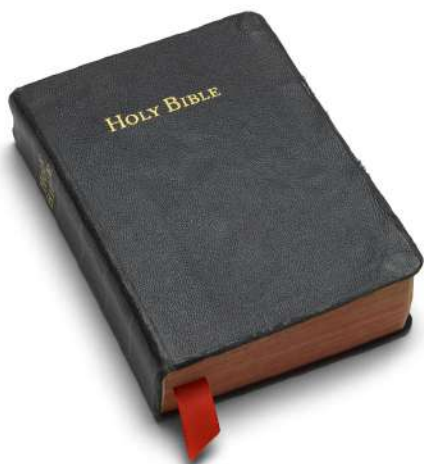
For example, Deuteronomy 6:12 reads, “Take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” Moses also tells his people to “take care” to preserve their knowledge of Torah: “Take care lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God... by not keeping his commandments” (4:23; 8:11).

The responsibility to “take care” also extends to one’s neighbors: “Take care that you do not neglect the Levite... [or] your poor brother” (12:19; 15:9).



Finally, at the end of all these declarations to “take care” in our relationships with God and others—bonds that Jesus puts at the very heart the Torah (see Matt 22:36-40; Mk 12:28-32; cf. Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18)—Deuteronomy says to “take care” with skin ailments (24:8).

Thus, the Torah uses the command to “take care” in order to connect spiritual practices (like Scripture study and remembrance of God and neighbor) with principles of bodily health, and thereby underscores the importance of both physical and theological care.



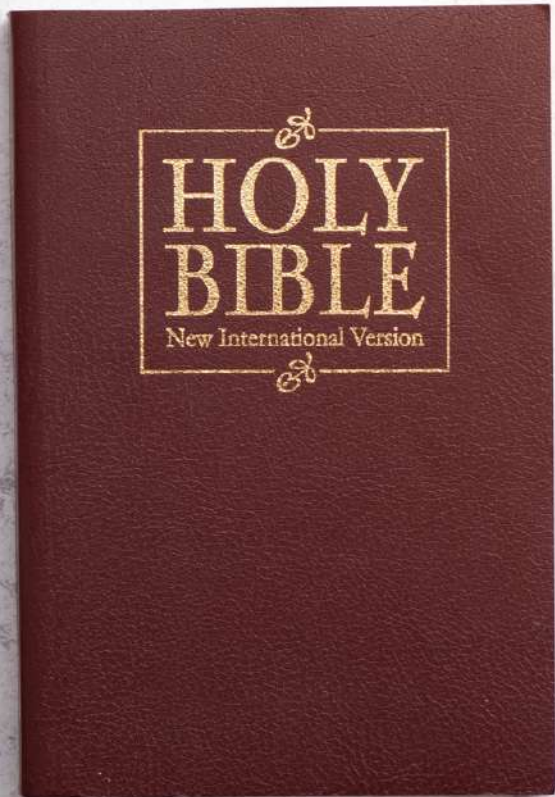


CHAPTER

02



*Have a Healthy Spirit:  
Positivity from Proverbs*



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In a period of instability, like the COVID-19 pandemic, certain measures—like social distancing and staying home—could protect our physical health. At the same time, our spiritual and mental well-being is also very important. Scripture states that a strong spirit provides internal stability in the midst of physical infirmity, and a positive mindset promotes joy in difficult times.



According to Proverbs, everyone has a God-given life-breath, which animates each person and illuminates the divine-human relationship. Alongside concern for physical wellness, the Bible highlights the importance of having a healthy spirit.

Proverbs remind readers that inner health is an important component of one's overall condition. One proverb notes, "A joyful heart (*lev sameach*) is good medicine, but a stricken spirit (*ruach*) dries up the bones" (17:22).

In Hebrew thought, the "heart" (*lev*) is the seat of intellect and thought. Thus, a happy heart is equivalent to a joyful mindset or healthy emotional state. A heart of rejoicing ensures an intact spirit: "A joyful heart makes a good countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit (*ruach*) is stricken" (Prov 15:13).

Positive or praiseworthy thoughts lead to the soundness of spirit, which can be a sustaining force through external difficulty (cf. Phil 4:8). Indeed, Proverbs says that a person's "spirit (*ruach*) will endure sickness (*mahaleh*), but a stricken spirit who can bear?" (18:14).

To be clear, this proverb does not claim that a strong spirit prevents physical illness, but it does assert that one's spirit is an engine of endurance that can help us to stand up under adversity.



Along with the Hebrew word *ruach*, another term for “spirit” is *neshamah*. Genesis calls this God-given spirit the “breath of life” (*nishmat hai*) that animates humanity and defines our personhood (Gen 2:7). Proverbs echoes this understanding, saying, “The spirit (*neshamah*) of humanity is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inward parts” (20:27).

Spirit-health creates an internal luminous that deepens the human-divine relationship.

Jesus picks up on Proverbs' point when he proclaims, "The eye is the lamp of the body so that if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light" (Matt 6:22).

In elaborating on this idea, he adds, "If then your whole body is full of light... it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light" (Lk 11:36).

Just as we must prioritize our own physical health and that of our neighbors, we can also cultivate spirits that illuminate life's shadows and serve as beacons of divine encouragement.





Photo credit Danielle Oron

## CHAPTER

# 03



## *The Matzah Brei Sandwich*



## Ingredients

For the matzah brei “buns”:

- 6 pieces matzah
- 3 large eggs
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- fresh black pepper
- canola oil for frying





Ingredients for the sandwiches:

- avocado
- Swiss cheese or other sliced cheese
- Zhug, harissa or other hot sauce
- fried eggs



- To make the matzah brei “buns”: Start by breaking all the matzah into pieces and place into a large bowl. Cover completely with cool water and soak for 5 minutes.
- Drain the water, pressing the matzah against the bowl to “wring” out as much water as possible.
- Add the eggs, salt, and pepper to the matzah and mix.
- In a large non-stick skillet or pan, add enough canola oil to cover the bottom of the pan by 1/4”. Heat over medium to medium-high heat until the oil simmers.
- In batches, add the brei batter to the pan forming patties measuring about 3/4 cup. I find it easiest to do this with wet hands OR heaping a big spoonful of batter into the pan and flattening it out to form a round pancake shape.

- Fry for 2-3 minutes on each side. Transfer to a cooling rack and sprinkle with salt. Continue with the remaining batter, you should have enough for 8 “buns.”
- To assemble sandwiches: Take one of the matzah brei “buns” and layer a piece of Swiss (or other cheese) on top, followed by sliced or mashed avocado, the hot sauce of your choice, and then a fried egg. Top with a second matzah brei “bun.”





CHAPTER

04

*Israeli 7-Layer Salad  
with Labneh Poppyseed  
Dressing Recipe*



Ingredients for the salad:

1/2 cup pistachios, toasted and chopped

1/2 cup chopped mint

1/2 cup chopped dill

1/2 cup chopped cilantro

1/2 cup chopped parsley

1 cup dried black lentils (aka beluga lentils)

1/2 head of a medium-sized red cabbage, chopped thinly

4 carrots, sliced thinly into rounds or grated

2 cups chopped sugar snap peas

2 mangos, peeled and cubed





For the dressing:

3/4 cups labneh

Juice of 1 lemon

Zest of 1/2 lemon

1/2 Tbsp honey

1 clove garlic

1 tsp kosher salt

fresh black pepper to taste

2 Tbsp poppy seeds



- First, bring 4 cups of water to boil in a pot. Rinse the lentils under water and add to the boiling water. Cook for 10-12 minutes or until tender. Drain and set aside to cool and place in the refrigerator.
- Meanwhile, make the dressing. In a food processor or blender, blend together labne with the juice of one lemon, garlic, honey, salt, and pepper. When you've reached the consistency you prefer (if you want it thicker, add more labne and if you want it thinner, try adding more lemon juice or a splash of vinegar), transfer the mixture to a bowl and mix in 2 Tbsp. of poppy seeds. Set aside.
- Next, assemble your salad. In a clear, large bowl, add a layer of mango to the bottom. Then add sugar snap peas, slivered carrots, shredded cabbage, cooled black lentils, chopped herbs, and toasted pistachios.
- When it's time to eat, let guests serve themselves the salad, making sure to get a little bit of every layer. Invite everyone to top with labne poppyseed dressing, and enjoy!

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