



Acceptance vs. Denial: Rabbinic Advice on Sickness

Led by Rabbi Debra Cantor

(with gratitude to Rabbi Daniel Brenner for suggesting these sources)

BABYLONIAN TALMUD NEDARIM 40a

Rava*, on the first day of his illness, said to his visitors: “Do not reveal to anyone that I am sick!” Later he said: “Go and tell everyone in the market...so those that care for me will ask for mercy on my behalf.”

*Abba ben Joseph bar Ḥama (280-350 CE), who is exclusively referred to in the Talmud by the name Rava, was a Babylonian rabbi who belonged to the fourth generation of Amoraim. He is known for his debates with Abaye, and is one of the most often cited rabbis in the Talmud.



DR. SHLOMO BREZNITZ (Israeli psychologist, B. 1936, Czechoslovakia; was a hidden child during the Shoah; made Aliyah in 1949; served in Knesset; expert on stress and trauma)

Seven stages of denial that are associated with serious illness:

1. Denial of Personal Relevance: *“This is not such a big deal for me”*
2. Denial of Urgency: *“I’ve got time. Nothing is going to happen for a while.”*
3. Denial of Vulnerability: *“Plenty of people do just fine with this condition.”*
4. Denial of Feelings: *“This doesn’t change my life that much.”*
5. Denial of the Source of Feelings: *“I’m much more upset about other things in my life.”*
6. Denial of Threatening Information: *“They are always trying to scare me with possibilities.”*
7. Denial of All Information: *“I’m surrounded by idiots.”*

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, ARACHIN 16b

It is said that anyone who lives forty days without experiencing any suffering is considered to have experienced what life is like in the heavenly realm. Any form of discomfort is regarded as suffering, including such minor inconveniences, such as uncomfortable clothing.

In Everything

By Leah Goldberg (1911-1970, prolific Israeli poet, scholar, translator)

(Translation by Marcia Falk)

In everything, there is at least an eighth
of death. It doesn't weigh much.
With what hidden, peaceful charm
we carry it everywhere we go.
In sweet awakenings,
in our travels,
in our love talk,
when we are unaware,
forgotten in all the corners of our beings—
always with us.
And never heavy.



ZOHAR iv 232b

A soul learns more from suffering than from rejoicing.

PROFESSOR VANESSA OCHS (University of Virginia)

“My story is mine alone, it does not help when someone says that I will learn from illness, that one day I will be grateful...I know, too, that if I cannot make my experience meaningful in some fashion, it is really too trying to go on.”



MAIMONIDES, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avel 14:5*
(1138-1204, Spain and Egypt)

Whoever visits the sick removes a portion of the sickness and gives the sick person relief...but we do not visit the sick in the first three hours of the day or the last three hours of the day, because that is when the caregivers are taking care of the medical needs of the sick person.