Jewish Medical History in Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein's Mekor Barukh: When the Doctors Became Rabbis, the Jewish People Were Healthy[1]

By: EDWARD REICHMAN

Introduction

"When the rabbis became doctors, the Jewish people became sick" is an old adage of obscure origins.[2] As to its ultimate source and meaning, and whether it refers to an unearned title of "doctor," or a genuinely procured university doctorate (Ph.D.),[3] I will leave to others to discuss. Of note, in no iteration is it understood to mean that the rabbis became medical doctors.

In this contribution, I explore an inverse historical observation, "When the doctors became rabbis, the Jewish people were healthy." In

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1 I thank Rabbi Avraham Steinberg of the Young Israel of the Main Line in Philadelphia for bringing this reference to my attention in a masterful *derashah* he delivered which included the story, discussed here, of the physician mistaken for the rabbi.

2 See, for example, Shimon Steinmetz, "When the Rabbis Became Doctors" *On the Main Line Blog* http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2011/02/when-rabbis-became-doctors.html (February 21, 2011). This topic should also include the chapter of *Mekor Barukh* discussed in this essay, which offers theories about the origin of rabbis being addressed as "doctor."

3 On the requirement of German rabbis in the nineteenth century to obtain advanced university training, see Monika Richarz, *German Jews and the University, 1678–1848* (Camden House, 2022).

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this case, however, I understand it to mean that the doctors indeed became rabbis (or their equivalent).

We use as the basis for our discussion an unexpected source, and one not typically cited in Jewish medical historical discussions. Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein (1860–1941) is the author of *Torah Temimah* and son of Rabbi Yeḥiel Mikhel Epstein, author of the *Arukh Ha-Shulḥan*. His autobiographical magnum opus *Mekor Barukh* has been a fertile source for scholars in the modern era. It has been partially rendered into English,[4] has been the subject of academic articles,[5] and has sparked controversy regarding his portrayal of his uncle, the Netziv.[6] It is not typically viewed as a "*mekor*" (source) of Jewish medical history; yet, a sizable chapter nestled in the second of this four-volume, 2000-page work is devoted entirely to Jewish physicians. Here we not only explore the untapped value of this little-known chapter for the study of Jewish medical history, placing it in its historical context, but we solve a mystery as to why a chapter on this topic, seemingly unrelated to the larger work, finds its expression in *Mekor Barukh* in the first place.

The fourteenth chapter of *Mekor Barukh*, found in the second volume, is curiously titled, "*Tov She-bi-Rofim*" (the best of physicians),[7] a clear allusion to the statement of *Ḥazal* that the best of physicians is destined for Gehinom.[8] We reserve our analysis of Epstein's title choice until the end of this essay. In this chapter, we find not only historical gems of little-known Jewish medical practices, and precious biographic information and

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4 Baruch Epstein, *My Uncle the Netziv* (Mesorah Publications, 1988).

5 See, for example, Don Seeman and Rebecca Kobrin, "'Like One of the Whole Men': Learning, Gender and Autobiography in R. Barukh Epstein's *Mekor Barukh*," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 2 (Spring, 5759/1999), 52–94; Dan Rabinowitz, "Rayna Batya and Other Learned Women: A Reevaluation of Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein's Sources," *Tradition* 35:1 (Spring 2001), 55–69;
Gavin Michal, "Scholarly Women —'Almost Like One of the Proper Men,'" *Kotzk Blog* (July 4, 2021) https://www.kotzkblog.com/2021/07/343-scholarly-women-almost-like-one-of.html

6 See, for example, J. J. Schacter, "Facing the Truths of History," *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, vol. 8 (1998–1999), 200–276; Eliezer Brodt, "The Netziv, Reading Newspapers on Shabbos, in General and Censorship," *Seforim Blog* Part I (March 5, 2014)
https://seforimblog.com/2014/03/the-netziv-reading-newspapers-on-3/

7 *Mekor Barukh,* vol. 2 (Vilna: Ram Publishers, 1928), 1113–1130.

8 See, for example, Fred Rosner, "The Best of Physicians Is Destined for Gehenna," *New York State Medical Journal* 83:7 (June, 1983), 970–972; Allan Berger, "The Arrogant Physician: A Judaic Perspective," *Journal of Religion and Health* 41:2 (Summer 2002), 127–129.

anecdotes about Jewish physicians, but we also find a profound insight about the evolution of the "Jewish" doctor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Rabbi Epstein divides this chapter into two sections. While the first section includes a family anecdote (related to Jewish physicians), and thematically aligns with the work *Mekor Barukh*, whose subtitle is "My Personal Remembrances of the Previous Generation," the second section, discussing the general history of Jewish physicians, seems to stray beyond the work's subject theme. The author himself confirms this with his introduction to section two: "And while we are on the topic (of physicians), allow me to address the issue of… ." We consider Epstein's chapter as a whole from a medical historical perspective and suggest a plausible explanation, cryptically alluded to in this very chapter, as to why Epstein opted to include the excursus of section two.

A common thread running through both sections of the chapter is the relationship of physicians and rabbis. This relationship has taken different guises, quite literally, and though he does not present it as such, reflects a number of ways in which "the doctors became rabbis."

I. Section One of Chapter Fourteen: When the Doctors Became Rabbis: In Dress and Address

The Physician's Garb

Section one revolves around a story about a Jewish physician related by Rabbi Epstein's great-grandfather, a resident of Lithuania, who was on a committee reviewing applications for a community physician. The leading candidate was a Jewish physician whom the committee thought would best serve their needs. Rabbi Epstein's great-grandfather was adamant about one particular aspect of the negotiations—that the physician should wear the garb commonly worn by non-Jewish European physicians and not that which was customary for Jewish physicians in Lithuania. In Lithuania, Epstein reports, it was the practice of Jewish physicians to don a round fur hat and a long frock extending down to the feet, known as a "*me'il*." This garb was virtually indistinguishable from that of the rabbis.

When asked why this seemingly peripheral issue was of such concern, he proceeded to tell a delightful if disturbing story about how the physician's dress nearly led to a flagrant violation of Torah law. Once a woman entered a rabbi's home to present a halakhic query about kashrut. She found him in his study, and after presenting the case, received a quick and quite lenient response. Upon her return home, the woman's husband inquired about the decision. The woman's husband, who himself was a

learned man, was concerned that not only was the rabbi's response suspiciously permissive, but the rabbi had also neglected to clarify the specific circumstances of this case before rendering his decision. When the husband rushed to the rabbi's house to investigate and confronted the rabbi, the latter seemed bewildered. He did not recall receiving any such query that day. It was ultimately revealed that the man in the rabbi's study was in fact not the rabbi at all, but a physician visiting to treat the rabbi's ill daughter. The woman mistook him for the rabbi due to his garb, which was identical to a rabbi's. The physician, upon hearing the query, and believing the rabbi to be in a state of duress related to his daughter's illness, and in no mental condition to address this question, took it upon himself to respond to the woman and relieve the rabbi of this additional burden. Recalling some elementary Talmudic principles from his childhood, as he had not advanced further in his Torah study, he took the liberty to provide a lenient ruling, erroneously assuming the rabbi would have done likewise.

Leaving the halakhic ramifications of the story aside, we learn of the Lithuanian custom of the rabbi and physician dressing alike. Examples of different distinct groups, including Jews, wearing similar attire goes back at least to medieval times. According to Cecil Roth, at the likes of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, "It was a stock joke in medieval times that the gown of the Doctor of Divinity was almost indistinguishable from the traditional Jewish garb."[9] Roth added that "from which side the imitation came is not indicated." Asher Salah also points to a time when rabbis and doctors may have dressed similarly. He notes that seventeenth-century iconography reveals that rabbis from the Netherlands and Italy donned attire that resembled a physician's robe.[10]

Our passage represents firsthand eyewitness testimony of a unique, otherwise little-known custom. To my knowledge, this specific custom of virtually identical costumes for both rabbis and Jewish physicians is not found elsewhere and has not been previously documented. How place- or time-specific was this practice? Was this only the custom in Lithuania? When did this custom begin and end? Are there extant illustrations of this type of physician's garb? Further investigation is required.

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9 Cecil Roth, "The Medieval University and the Jew," *Menorah Journal* 19:2 (November–December, 1930), 128–141.

10 Cited in Eric Silverman, *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 35. The garb also bore resemblance to a Protestant clerical coat.

History of the Jewish Physician's Garb

While a comprehensive dedicated work on the Jewish physician's garb throughout the ages remains a desideratum, here we mention some brief highlights.

In the fifteenth century, Yehudah Messer Leon,[11] who was a professor at the University of Padua, initiated a halakhic discussion on the Jewish physician's wearing of academic robes (called Cappa gowns), in light of the prohibition of "and in their statutes you shall not walk." The seminal responsum of Rabbi Yosef Colon on this topic, which was ultimately permissive,[12] was addressed to Messer Leon.[13]

There are illustrations labeled as the traditional garb of the Jewish physician.[14] However, there may not necessarily be solid historical basis for the assertion that the garb was customarily worn by all Jewish physicians of the time. Indeed, there are numerous portraits and depictions of Jewish physicians throughout the centuries. It does not mean that every image reflects a unique garb worn by the Jewish physicians of this time.

The focus of many historians has been not on the unique medical garb of the Jewish physician, but rather on the exemption of the Jewish physician throughout history from wearing the unique identifying garb required by all Jews. Jews from the Middle Ages onwards were often subject to discriminatory practices requiring them to wear some identifying clothing, be it a badge or hat, of specific colors.

In thirteenth-century Aragon, Jews were required to wear such an identifying sign. Jewish doctors attempted to procure exemptions, the

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11 On Messer Leon and his work, see Isaac Rabinowitz, *The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow by Judah Messer Leon: A Critical Edition and Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Daniel Carpi, "Rabbi Yehudah Messer Leon and his Work as a Physician" (Hebrew), *Michael* 1(1972), 276–301; Daniel Carpi, "Notes on the Life of Rabbi Judah Messer Leon," in E. Toaff, ed., *Studi sull'Ebraismo Italiano: In Memoria di Cecil Roth* (Rome: Barulli, 1974), 39–62; Edward Reichman, "The Yeshiva Medical School: The Evolution of Educational Programs Combining Jewish Studies and Medical Training," *Tradition* 51:3 (Summer 2019), 41–56.

12 *Maharik* #88.

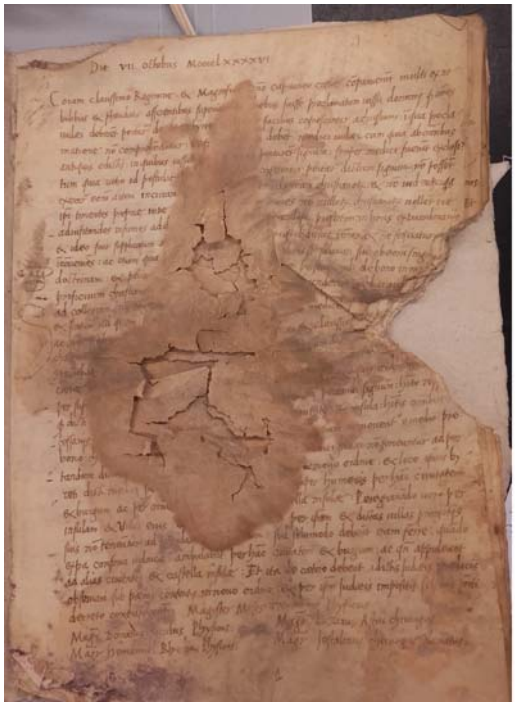
13 See also, Judith Bleich, "Clerical Robes: Distinction or Dishonor?" *Tradition* 50:1 (Spring 2017), 9–34.

14 For example, an illustration online (https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/24722181;prevRouteTS=1678320000154) is labeled as a Jewish physician in traditional costume. The physician in this engraving has been identified elsewhere as Moses Hamon.

logic of which was sometimes included in the privileges granted. For example, in a privilege written by the King of Aragon to Ezra Alacar on November 18, 1330, we find the following:

> You have to travel on various routes by day and by night. If you wear on your vest the roll that Jews have to wear on their external vest, you risk being molested by unknowing Christians.[15]

In fifteenth-century Candia, then part of the Venetian State, it was suggested that the Jewish physician wear a special scarf instead of a yellow hat. An illustration of the suggested scarf appears in the margin of the Senate records of Candia from October 7, 1496.[16]



15 Cited in Joseph Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine and Medieval Society* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1994), 73–74.

16 ASVe, Duca di Candia, b. 26bis, fasc. 12, f. 1r–v (7 October 1496). See Giacomo Corazzol, "Jewish Medicine in Venetian Crete (Late Thirteenth to Early Sixteenth Centuries): Physicians, Surgeons and Manuscripts," in Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche, eds., *Cultures of Empire: Rethinking Venetian Rule 1400–1700: Essays in Honour of Benjamin Arbel* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 329–365, esp. 350.

The history of the distinctive dress for Jews legislated for centuries by the Venetian Republic is perhaps better known and documented. In Ravid's general discussion about the distinguishing head-covering of the Jews in Venice,[17] which at various times was either red or yellow, the status and petitions of physicians to receive exemptions occupies an inordinate percentage of the discussion. The Italian doctors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries argued, much like their predecessors in Aragon centuries earlier, that in traveling from place to place to provide medical care, if they were required to wear the designated Jewish cap, they would live in constant fear of their lives and of the prejudice of the Christian population. This would effectively prevent them from practicing their craft. In addition, the Jewish graduates of the University of Padua claimed that their medical diploma entitled them to an exemption from the required distinctive clothing, something the Venetian Senate debated.[18]

Returning to Rabbi Epstein's case, his great-grandfather's stipulation was ultimately rejected by the Chief Judge of the local rabbinic court, also a member of the search committee, not only due to the exceeding rarity of the confluence of such circumstances occurring again, but also because this remote potentially negative concern was far outweighed by the many positive aspects associated with the physicians' appearance mimicking that of the rabbis. These included, in his opinion, maintaining the spirit of Judaism "hovering" over the physician and serving as a deterrent from his straying from religion, as well as facilitating honor to its wearer, which would in turn generate an environment of reciprocal honor between Jewish doctor and patient. In a sense, the Chief Judge argued that when the doctors dress like rabbis, the Jewish people would stay healthier.

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17 Benjamin Ravid, "From Yellow to Red: On the Distinguishing Head-Covering of the Jews of Venice," *Jewish History* 6:1–2 (1992), 179–210. See also, David Jacoby, "Les Juifs à Venise du XIV au Milieu du XVI Siècle," in his *Recherches sur la Méditerranée Orientale du XIIe au XVe Siècle* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 175–176, 202–203. Harry Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* (Ktav, 1967) also references the Jewish physicians' frequent requests for exemption from the Jewish dress requirement, 551–612

18 Jewish physicians in Rome in the sixteenth century also obtained exemptions from wearing the red cloak. See Anna Esposita, "Non Solo Archiatri: Medici Ebrei a Roma nel Rinascimento," in Myriam Silvera, *Medici Rabbini* (Carocci Editore, 2012). See Roth, *op. cit.*, 137 regarding the exemption of Jewish Padua medical students from wearing the red hat.

When Doctors Became Rabbis: How the Jewish Physician Was Addressed

Rabbi Epstein reports that the practice of physicians dressing in rabbinic garb became so widespread, as did the general physician-rabbi symmetry, that it even metastasized into addressing the physician with the title "rabbi" or "rebbe." Thus, we find yet another example, albeit external, in which doctors resembled rabbis. Parenthetically, Epstein attests to the fluidity of the titles "rabbi" and "doctor" being reciprocal.[19]

As anecdotal support for this observation, Epstein cites the case of the esteemed physician Shmuel Kuschelewsky,[20] one of the first Jewish graduates of University of Vilna (in 1824), whom Epstein describes as meticulous in his religious observance. Kuschelewsky insisted that the people address him as rabbi. He argued that the rabbi and physician work in tandem to heal the body and soul respectively. The rabbi would be unable to attend to the soul would it not be for the doctor's preservation of the body. As such, they both equally deserve the title of "rabbi."

Here is yet another example of how the physicians became rabbis. The potentially positive implications of such a practice might be assimilated from those suggested by the Chief Rabbinic Judge in Lithuania regarding the rabbinic-like garb of the physician. Thus, when the doctors were addressed as "rabbi," the Jewish people were healthier.

II. Section Two of Chapter Fourteen: When the Doctors Became Rabbis: The Physicians' Torah Education and Scholarship

In section two, Epstein departs from a personal perspective and launches an address on the state of Jewish physicians "today" as compared to generations gone by. Epstein notes that the physicians of the past spent their early educational years totally immersed in Torah study and in a Torah environment, complete with strong connection to the Torah giants of their respective generations. They did not begin their secular studies until later in life. As such, their Torah knowledge was firmly established and was an integral part of their being. It remained a prominent and dominant part of their lives in perpetuity.

He lauds this medicine and Torah synthesis, and it is these unique physicians who most literally reflect our adage, "When doctors became rabbis…" While some of them indeed became ordained rabbis, even

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19 I. e., rabbis were also addressed as "doctor," apropos "when the rabbis became doctors." Epstein offers intriguing theories about the origins of the practice.

20 See below for more biographical information on this physician.

those who did not, imbibed, embodied, and illuminated Torah to justifiably earn the title rabbi, nonetheless. Epstein in a sense posits that when the doctors became rabbis, the Jewish people were healthy.

Epstein does not suffice with generalities, but proceeds to provide an illustrative list, which we discuss in detail below, of specific physicians from earlier generations who excelled in the fields of both medicine and Torah scholarship.

In contrast to the type of physician described above, Epstein describes the physicians of his day, who began the study of secular subjects at a young age and did not cultivate a significant foundation in Torah learning prior to studying medicine. As such, they never advanced beyond rudimentary knowledge, sometimes remaining ignorant of even the most basic tenets of the religion, let alone the Hebrew language.[21] He laments the current state of Jewish physicians and the precipitous decline in their Jewish knowledge and identity. He concludes with a postscript of anecdotes of physicians of his day that reflect their profound Jewish illiteracy.[22]

This address is comprised of two interrelated elements: 1) An observation of a fundamental change in the Jewish education of physicians, with a resultant decline in their Jewish knowledge and identity. 2) A list of Jewish physicians who followed the ideal path of Jewish education combining medicine with Torah scholarship and observance.

A Hidden Clue to Rabbi Epstein's Digression

Section two, as Epstein himself acknowledges, deviates from the larger work's purview. What motivated Epstein to include this two-pronged digression and take the chapter in this direction?

Regarding such a list of Jewish physicians, is there any precedent for such an endeavor? Over the recent centuries, a number of scholars have

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21 His opinion of these physicians is perhaps alluded to in the Hebrew title of the chapter, "Tov She-bi-Rof'im," a hint to the statement of *Ḥazal* that the best of physicians are destined for Gehinom. *Mishnah Kiddushin* 4:14.

22 The cases he cites are highly illustrative, if not comical, and can best be appreciated when read in the original. While the prominent physicians of great Torah learning discussed earlier in the chapter are identified by name and other biographic information, the section on the Jewishly illiterate physicians contains tales of only unnamed practitioners. The author clearly consciously omitted the names to prevent personal humiliation, a sensitivity worth noting.

compiled lists of Jewish physicians[23] arranged by name, time period, geographic location, or affiliated university.[24] Steinschneider attempted a comprehensive alphabetical list of Jewish physicians not long before the publication of *Mekor Barukh*.[25] All we know from these lists, aside from skeletal biographical statistics, is that the physician was Jewish, though even this is sometimes conjecture.[26] There is no indication of religious predilection.

The list provided by Rabbi Epstein is of a different genre. It is not categorized by historical data points, or even solely by Jewishness; rather, it is restricted exclusively to Jewish physicians who excelled in Torah observance and scholarship. The physicians listed represent the ideal or model examples of a "Jewish" physician. Had anyone previously attempted to compile a list of this nature?

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23 See, for example, Moritz Steinschneider "*Jüdische Aertze*," *Zeitschrift für Hebräeische Bibliographie* 18: 1–3 (January–June, 1915); Solomon Kagan, *Jewish Contributions to Medicine in America* (Boston Medical Publishing, 1939); Nathan Koren, *Jewish Physicians: A Bibliographical Index* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973); Hindle S. Hes, *Jewish Physicians in the Netherlands* (Van Gorcum, Assen, 1980); Ronald Eisenberg, *Jews in Medicine: Contributions to Health and Healing Throughout the Ages* (Urim Publications, 2019).

24 A few examples include Louis Lewin, "*Die Jüdischen Studenten an der Universität Frankfurt an der Oder*," *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 14 (1921), 217–238; Adolf Kober, "Rheinische Judendoktoren, Vornehmlich des 17 und 18 Jahrhunderts," *Festschrift zum 75 Jährigen Bestehen des Jüdisch-Theologischen Seminars Fraenckelscher Stiftung*, Volume II (Breslau: Verlag M. & H. Marcus, 1929), 173–236. For a list of Jewish graduates of the University of Padua, see Abdelkader Modena and Edgardo Morpurgo, *Medici E Chirurghi Ebrei Dottorati E Licenziati Nell Universita Di Padova dal 1617 al 1816* (Bologna, 1967); Guido Kisch, *Die Prager Universität und die Juden, 1348–1848* (B. R. Gruner, 1969); M. Komorowski, *Bio-bibliographisches Verzeichnis jüdischer Doktoren im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Munchen: K. G. Saur Verlag, 1991); Richarz, *op. cit.*

25 Steinschneider, *op. cit.*

26 Some are included in these lists by virtue of their "Jewish" sounding names, without corroborating evidence as to their Jewishness. In addition, a not insignificant number converted to other religions to advance their medical careers (though technically they would still be counted among Jewish physicians). The history and extent of conversion amongst Jewish medical students and physicians is a dissertation that needs writing. Promotion in medicine until very recent times was typically contingent upon rejection of the Jewish faith. For example, see the numerous discussions in Richarz, *op. cit.*, regarding the persistent and consistent pressure exerted upon students and graduates to convert.

In fact, at least two works of a similar nature preceded Epstein.[27] David Holub produced a lengthy work of some 250 pages entitled *Pardes David*[28] dedicated to biographies of physician/Torah scholars.[29] Holub viewed himself as filling a void in the recently expanding field of Jewish history, as the history of Jewish physicians had been largely neglected.[30] There is however no mention of a spiritual or religious decline of the Jewish physicians in his day. *Pardes David* does not seem to have been widely disseminated, nor cited, and appears to have been unknown to Epstein.

The second work of this nature is not in a dedicated volume but occupies some 25 pages of a larger work titled *Meishiv Nefesh*, published in 1906 by Dr. Menachem Mendel Yehuda Leib Sergei, a prominent well-respected physician and Talmudic scholar. This work, which includes both halakhic and medical treatises on circumcision, as well as other halakhic topics, is introduced by a separate essay titled *Sha'ar Ha-Torah Vi-ha-Ḥokhmah* (The Gate of Torah and Wisdom). In addition to some brief autobiographical information and insight into the reason for his choice of medicine as a career,[31] Sergei praises the physicians who marry medical and scientific knowledge with Torah study. He is so enamored with this life model that he lists dozens of illustrative personalities from Jewish history throughout the centuries (along with biographies).

Sergei then laments the physicians of his day who had not followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, and, with few exceptions, had precipitously declined in their Torah knowledge and practice. He attributes this fact to a major deficiency in the methodology of Jewish education. In previous generations, young children studied Torah intensely for years and only after a solid foundation in Torah studies did they venture into the world of secular knowledge. This guaranteed that their Torah learning would forever remain primary. His contention was that in his day, already at a young age, before their Torah foundation was solidified, young children were being exposed to secular studies. As a result, the foundation of

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27 See David Holub, *Pardes David*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1880 and 1882); Menachem Mendel Leib Sergei, *Meshiv Nefesh* (Vilna, 1906). Later examples of more recent similar lists include David Margalit, *Ḥokhmei Yisrael ki-Rof'im* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1962); Asher Salah, *Le République des Lettres: Rabbins, Écrivains et Médecins Juifs en Italie au 18th Siècle* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

28 It originally appeared in the pages of the periodical *Ha-Shachar* in the 1870s.

29 David Holub, *Pardes David*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1880 and 1882).

30 See introduction to *Pardes David* 1 (Vienna, 1880).

31 E. Reichman, "The Jewish Attraction to the Medical Profession in Physicians' Own Words: A Mesorah of Medicine," *Ḥakirah* 34 (Fall 2023), 215–236.

Torah knowledge was not properly formed. With this system of education, the children never attain the primacy of Torah study required to become a true Torah U'Madda Jew.[32]

Sergei's essay bears striking resemblance to Epstein's second section. Could Epstein have received his inspiration from Sergei, or perhaps even borrowed parts of it?

We must first inquire as to whether Epstein was even familiar with Sergei or his work. Fortunately, Epstein answers our question himself, and in this very chapter. One of the physicians he includes in his list, upon which we elaborate below, is none other than Sergei. In fact, he reserves superlatives for him in both his brilliance in Talmudic and rabbinic literature as well as for his masterful work, *Meshiv Nefesh*. Epstein reveals that he only came across Sergei's work incidentally, in the possession of an acquaintance, and expresses surprise that Sergei was not more widely known in the Jewish community.

While it is clear that Epstein had seen Sergei's work, it remains for us to explore the extent to which it served as an inspiration or perhaps template for his own. There is little doubt in my mind that the general idea to include this section came from Sergei, but how far do the similarities extend? The overt and unabashed praise of the physician-Torah scholar model could easily have been independently maintained by Epstein. However, the analysis of the educational transition of Jewish physicians of the early twentieth century, as well as the idea to include a substantial list of Torah learned physicians, could easily have derived from Sergei.

The true test of the extent of the similarity is how the lists of physicians match up. In this regard, Epstein's chosen physicians, which we discuss below, are far fewer, dissimilar, and bear scant biographical descriptions in contrast to those of Sergei. In fact, less than a handful of names are common to both lists, and Epstein included contemporary physicians (including Sergei), which Sergei did not.

It seems to me that Epstein had only brief access to someone else's copy of Sergei's *Meshiv Nefesh* and probably did not possess a copy himself. The significant disparity in the physician lists implies that Epstein did not have Sergei's work on hand when he penned his chapter.

It remains only conjecture as to how much of Epstein's chapter on physicians was inspired by Sergei. While both Holub and Sergei's contributions are far more comprehensive and cover a wider historical period,[33]

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32 My formulation.

33 See Edward Reichman, "The Life and Work of Dr. Menachem Mendel Yehudah Leib Sergei: A Torah U'Madda Titan in the Early Twentieth Century," *Ḥakirah* 27 (Fall 2019), 119–146.

Epstein's list nonetheless contributes novel material not found in either. It is to this list that we now turn our attention.

Rabbi Epstein's List of Physicians

Now that we understand his motivation, let us take a closer look at the list of physicians.

While Holub's and Sergei's lists are chronological and grouped by historical time periods, Epstein's appears to be random. As opposed to his predecessors, for whom this list was a primary and dedicated objective, for Epstein this was a mere tangent of peripheral interest.

As the order of Epstein's list is decidedly not chronological, nor does he provide even approximate dates for many of the entries, the reader might not appreciate the temporal relationship between, or chronological span of, these physicians. (The physicians range from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries.) I therefore list the physicians in chronological order. Furthermore, as some of these physicians are identified by first name only, and yet others may be unfamiliar to the modern reader, we add a little bibliographic flesh to Epstein's skeletal list. We supplement with some previously unpublished archival items.

- R' Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Tashbetz) (1361–1444)[34]

Tashbetz was a rabbi, philosopher, physician, and prominent *posek* in Palma de Mallorca.

R' Epstein theorizes why despite being a physician Tashbetz struggled financially. Possibly related to the general state of poverty in his city, he likely received little for his services.

- R' Eliyahu (Montalto) (1567–1616)[35]

Epstein mentions a R' Eliyahu who wrote a responsum, "filled with multiple references to Talmud and *poskim*," about the use of a carriage to travel to treat the Queen on Shabbat. This is a reference to Elijah Montalto (1567–1616), the great Marrano physician to the Medici family. Montalto is known to the halakhic world for a responsum he penned defending his practice of traveling in a *carroza* (carriage) on Shabbat to attend to

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[34] On Tashbetz, see Sergei, op. cit., and David Margalit, *Derekh Yisrael bi-Refuah* (Academy of Medicine: Jerusalem, 1970), 245–248.

[35] See H. Friedenwald, *op. cit.*, "Montalto: A Jewish Physician at the Court of Marie de Medici and Louis XIII," in his *The Jews and Medicine* (Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 468-496.

Queen Maria Medici in Paris.[36] Epstein contrasts this to physicians who used prohibited forms of transportation on Shabbat with no regard for whether halakhah allowed it or not.

- Binyamin Mussafia (1606–1675)[37]

Benjamin Mussafia, a graduate of the medical school of Padua (1625), wrote *Dicti Sacro-Medicae Sententiae* (Hamburg, 1640), the earliest known work by a Jewish physician on the Bible, collecting and explaining medically related passages from the Torah.[38] He is also the author of *Musaf Ha-Arukh*, a commentary of the dictionary *Sefer Ha-Arukh*, and *Zekher Rav*, a work on grammar.

- Azriel Petaḥyah Alatino (seventeenth century)[39]

Alatino practiced in Ferrara, served as a rabbi and authored a work on the laws of *muktzah*. According to Koren, he participated in the translation of the Cannon on Avicenna into Hebrew.

- Abraham Ha-Kohen (Sacerdote)[40] (1670– ?1722)

Epstein writes of an Avraham Ha-Kohen from Candia who served as a rabbi and wrote *derashot* (sermons) on the Torah.[41] He is referring to Avraham Sacerdote (Ha-Kohen) from Zante, a different Greek Island, which was also part of the Venetian empire. He graduated from Padua (1693) and led a group of physician poets in his day.

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36 Cecil Roth, "Elie Montalto et sa Consultation sur le Sabbat," *Revue des Études Juives* 94:188 (April–June, 1933), 113–136; Yaakov Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Miller, "The Custom of Treating non-Jewish Patients on Shabbos," (Hebrew) *Ḥitzei Giborim* 7 (Elul, 5774), 295–296.

37 For a more expansive biography of Mussafia, see Margalit, *op. cit.*, 142–151.

38 See H. Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* 1 (Ktav Publishing House, 1967), 112.

39 See Koren, *op. cit.*, 12.

40 See M. Benayahu, "Rav Avraham Ha-Kohen mi-Zante ve-Lahaqat ha-Rof'im ha-Meshorerim be-Padova," *Ha-Sifrut* 26 (1978), 108–140.

41 *Derashot al ha-Torah* (Venice, 1700).

- Shimon Morpurg—Shimshon Morpurgo[42] (1681–1740)

Morpurgo graduated from the University of Padua in 1700. He was a physician, rabbi, liturgist/poet, and author of responsa on *Shulḥan Arukh* titled *Shemesh Tzedakah*. He received his rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Yehudah Briel and served as a rabbi in Ancona in the later years of his life.

- R' Yitzḥak Lampronti[43] (1679–1756)

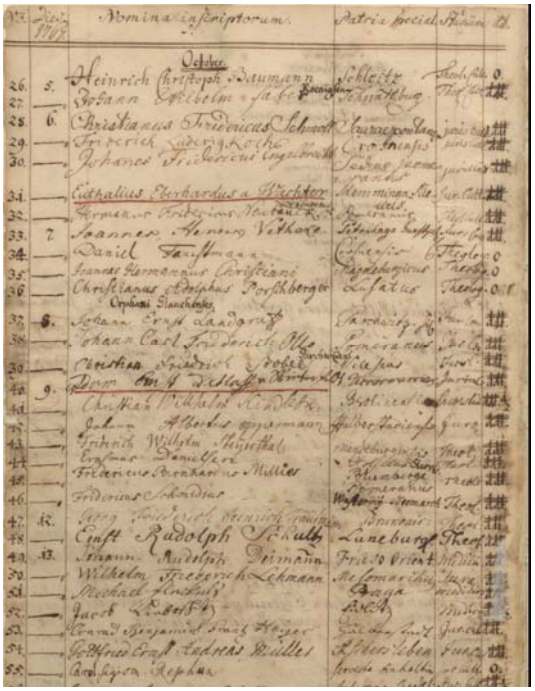
Lampronti was one of the greatest figures of the Italian Renaissance—rabbi, physician, author of the first-ever halakhic encyclopedia. Epstein recounts his great difficulty in procuring all the volumes of his encyclopedia *Paḥad Yitzḥak* and that it took over one hundred years until the volumes were published. Below is Lampronti's graduation record from 1696 which I obtained from the University of Padua Archives.

42 On Morpurgo, see Edward Reichman, "The Illustrated Life of an Illustrious Renaissance Jew: Rabbi Dr. Shimshon Morpurgo (1681–1740)," *Seforim Blog* (https://seforimblog.com), June 22, 2021.

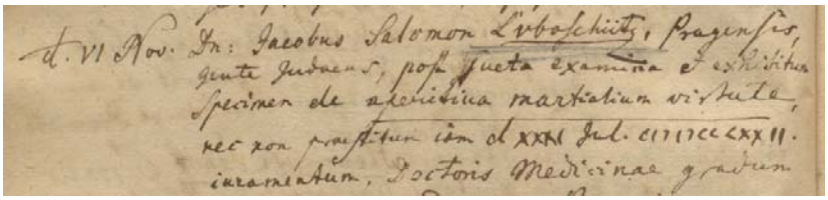
43 Much has been written about Lampronti and his work, including his medical practice. See, for example, D. B. Ruderman, "Contemporary Science and Jewish Law in the Eyes of Isaac Lampronti and Some of his Contemporaries," *Jewish History* 6(1–2) (1992): 211–24; D. Margalit, "Rabbi Yitzchak Lampronti — Rabbi, Physician, and Lexicographer" (Hebrew), in *Ḥakhmei Yisrael Ke-Rof'im* (Mosad HaRav Kook, 5722), 152–74: H. A. Savitz, "Dr. Isaac Lampronti," in *Profiles of Erudite Jewish Physicians and Scholars* (Spertus College Press, 1973), 29–32; Debra Glasberg Gail, "Scientific Authority and Jewish Law in Early Modern Italy," (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 2016). Sergei's, *op. cit.*, longest entry is on Lampronti.

- Yaakov (Jakob Salomon) Leiboschutz (1739–1825)[44]

Leiboschutz was a graduate of the University of Halle, lived in St. Petersburg, and later moved to Vilna. Below are two records I procured from the University of Halle. His matriculation record for the University of Halle on October 13, 1767 (he is #52 on the list and identified as being from Eidlitz),[45]



and his graduation record from November 6, 1773:



[44] See Koren, *op. cit.*, p. 84; W. Kaiser and A. Völker, Judaica Medica des 18 und des Frühen 19 Jahrhunderts in den Beständen des Halleschen Universitätsarchives (Halle, 1979), 31–35.

[45] UAHw, Rep. 46, Nr. 5.

Epstein recounts a remarkable anecdote he heard from his maternal uncle, Rabbi Ḥayyim Berlin, about Leiboschutz treating the Vilna Gaon. Upon exiting the room after examining the Gaon, the doctor was asked (in Yiddish), "Where is he holding?" He quipped, "He is 'holding' in *Keilim*," i.e., he is currently learning the tractate of *Keilim*. When he pressed his ear to the chest of the Vilna Gaon as part of his routine physical exam, he had heard him reciting the Mishnah.[46] Regarding the great Vilna Gaon, it is perhaps not surprising that he was reciting the Mishnah by heart. For Leiboschutz to recognize the exact source after hearing only brief whispered utterances is another matter, and quite impressive indeed.

- Gedaliah Brecher[47] (1797–1873)

Gideon Brecher, also known as Gedaliah ben Eliezer, was an Austrian physician and writer. Brecher was the uncle, by marriage, to perhaps one the greatest bibliographers in Jewish history, Moritz Steinschneider. Amongst the latter's voluminous works are essential bibliographies of books and manuscripts on the topics of science and medicine in rabbinic literature. Brecher was born in Prossnitz, Moravia. He was the first Jew of Prossnitz to study medicine or any other professional field. Brecher obtained his graduate degree in Surgery and Obstetrics in 1824. He received his medical degree from the University of Erlangen in 1849. His thesis was *Das Transcendentale, Magie und Magische Heilarten im Talmud* (Vienna, 1850). This 267-page dissertation is well-researched with copious notes and incorporates much Hebrew text.

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46 Lieboschutz added, "*lashon nofel al lashon*."

47 The entry for Brecher is preceded by a brief mention of someone only known to R' Epstein by his pseudonym or column name, in the journal *Ha-Magid*, "*Emet l'Yaakov*." Epstein simply identifies him as a physician who also delivered sermons in synagogue. In the periodical *Ha-Magid*, the author of this column later revealed his identity as Yaakov Reifman, and he does not seem to have been a physician. See *Ha-Magid* (October 1, 1879)


Das

Transcendentale,

Magie und magische Heilarten

im

Talmud.

Von

Dr. Gideon Brecher,

Wien, 1850.

While Epstein does not mention this dissertation, he mentions Brecher's lucid commentary on the *Kuzari* of Judah ha-Levi, which appeared with the text in four parts (Prague, 1838–1840). Brecher's correspondence with Samuel David Luzzato about this commentary was also published.

- Efraim Edelstein (1803—1884)

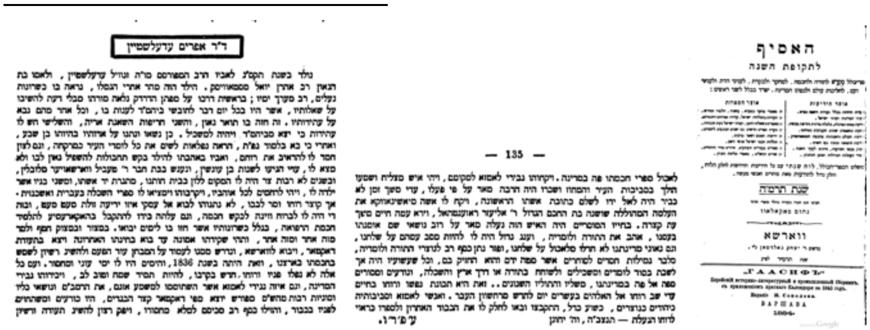
When R' Epstein was younger and learned in the Volozyn Yeshivah, he heard repeatedly from his friends in the dormitory who were from Lomza of a local physician by the name of Efraim Edelstein who was considered an *iluy* (genius in Torah study) in his youth and only started learning medicine at age twenty-four. Even after he completed his training and began practice, his continued devotion to Torah was legendary. He gravitated towards his yeshivah friends and delighted in exploring complex Talmudic issues with them. R' Epstein confesses that he thought his friends' description was a bit exaggerated until one day years later he came upon an obituary by R' Nachum Sokolov for this physician in the journal *ha-Asif*[48]

[48] Epstein does not mention the publication specifics. It appeared in *Ha-Asif* year 5645, pps. 134–135.

which confirmed the truth of all that his friends had said years earlier.[49] While Edelstein had struggled after his medical training, when he arrived in Lomza his great Torah learning was noticed and appreciated and he received financial support for the rest of his life.[50]

- Shmuel Kuszelewski[51] (mid nineteenth century)

Kuszelewski was a prominent, learned, and observant physician in Lithuania, an adherent of Chabad, and maintained close contact with many of the rabbinic personalities of his day. Epstein identifies him as the first Jewish graduate of the University of Vilna (1824).[52] Below are the front page and dedication of his medical dissertation, which I have not seen published elsewhere.


ד"ר אפרים עדעלשטיין

— 135 —

האסיף

לתקופת השנה

49 He thought to himself that he should ask forgiveness from his childhood friends for having been *ḥoshed bi-kesheirim*, suspected them of being less than honest.

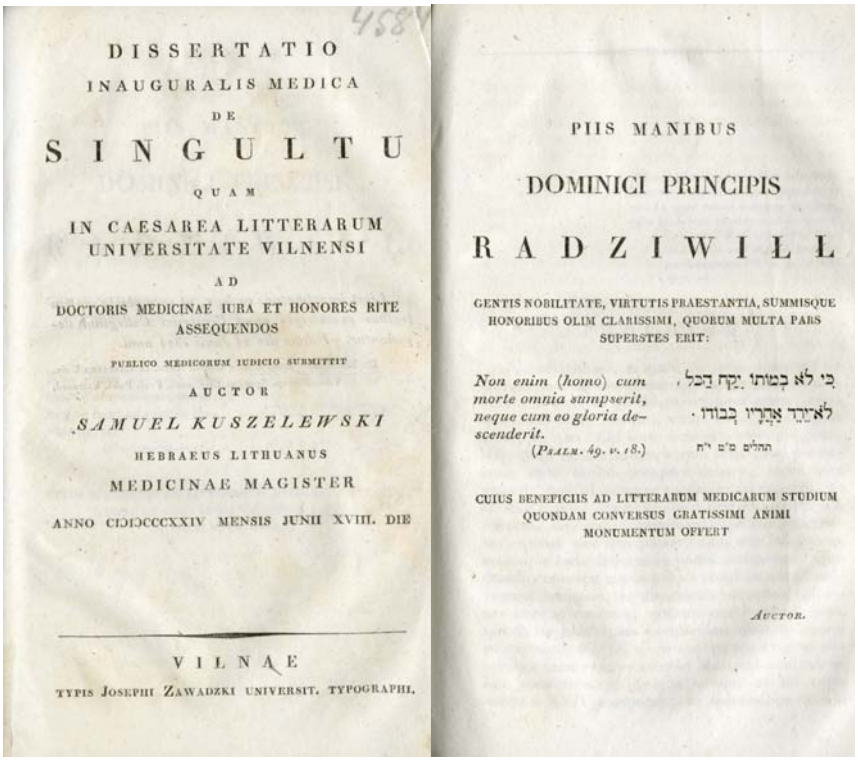
50 Edelstein was apparently also a coin collector, as we find brief mention of his private collection in Stanislaw Krzyzanowski, ed., *Rocznik dla archeologow numizmatykow i bibliografow polskich* (Universitätsdruckerei, 1874), n. 363.


363. EDELSTEIN EFRAIM Med. Dr. m. Łomża—zbiór znakomity polskich monet i medali.

On Edelstein's son, Dr. Alexander Edelstein, see Leon Wulman, "A History of the Jewish Physicians in Poland," in L. Falstein, ed., *The Martyrdom of Jewish Physicians in Poland* (Exposition Press: New York, 1963), 43–44.

51 See Margalit, *Derekh Yisrael*, *op. cit.*, 252–253. There are variant spellings for his name. I adopted the one that appears on his dissertation below.

52 As per correspondence with the archivist at the University of Vilna, Veronika Girininkaitė, there were other Jewish graduates who preceded him. See Dr. David Ščiupakas, ed., *Lietuvos Jeruzalės Medikai* (Physicians of the Lithuanian Jerusalem) (Vilnius : R. Paknio leidykla, 2016).



DISSERTATIO
INAUGURALIS MEDICA
DE
SINGULTU
QUAM
IN CAESAREA LITTERARUM
UNIVERSITATE VILNENSI
AD
DOCTORIS MEDICINAE IURA ET HONORES RITE
ASSEQUENDOS
PUBLICO MEDICORUM IUDICIO SUBMITTIT
AUCTOR
SAMUEL KUSZELEWSKI
HEBRAEUS LITHUANUS
MEDICINAE MAGISTER
ANNO CIↃIↃCCCXXIV MENSIS JUNII XVIII. DIE

VILNAE
TYPIS JOSEPHI ZAWADZKI UNIVERSIT. TYPOGRAPHI.

PIIS MANIBUS
DOMINICI PRINCIPIS
RADZIWIŁŁ
GENTIS NOBILITATE, VIRTUTIS PRAESTANTIA, SUMMISQUE
HONORIBUS OLIM CLARISSIMI, QUORUM MULTA PARS
SUPERSTES ERIT:

Non enim (homo) cum morte omnia sumpserit, neque cum eo gloria descenderit.
(*Psalm. 49. v. 18.*)

כִּי לֹא בְמוֹתוֹ יִקַּח הַכֹּל ,
לֹא יֵרֵד אַחֲרָיו כְּבוֹדוֹ ·
תהלים מ"ט י"ח

CUIUS BENEFICIIS AD LITTERARUM MEDICARUM STUDIUM
QUONDAM CONVERSUS GRATISSIMI ANIMI
MONUMENTUM OFFERT

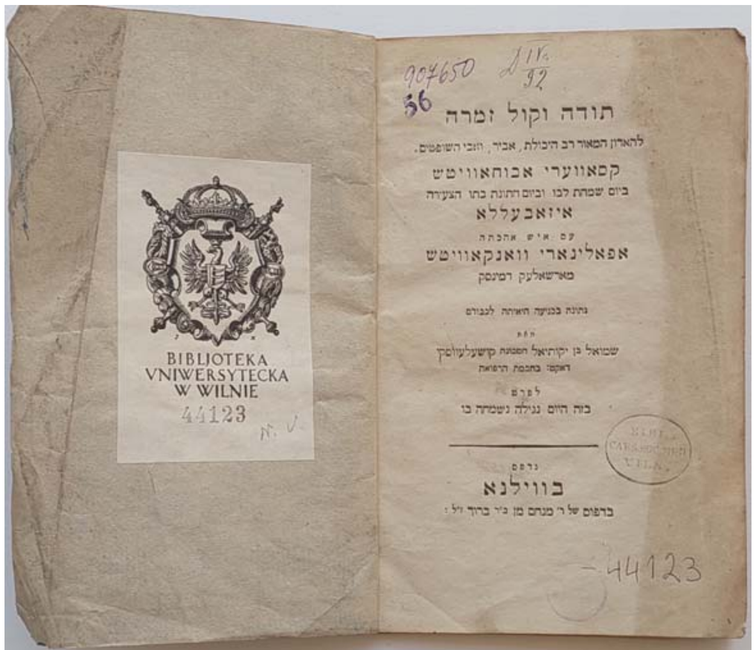
Auctor.

Note that he is identified as Hebraeus, a convention applied to Jewish students and dating back centuries in countries like Italy and the Netherlands. Also, note the verse in Hebrew as part of the dedication to Prince Radzivill.[53]

In addition to the story above regarding Kuszelewski's use of the title "Rabbi," Epstein also includes another anecdote about him. He was once in mourning, yet attended to a routine medical call even though another physician was consulted. This would not usually be permitted for a mourner. He justified his behavior by citing rabbinic sources to the effect that the more consultants the better. Epstein offered halakhic support for his behavior as well.

In addition, the University of Vilna holds a book of his published in 1825 in honor of the wedding of the daughter of a prominent community member. I have also not seen this referenced elsewhere. It includes Hebrew introductions from contemporary figures and a collection of Hebrew poetry translated into both Polish and Latin.

[53] This particular verse seems to me perhaps not the best choice for a dedication to an honorable prince.



907650
56
תודה וקול זמרה
להאדון המאור רב היכולת, אביר, וצבי השופטים.
קסאווערי אבוחאוויטש
ביום שמחת לבו וביום חתונת בתו הצעירה
איזאבעללא
עם איש אהבתה
אפאלינארי וואנקאוויטש
מארשאלעק דמינסק
נתונה בכניעה הראוייה לכבודם
מאת
שמואל בן יקותיאל המכונה קושעלעווסקי
רופא: בחכמת הרפואה
לפרט
בזה היום נגילה נשמחה בו
נדפס
בווילנא
בדפוס של ר' מנחם מן ב"ר ברוך ז"ל:
BIBLIOTEKA
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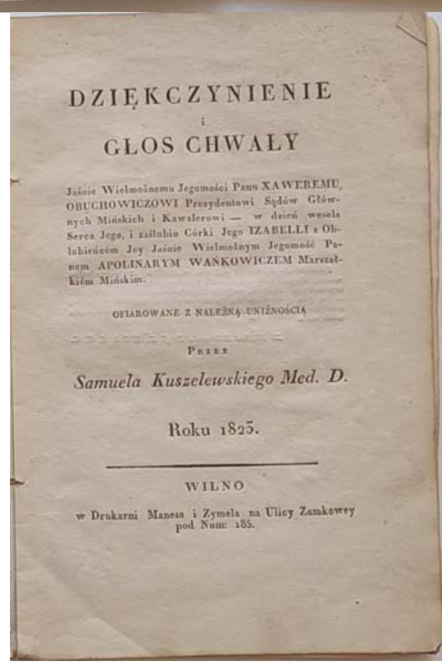

DZIĘKCZYNIENIE
i
GŁOS CHWAŁY
Jaśnie Wielmożnemu Jegomości Panu XAWEREMU, OBUCHOWICZOWI Prezydentowi Sądów Głównych Mińskich i Kawalerowi — w dzień wesela Serca Jego, i zaślubin Córki Jego IZABELLI z Oblubieńcem Jey Jaśnie Wielmożnym Jegomość Panem APOLINARYM WAŃKOWICZEM Marszałkiem Mińskim.
OFIAROWANE Z NALEŻNĄ UNIŻNOŚCIĄ
Przez
Samuela Kuszelewskiego Med. D.
Roku 1825.
WILNO
w Drukarni Manesa i Zymela na Ulicy Zamkowey pod Num: 185.

- Yehuda Leib Katznelson (1846–1917) [54]

Dr. Judah Loeb Katznelson, a Russian-Jewish physician, poet and novelist, wrote extensively on Biblical and Talmudic medicine. After completing his initial medical training, Katznelson opted to write a dissertation and take special exams to practice academic hospital-based medicine. The topic of his dissertation in Russian was normal and abnormal anatomy in ancient Hebrew Literature in relation to ancient Greco-Roman medicine. It was later translated into German and published in an academic journal.[55]

Epstein adds that Katznelson heard a Torah *shiur* (lecture) from his father, R' Yeḥiel Michel Epstein.

- Mendel Leib Sergei[56] (d. 1918)

Sergei, who was from Riga, was a prominent physician and the author of *Meshiv Nefesh*. A biographical entry during his lifetime indicates the extent to which he was respected and revered:

> In past generations there were great Torah scholars who were also prominent and famous physicians (especially in Spain), but we have not seen the likes of such men for many generations, until the appearance of this exceptional rabbi in our land, singular, one of a kind, who combines Torah, fear of God, and wisdom in an extraordinary way. [57]

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54 For a brief biography, see H. A. Savitz, "Judah Loeb Katznelson (1847–1916): Physician to the Soul of His People," in his *Profiles of Erudite Jewish Physicians and Scholars* (Spertus College Press: Chicago, 1973), 56–61. On the literary contribution of Katznelson, see M. Waxman, *A History of Jewish Literature* 4 (Bloch Publishing: New York, 1947), 154–156. For his contribution, as well the contribution of others, to Biblical and Talmudic Medicine, see *ibid.*, 702ff. For an analysis of one of his literary works, see Edward Reichman, "'*The Lost Library'* by Dan Rabinowitz and the 'Burial of Souls' by Yehuda Leib Katznelson: Different Expressions of the Same Sentiment," *The Seforim Blog* (April 3, 2019), available at https://seforimblog.com.

55 Judah Leib Benjamin Katzenelson, "De Normale und Pathologische Anatomie des Talmud," *Historische Studien aus dem Pharmakologischen Institute der Kaiserlichen Universität Dorpat* (1896).

56 On Sergei, see *Edward Reichman, "The Life and Work of Dr. Menachem Mendel Yehuda Leib Sergei: A Torah U'Madda Titan of the Early Twentieth Century," Ḥakirah* 27 (*Fall* 2019), 119–146.

57 Shmuel Noach Gottleib, *Ohalei Shem* (Glauberman Press: Pinsk, 5672), 553–554.

Conclusion

Regarding his choice of title for chapter fourteen of his work *Mekor Barukh*, I think Epstein intentionally curtailed the rabbinic expression by writing only "*Tov She-bi-Rof'im*," the best of physicians. He refers in this chapter to those who are genuinely the best of physicians, without qualification; those who value and embrace Torah as an integral part of their lives even though they happen to be physicians. Also alluded to in his title, however, is a different type of physician, one who might deserve the latter half of the expression and may be destined for Gehinom, an example being the physician in the chapter's opening story who audaciously ruled on a halakhic matter. This act was clearly out of the scope of his expertise and may appropriately be considered egregious malpractice of the rabbinic variety. Perhaps the Jewishly illiterate physicians might also be included in this category.

Section two, which explores the history of Jewish physicians more broadly, represents a digression from the main theme of the work. In all likelihood, it was inspired by the writings of Dr. Menachem Mendel Sergei, as hinted to in the chapter itself, though to what extent we may never know.

Rabbi Epstein's chapter has provided solid evidence to support our adage, with its multiple levels of meaning, that "When the doctors became rabbis," be it in dress, title, or Torah scholarship, "the Jewish people were healthy." ☙