



Choosing life

"I take a pill in the morning, which keeps me alive. It's the thing that keeps my leukemia in check, allowing me to watch my children grow up and hear the parrots that I raise chirp."

My wife and I built a nice home. It took us quite a few years. Well, we were a young couple with little money. But when the children came along, they brought their blessings with them, and the home was filled with joy, plants and the aroma of cooking on Friday evenings, ahead of the Shabbat meal. You know something? My wife is still beautiful, just like on the first day I met her. Sometimes, when she smiles at me, I can still see the young girl I fell in love with and look for something to keep me busy around the house so she won't see me blushing.

On the first floor of our house, I built a kindergarten for her. Yes, she wanted to take care of children, so I built her a kindergarten. The walls are colorful, mobiles playing lullabies hang from the ceiling. There's a yard with swings, artificial turf, and a sandbox. And children, lots of children, come to the kindergarten and my wife's loving arms. Every morning, I wake up to the sound of her singing and their laughter. I go downstairs and watch them from the side. They are so young, glowing. What do they know about pain and the illnesses of life? I wish that they never find out, I think to myself as I go upstairs to prepare myself a cup of coffee and take a pill.

I take a pill in the morning, which keeps me alive. It's the thing that keeps my leukemia in check, allowing me to watch my children grow up and hear the parrots that I raise chirp. Sorry about the sudden shock. I depicted an idyllic scene, and now I am suddenly talking about pills and leukemia, but it's a part of me. This terrible disease is deep within my body, and nothing but this pill can keep it away. Well, in fact, except for faith. Yes, faith helps me.

Twenty years ago, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and he, who meant the world to me, asked me to support him throughout the process, to take him to the treatments and hold his hand as his body slowly waned. I did so. When he closed his eyes for the last time, I broke down and wept. But before the tears from his parting had dried - before I had grieved enough for him - my sister passed away from the same disease. You do not know me, but I am tall and strong - I was once in the armed corps! I have large hands,

real workman's hands and a deep voice. I am a farmer in soul, and nature is my great love. But when the same killer, cancer, took them both, something began rotting inside me. It was as if, until then, I had the song and sun of farming in me, and then winter and storms had suddenly come upon me, and it never ends - that horrid winter never ends. "I will not get cancer," I told my wife one morning. "You promise?" she asked. "Have I ever broken a promise?" I replied as I stroked her face. She did not respond.

In 2009, after a routine check-up at the family doctor, he calls and tells me to come over urgently. My hands are shaking, so my wife is at the wheel. When we finally arrive, he throws the words "leukemia" into the air. My wife doesn't look at me. We both realize I had broken my promise. "Lymphocytic leukemia," he says. "Not the regular kind, but a rare one - a p17 type mutation." At that moment, on the doctor's shoulders, I see the angel of death sitting and smoking a cigarette, looking at me and smiling. He said, "I got you, didn't I?" I look him in the eye, I want to answer him - to say that I am not like my father and sister, that I can fight him, I can beat him, but I can't.

The sound of my wife's weeping breaks me, and, suddenly, in a moment, I break down and cry too. The future didn't seem rosy. My blood cell count doubled every moment, pain was in every part of my body, and the chemo exhausted me. Suddenly, I could do nothing at home, I didn't go to work and, except for lying on the couch watching everyone but me living their lives, I did nothing. During a periodic exam at the doctor's, I asked him, "Is there anything to do? Any drugs?" "Only God can help you," he replied. Another shock, but to the heart, as if it were not broken and shattered enough already.

I started thinking about Heaven, whether I would make the cut or not. You know, I wasn't so worried; even if I didn't make it to Heaven (although I had been a fairly good man, I must say), Hell would not be new to me. I had explored extensive parts of it here, on Earth. God had not spared me from the evils of life. I was told about an upcoming conference in Israel, to which some great leukemia expert from a great hospital in Houston was coming. The

best doctors consulted him, told him about me, the disease and the mutation. He told them about a drug, the one that saved my life. Its effect - within days of starting to take it - stunned my doctor. It has kept me alive and has blocked the disease. It took me time to get a hold of the drug, and money, lots of money. It could save hundreds of leukemia patients.

My father, may his memory be blessed, survived Bergen Belsen. A few days before his death, he told me, "Pini'le, nothing is impossible." So, as far as I am concerned, nothing is impossible. I was interviewed by all the media outlets, I held demonstrations, I paid a lot of money, and used my connections. Until one day, the drug arrived in the mail. Since then, I have not left it; it is the key to my life. But what about all the rest of the patients? Won't they get it? What about someone without a lot of money and his family at his side? Is he sentenced to death?

I, whom the doctor had given just six weeks to live, am alive and happy thanks to this treatment, and there is more to come! How hard is it to add a life-saving drug, one that grants a long a good life, to the basket of health care services? This drug saved my life, and it can save many others. Some people can already receive it, and I wish that more patients will get this precious opportunity to live a long life. I gave my wife a promise and, in the end, I kept my promise, thanks to the drug and faith. There are no more tears. I smile more frequently. But don't wipe it off. I am fighting for other patients so they too can live. I beg you. The day I learn about someone who cannot afford the drug, the day I learn that he is no longer alive, will be the day that I will remember my father, my sister and the emptiness of this world, and the pain. The pain will break every wall and conquer every cell in my body. Which is already tired as it is.

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