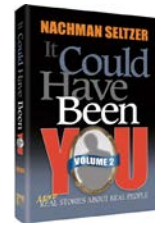


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Turn It Off

Rabbi Benjamin (Benny) Fisher is famous all around Israel for his unsurpassed medical knowledge and unstinting support for anyone sick. His organization, fields upwards of three hundred calls a day (!) the vast majority of which are personally answered by him. The calls for help run the gamut from chest pains to cancer to heart attacks to everything in between. Upon calling "Magen Lacholeh," (a shield for the sick) one reaches a person who is intimately familiar with the symptoms of whatever it is that the patient is feeling and who knows the perfect address to direct them to. Rabbi Fisher is closely connected to the top specialists and surgeons in every field around the globe and doesn't hesitate to request their assistance when needed. And they love him and grant their help unconditionally whether his call arrives in the day time or in the middle of the night.

Magen Lacholeh does not satisfy itself with a recommendation to the proper doctor. Far from it. Once a patient brings this organization into the picture they remain a part of the situation until it is resolved. There are times when special, hard to procure medicines are needed and these are provided to the patient free of charge. At times emergencies may arrive overnight in which a patient needs to travel immediately to a different country - by private plane, with a team of doctors flying alongside him. Those costs are covered by the organization as well in a case where the patient has no way of covering the costs on their own. Not only that, but in a some situations where by going through normal channels an operation may be scheduled for six months later, by going through Magen Lacholeh, the time frame is cut down to about a week.

And there is so much more.

For the average person a medical emergency is a crises of mammoth proportion; the main reason being the fact that they have never heard of any of this terminology in their lives. They have just been thrown into a foreign sea and are floundering. They feel completely and utterly lost, abandoned, forlorn and depressed. The color has just been ripped from their lives and they don't know where to turn, who to trust and what their next move should be. And that is exactly what Rabbi Benny Fisher seeks to alleviate. He guides them through the uncharted waters like a master captain. He explains to them exactly what they should be doing step by step and he walks them through the path of sudden darkness holding their hand. He also provides a team of counselors who provide the proper guidance a person needs to remain sane and healthy while they are sick.

And he does this three hundred and sixty five days a year.

It's not a job, it's a way of life. For Rabbi Benny Fisher, Pikuach Nefesh is a daily occurrence. That's just the way it is.

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And how did Rabbi Fisher get involved in all this to begin with?

Well that is of course a story.

One of his very good friends had been in a car accident. He was almost fatally wounded and Rabbi Fisher was extremely concerned and beside himself with worry about his friend. According to the doctor's reports, his friend was in critical condition with one chance of survival.

And that one chance was dependent on one particular doctor. Because he was the only one who knew how to do the particular operation that was needed to save his friend's life. The trouble was, it didn't seem like the family was having any luck in reaching this surgeon and all the while his friend's life was hanging by a thread.

Benny Fisher went into overdrive. He was going to do everything he could to save his friend. He found out which hospital employed the eminent surgeon. Then he planned his next move.

The following morning, Rabbi Fisher marched into the hospital and headed straight for the doctor's private office. When he arrived he was informed by the receptionist that the big man was in a meeting with lots of other important personages and couldn't be disturbed. Next thing she knew Benny Fisher was out of the waiting room and making a beeline straight for the conference room.

Taking a deep breath, he squared his shoulders and pushed open the door, his heart beating powerfully at the scene before his eyes. The surgeon sat there surrounded by many of his distinguished colleagues. He was delivering a speech of some vital topic or other - but he stopped and glanced at the young rabbi who had just come bounding into his private conference room without permission.

"Yes?!" He was not happy with Benny Fisher.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you in the middle of your meeting, and I would have never even dreamed of doing such a thing, but one of my best friends is lying in critical condition and the doctors have informed me that you are the only surgeon capable of operating on him successfully. That is the reason I am here. To respectfully request that you please operate on my friend and do your best to save his life."

The doctor looked around the room. Every face was turned towards his. Focused on him. Waiting for his reply. He didn't really have a choice in the matter. How would it look for the only capable surgeon in the country to turn down this request when a man's life hung in the balance? What could he possibly say? That he was too busy? That it was a matter of money?

A doctor can never be too busy to save a life.

And if it was a matter of money, Benny would have come up with the funds. He wasn't taking "no" for an answer and the doctor sensed that clearly.

In the end, the doctor operated and his friend's life was saved.

And that was when Rabbi Benny Fisher first acquired a reputation as a man who could get things done. Things that other people couldn't manage to do. Because of his determination and because he would never take no for an answer.

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And now, I move on with our story.

Quite a few years ago, Rabbi Fisher received a letter from the army informing him that he had to report for reserve duty, or, "*miluim*." Every soldier who has served in the IDF is upon his release from the army, "invited" back for a few weeks of service during the course of the following years. And that was how Rabbi Fisher found himself being asked to report for some follow up time.

When he arrived at the base, Rabbi Fisher was taken along with everyone else into an auditorium where the officer in charge gave the soldiers a little speech about the regulations that must be followed during their time spent as guests of the IDF.

The officer delivered his speech and finished up with, "and turn off your cell phones while you are here. Anyone who is caught making a call will be severely punished. Thank you."

Although to be honest, I don't think he said thank you.

Rabbi Fisher was fine with everything the man had said up until the last part of his shpiel. The part about the cell phones. That was why he approached the man to explain precisely why he wouldn't be able to turn his off.

"Sir?"

"Yes?"

"I am sorry, but I will not be able to turn my phone off during my time here in the army."

"And why is that soldier?"

"Because sick people, very sick people, call me at all hours of the day and night and need to be able to reach me. All the time."

"Let someone else answer your calls."

"They don't have my knowledge of medicine or my personal rapport with the top specialists."

"Are you a doctor yourself?"

"No, but I have amassed a huge amount of medical knowledge, know how and very close ties with hundreds of top doctors around the globe in the years that I have been working in this field. And that is why I simply cannot shut off my phone. Because I have to be available to save lives.

But the officer wasn't really listening. I guess he was used to people following his orders unconditionally and here Rabbi Fisher wasn't conforming to the usual scenario.

"So can I leave my phone on?" Rabbi Fisher asked once again.

"No you cannot."

"But I must sir."

"You can't!"

"I'm sorry sir, but I will be leaving my phone on."

"Then you will be court martialed for not obeying an explicit order."

Rabbi Fisher was at the end of his rope now and not inclined to argue the matter any further.

"Would it help if I call the army chief of staff right now and you take it up with him?" he asked the officer who looked at him as if he was a crazy man.

"What are you talking about?"

"I am talking about dialing the private number of the IDF chief of staff and asking him if I have to shut off my phone when I am serving my country. That's what I'm talking about."

"I don't know what you think you're playing at, but this conversation is just about finished. You are dismissed." Then he turned away from Benny Fisher.

Rabbi Fisher walked away and dialed the number of the Ramatkal.

"Hello?"

"Hi, this is Benny Fisher."

"Benny how are you?!!"

"Baruch Hashem fine."

"What can I do for you Benny?"

"Something small please."

"And that is?"

"Well I'm going to put the officer of my army base on the phone with you and he will tell you what this is all about."

And then Rabbi Fisher held out the phone to the officer and said, "the Ramatkal wants to talk to you."

And he looked at me in a way that suggested that half of him thought I was lying and the other half wasn't sure and the third half (wait that can't be right, there are only two halves) was sure hoping that he wasn't telling the truth. But he was and he continued holding out the phone and eventually, the officer accepted it reluctantly and a most interesting conversation unfolded before Rabbi Fisher's very eyes. But before I tell you what happened, I wish to go back a week in time. Because that was when Benny Fisher actually met the Ramatkal. And they became friends.

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"My relationship with the IDF's chief of staff began exactly one week prior to my being called up for "*miluim*," Rabbi Fisher began.

"As everyone knows, the Israeli army is constantly in a state of war. Sometimes the war is being fought out in the open against another country or state, while at other times it is being fought in a more covert manner, which might include shooting off a missile or two at some of the other sides brightest minds. Anyway a week before I reported for action, the army ambushed a group of terrorists and injured many of them in a bad way.

This was good news. It meant that some truly dangerous people had just been put out of commission. One of the terrorists who had been wounded was an especially important individual who specialized in all sorts of operations that were of specific interest to

the army because the information this man possessed, could, if delivered into the army's hands, potentially save numerous Israeli lives.

There was a problem however.

The terrorist had been severely wounded in the attack and he was barely hanging on to his life.

The very army which had put this murderer in his current position now realized that they would have to save him despite the fact that they would have liked nothing better than to bury him in an unmarked grave right then and there. Basically he knew too much to die and they needed him, which was a shame, but also reality.

Once all agreed that he needed to be saved, the doctors were consulted about what it would take and all the experts concurred that he needed this extremely complicated and ultra-sensitive operation which (surprise, surprise) could only be carried out by one particular doctor in the entire country.

"So call him up," is what you are no doubt thinking.

Well they would have called him up and they actually tried to do that, but they couldn't track him down.

"What do you mean they couldn't track him down????!! Aren't we talking about the Israeli army? Since when can't the army track down anyone they need? And besides, why didn't they just get the Mossad on it or the GSS?"

Well they actually did try to utilize all the considerable connections at their disposal and still the doctor remained beneath the radar. They tried his office - but his secretary said he would be out of the office for a week and no, she didn't know where he was.

"Really?" They asked her.

"Really," she replied.

They tried his cell phone, but the call went straight to his voice mail.

They tried the hospital where he worked, but nobody knew where he was.

They tried his phone at home, but nobody answered.

This was a matter of national urgency and amazing as it might seem, the entire IDF was being stymied by a doctor who didn't know the first thing about espionage. And all the while the terrorist was becoming progressively weaker. It was only a matter of time before he kicked the bucket (as my eight grade rebbe Rabbi Luria used to say.)

And just when the army was at its wits end, someone came up with the brilliant idea of calling Rabbi Benny Fisher, because as legend had it, here was a man who could get a hold of any doctor in the world whenever he needed them.

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"Rabbi Fisher?"

"Yes?"

"This is Colonel Gadi Yalili (*name changed to protect identity*)."

"How can I help you sir?"

"Well we have an almost fatally wounded terrorist in our hands who possesses a huge amount of vital information which we need to extract from him, but first he needs to be operated on so he doesn't die and we, with all our resources simply cannot track the doctor down."

"I see."

"Can you track him down for us? Rumor has it that you can get a hold of any doctor in the world."

"What's his name?"

"Dr. Kravitz."

"Dr. Kravitz is an old friend. I will track him down for you. No problem."

"Time is of the essence. How fast can you take care of this?"

"Right now."

"Okay I'm waiting for your call."

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Rabbi Fisher scrolled through his list of contacts until he found the private cell number for Mrs. Kravitz, who had provided her number for him to be used in the case of an emergency.

This fit the criteria hands down.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Mrs. Kravitz? This is Benny Fisher."

"Oh hello Rabbi Fisher, it's so nice to hear your voice! What can we do for you?"

"Well I'll tell you. You know I would never bother you if it wasn't a true emergency, and that's exactly what I have on my hands. Can I ask you where you and the doctor are right now, because the entire state security apparatus of Israel is searching for you right now and not having any luck."

"Certainly Rabbi Fisher. The doctor and I are currently vacationing in Eilat. He left his cell phone at home and didn't even tell his secretary where we were going so that we would have some peace and quiet."

"Well Mrs. Kravitz, I'm sorry to say that in spite of your best attempts at a disappearing act, your vacation seems to be coming to an end. The army has informed me that a helicopter will be sent to you as soon as possible so that you can return to Jerusalem immediately."

"What is this about?"

Rabbi Fisher told her.

"Tell the army that we'll be at the helipad as soon as we possibly can."

The operation was a success and Rabbi Fisher earned the respect and personal gratitude of the army's Chief-of-Staff who provided him with his private number just in case he was ever needed.

Rabbi Fisher hadn't expected that the time to use it would be so soon, but in this world, one just never knows.

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Now as Rabbi Fisher handed the phone to his commanding officer, he waited anxiously to see what was going to happen.

"Hello?"

"Officer, this is the *Ramatkal*."

"Sir!!"

"Officer you are not to make Benny Fisher turn off his phone! In fact not only will you not make him turn off his phone, you will send him home immediately."

A pause.

"You see officer, Rabbi Fisher is fighting a war just the same as we are. It might be a different war, but it's no less important."

And that was why Rabbi Benny Fisher was sent home from the army; back to his office in Jerusalem where he sits and saves lives each and every day, rain or shine, morning and evening, with tremendous dedication.

As heard from Rabbi Benny Fisher and Zvi Gewirtz

If any of my readers would like to contribute to Magen Lacholeh, Rabbi Fisher's incredible organization, please be in touch with me.