

The Outstretched Arm

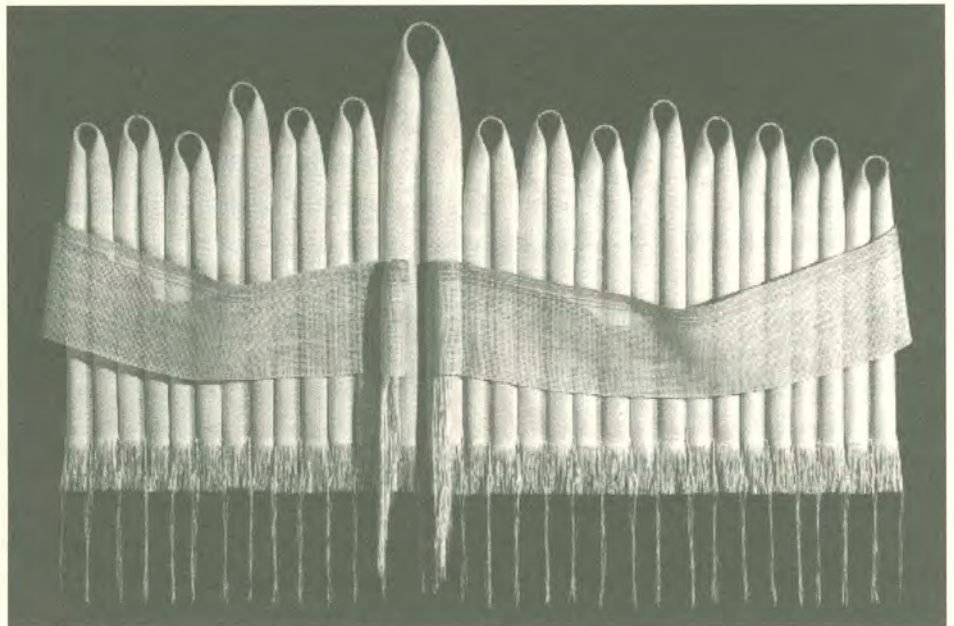
Vol. III No. 1

Fall 1993

To Heal the World: To Heal Ourselves

I have a vested interest in the topic of *Bikkur Cholim*, the commandment to visit the sick. For the last 25 years, I have been living with, sometimes comfortably and sometimes with a great deal of spiritual discomfort, a debilitating illness; and whenever I talk about Jewish responses toward illness, I find myself dealing with these questions not only from the perspective of someone who has faced these issues on a personal level, but just as importantly as someone who, as a committed Jew, feels passionately about the need of Jewish communities to respond both actively and spiritually to those among us who are ill, to make the concept of *Bikkur Cholim* an essential building block in creating community.

What *does* Judaism have to say to those of us who are ill, in pain, confronting our own mortality? What does it have to say to those of us who must witness the suffering of others, those whom we love, those who are members of



"Scholar and Students." The Art of Laurie Gross. Photography by Martin Rand

our community, even those whom we do not know? How do we respond as individuals, how do we respond as community? Does Torah tell us how we are to act in the face of our own or someone else's suffering, in the face of despair? Does Judaism provide any help whenever we are forced to confront our own fragility or that of those we love? Certainly, to be a Jew is to know about suffering on a universal level, to understand the painful and often tragic struggles of a people, but in what ways does our historical experience help us to understand the experience of a single life?

I would like to begin with several *midrashim* which provide possible mod-

els, some good and some devastating, of community response to illness. I frequently give *divrei Torah*, commentaries on the Torah portion read each week, in my synagogue, and for me, one of the most difficult of all the weekly readings is *Thazria* (Lev: 12:1 - 13:59). Like much in the Book of Leviticus, it is filled with many rules that at best seem arcane and at worst demeaning. This particular section deals with the question of ritualized cleanliness, and usually what annoys and troubles me are the rules governing the ritual purity and impurity of women after childbirth; but as my illness has become more life-encompassing, I find myself thinking more about that part of this

Inside:

To Heal the World	1
The Jewish Healer	2
Painful Treasure: A Review	4
Walking: A Meditation	5
Clay in the Hands of the Potter	6
"What Do I Say?"	9
Jewish Healing Center Events	10
Jewish Healing Center Resources	11
"Well-Healed"	12

To Heal the World, continued Torah portion which deals with the diagnosis of leprosy. After listing all the outward signs of leprosy in exacting clinical detail, Torah declares that after the diagnosis of leprosy is made, the leper's "clothes shall be rent, and the hair of his head shall go loose, and he shall cover his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague is in him, he shall be unclean; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall be his dwelling."

The isolation of the leper is complete and absolute and, to me, terrifying, for he is forced to leave the camp of the Israelites, to live apart from the community. How must he feel, going through the rituals of mourning for himself, having been forced to declare himself before the entire community to be unclean, to be shunned and isolated? Judaism is supposed to be grounded in our collective responsibility towards Adonai and for one another, is it not? How, then, at such a time, can we cast out someone who is suffering? What has happened to the principle of *chesed*, lovingkindness, which is the cornerstone of our faith, one of the three acts that sustain the world, according to the rabbis, that we are supposed to practice? What has happened to Adonai's *chesed*? Are we so horrified and so frightened by what has happened to the leper that we must banish him from our sight, so that we will not see his suffering?

This Torah passage serves for me as a link to the story of Job, who inflicts upon himself exile from the community, when, as part of Satan's campaign to force him to repudiate his God, he is afflicted with boils. Up until this point, even when he has lost everything that was of value to him, he has not yet cursed Adonai, but then Satan makes a horribly cruel suggestion to God: "Skin for skin. All that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth your hand now and touch his bone and his

flesh, and he will curse you to his face."

Satan is, in the end, only partially right, for although Job does not curse Adonai, as Satan had hoped he would, the physical torment is too much for him to bear; and covered with sores, Job sits in ashes; and three friends come to comfort him, sitting for seven days without saying a word, "for they saw that his suffering was very great." And then, Job opens his mouth and "cursed the day of his birth." The three comforters, I always think, sit in silence, because they do not know what to say to him. Job may have the affliction of boils, but their affliction is the inability to deal with their fear of Job's sickness and suffering; they don't know what to say, for when they do speak to Job, all they do is to offer conventional consolation and utter empty pieties. And so, like the leper who is cast out of the camp, Job is isolated physically and spiritually by his

pain.

Both the leper of *Thazria* and Job force us to confront what is inside us spiritually and what is outside us physically when we are deprived of the sense of belonging to the community, and what happens to us when we become isolated from it, both physically and spiritually. The question is, then, how we are to respond, knowing that we cannot cure the leper or Job, but knowing, at the same time, that we must bear witness to their suffering and pain. How and why must we find a way of acknowledging illness, even acknowledging our fear, while all the while not sitting by in silence?

So far, there is not much in these responses to be optimistic about. And yet, there are so many images we might use when attempting to uncover a Jewish response to illness, a response that

Continued on page 3



The Jewish Healer

This is the first of an occasional series in which Jewish members of the health care professions explore the impact of Judaism on their work.

How does my Jewish identity inform my daily practice as a clinical psychologist? There are several layers to this question. On the surface, as a Jewish male psychologist in New York City conducting psychotherapy with other New Yorkers, I've become a cliché. If you dig a little behind the cliché, however, the stereotype is of a rationalistic, wholly unspiritual individual cut off from his Jewish roots. It is not uncommon to find psychology and psychiatry departments consisting of Jews who, practicing in a secular society, do not think much about their Jewishness in the workplace, at least not on a conscious level. Nevertheless, upon reflection, it is difficult for me, as a caregiver to people

in emotional or physical pain, to ignore many aspects of my Jewishness. I am, therefore, pleased to have an opportunity to think "out loud," to share some of the ways my journey as a Jew has become intertwined with my professional identity, and with my approach to patient care.

As it happens, my areas of specialization bring me into contact with suffering in both the physical and the mental/spiritual realms. Anxiety, thanks to many comedians, has become an integral aspect of the modern stereotypical Jew. While this generalization about who suffers from anxiety is incorrect (all are certainly equally vulnerable), I believe that many of my patients who suffer from anxiety, whether

Continued on page 3

To Heal the World, continued might be able to tap into the sources of Jewish spirituality while remaining rooted in the mitzvot, or commandments, of Torah. One that has always seemed especially resonant to me is found in the language of Kabbala, for this particular expression of Jewish mysticism seems both to recognize the realities of an imperfect world and imperfect human beings, and to offer a way of repairing those imperfections.

Kabbalistic doctrine takes many forms, but as explained by Rabbi Isaac Luria, the sixteenth century mystic, the creation of the world had been the result of a process of emanations that flowed from a transcendent God, a God who could be known only through these emanations, ten in number (wisdom, justice and the like), that were conceived of as vessels, or *sephirot*. But the divine light contained in these vessels was too powerful to be contained, and all but the first three *sephirot* were shattered as God withdrew into Himself to make room for the creation, thus allowing the spiritual to mix with the material world. As a result, these divine emanations, most notably the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, are in exile in this world, the vessels that once held them now broken. And these divine sparks of light, now trapped in this world, must be released from their physical prison; for only through the restoration, or *tikkun*, of the spiritual world, will the Messiah come and will redemption of Adonai's creation be possible.

It seems like an impossible task, but Lurianic Kabbala offers the route to restoration and repair of the world: every person who acts in accordance with Torah brings home the fallen sparks; everywhere in the world a spark of the Divine Presence is waiting to be found, gathered and restored through Torah; and Adonai, in His lovingkindness, holds out the possibility to each generation that it might be the one to redeem the world. Each one of

The Jewish Healer, continued they are Jewish or not, trust that I have some special understanding of anxiety because of my birthright.

To some extent their perception is valid. To the extent that I, a great-grandson of Russian immigrants, share in our collective memory of pogroms and of the Holocaust, I cannot listen to people's pain with total clinical detachment. My very ability to feel empathy for the pain of others is rooted not only in my own life experience, but in my identity as a Jew. In my office, or at a patient's bedside, I am rarely alone. I am accompanied by my grandfather's hypercritical mandate to transcend the past, to "make something of yourself" despite life's injustices. My grandmother is there, wondering at the sheer beauty of the same world that had trampled on her own beloved parents. My wife is there, strug-

us, then, has the possibility to bring about *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, not only through the observation of the *mitzvot*, the commandments, of Torah but through acts of *chesed*, lovingkindness.

Tikkun olam is, in some ways, easier than it seems, for the essence of Torah is *chesed*, or lovingkindness, as another of the ancient Rabbis taught: "The Torah begins with deeds of lovingkindness and ends with deeds of lovingkindness." Torah, said Rabbi Luria, reveals the lovingkindness of Adonai towards his creation, and of each of us towards one another. By fulfilling the commandments of Torah, we are able to restore our own spiritual structure, for our actions have both an interior and exterior effect: everything we do reacts somewhere and somehow, for ourselves and for others.

Here then is the answer to the comforters of Job who do not know what to say; here is the answer to those who would close their eyes to the suffering of the leper. We have the power to recall the words of the rabbis which echo the teach-

ing with questions about what we say to our children about illness and loss.

My understanding of how an individual copes with personal crisis, illness and the thought of death is heavily informed by my personal experiences with Jewish practice. I am quick to ask my patients if religious rituals such as lighting Shabbat candles or putting on tefilin help keep their lives more regular. In times of crisis, the individual loses the sense of having a "normal life" and quickly begins to crave vestiges of the familiar and the predictable. Everyday rituals, be they religiously ordained or not, confer a sense of normalcy on an otherwise abnormal situation. Even in the face of mortal illness and the likelihood of death, it can be vitally important to continue to get out of bed, brush one's teeth, get dressed in regular street clothes, and eat breakfast

Continued on page 4

ings of Rabbi Luria, for they remind us that any deed that can lessen suffering is especially pleasing to Adonai. Judaism is a religion that ultimately finds its spiritual center in concrete acts: Torah is always telling us *what* to do. But certain acts are singled out by the ancient sages as having special importance. According to the traditions of Talmud, of all of Adonai's acts of lovingkindness towards His creation that humans can imitate, one of the most important is the act of visiting the sick; and so it is that *Bikkur Cholim*, visiting the sick, has been traditionally the means by which Jewish communities the world over have demonstrated acts of lovingkindness. This, then, is the way of embracing everyone within the community, this is a way of acknowledging the suffering of others: Rabbi Hillel said: "Do not separate yourself from the community; do not be sure of yourself until the day of your death; do not judge your fellow until you have been in that person's position; do not say of a thing that it

Continued on page 4

To Heal the World, continued cannot possibly be understood, for ultimately it will be understood.”

The spiritual and ethical model of *Bikkur Cholim* is found in Torah itself, for the rabbis who composed Talmud in commenting on the circumcision of Abraham and Ishmael, an act which sealed Adonai’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants, declared that while the two were recuperating, Adonai himself visited and brought them comfort. And if Adonai could bear witness to the pain of a single individual, then we, too, must do so. Talmud declares, “Whosoever visits the sick takes away a sixtieth part of his illness. If so, let sixty people visit him and set him on his feet again.” And we do such an act as a means of living our lives according to the precepts of Torah. We may not be able to understand the causes of pain, but it is imperative, it has always seemed to me, that we acknowledge it. *Bikkur Cholim*, then, becomes the Jewish way of releasing the divine sparks into the world, so that we may all feel their presence and contribute to the repair of the world, and of ourselves.

Tamara Green is Professor of Classics at Hunter College, City University of New York, and a member of the Board of the Jewish Healing Center.



The Jewish Healer, continued sitting at a table with a fork and knife.

As a therapist and as a Jew, I find it rewarding to connect with my patients on this seemingly mundane level. As a therapist, I find my patients more open and trusting if I convey an interest in their very personal efforts of maintaining a connection to the world, or even just a sense of the normal, through ritual. As a Jew, I feel a special kinship with any patient who recognizes, instinctively or not, the role of ritual in mental and spiritual health.

I routinely ask my patients who constitutes their community: who is supportive, who is worried about them, who is praying for their recovery. If it is a clergy person, I ask whether they would like to contact him or her for support or guidance in spiritual matters. The strong sense of conviction with which I ask these questions is born out of my own personal experience of caring for and being cared for by my own religious community in times of crisis.

I think about some of my patients during my own prayers as well. Wishing someone in the hospital a speedy recovery on a Shabbat morning creates a bridge between my professional and spiritual lives, without creating a stressful intrusion in my vacation from work.

Kenneth Gorfinkle Ph.D is Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry at The Behavioral Medicine Program, Columbia University, and a Research Scientist at New York State Psychiatric Institute.



Painful Treasure

A review of *With Healing On Its Wings* (Masorti Publications, 80 East End Road, London N32SY)

This work is a doubly painful treasure: painful in reminding us both of the universality and inevitability of suffering and of the striking dearth of accessible Jewish resources for those coping with illness. It is, nonetheless, a rich treasure of tradition, inspiration, sensitivity and taste.

The result of a collaborative effort by members of the New North London Synagogue, this exquisite booklet offers “Contemplations in Times of Illness.” Its origins are an important, if paradoxical, set of needs: to provide congregants with helpful and comforting Jewish resources in time of illness, but to do so in such a manner that would neither impose language nor force thoughts, but merely facilitate the search for highly personal prayer and individual reflection. Towards this challenging end, the group developed this 56-page guide which spans time and space, as well as literary and artistic genres, as it offers concrete and immediately available tools for spiritual healing.

Standard items from the weekday and Shabbat liturgy are integrated with bite-size selections from Genesis, Psalms, the Talmud, contemporary authors and medieval poets. In addition, four pages of this treasure are devoted to “specific situations,” such as “Prayer Before an Operation,” and “Prayer on Recovery From Illness.” And all of these diverse elements are interspersed with, and yet connected, by lovely watercolors of nature, by warm, humanistic drawings and photography, all set off by a design that is as dignified and elegant as it is inviting.

Painful Treasure, continued

A pleasant surprise halfway through this text is a bit of anecdotal Jewish humor from the hospital, accompanied by a light, cartoon-like illustration. Brilliant! Resources for spiritual healing *should* expand, uplift and enliven. The materials that are yet to be developed must respond not only to different people and situations, but to the shifting moods and moments of those struggling with illness, who are, after all and above all else, *people*. When talking and writing about illness, we must consider the varying needs, interests, and vocabularies of younger children, teenagers, young adults, middle-agers and the elderly, as well as

the different life situations of *amkba* (for example, strategies to help parents help their children deal with a grandparent's illness). The struggles and strengths of particular populations — for example, women confronting breast cancer, or those with HIV/AIDS — require special attention and sensitivity.

What this book, then, reminds us is that the pain remains, because there is no Jew who does not deal with illness (their own or a loved one's) in her lifetime, and yet so many have no access to the many rich resources embedded in the Jewish tradition and the Jewish community. *With Healing On Its Wings* ought to serve as a pointer to what we Jews need to and can

develop: new presentations of old material, recycled gems from disparate corners of the world of Jewish literature, reworkings and contemporary innovations based on the timeless and eternally expanding worlds of Jewish prayer, poetry, prose, philosophy and practical advice.

For now, however, we owe a great debt of gratitude to that very sensitive group in North London who developed this publication; and we must make a pledge to carry on their work, so that numerous flocks may bring much healing on many wings.

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW
Program Consultant, Jewish Healing Center

Walking: a Meditation

Imagine yourself as an infant, not quite ready to walk. You are in a place which feels very secure. See yourself trying to stand or to move in some tentative, exploratory way. . . You have no sense of yourself as a separate being, apart from what surrounds you. . .

You are walking — no boundaries between your self and the environment around you. No boundaries; walking with God, blameless.

This is your earliest memory, when you were like Noah: “blameless in his generation, Noah walked with God: *Et ha Elobim bithalech Noah.*” (Genesis 6:9)

Walking in wholeness, fully present, nothing separating you from anything. Walking with God . . .

As you picture yourself in your secure environment, notice a door in the distance. You feel compelled to go towards the door. “*Lech lechab:* Go forth.” Walk toward the door. With each step closer to the door, you sense your life-without-boundaries fading.

As you touch the door handle, the feeling of fading boundaries is replaced with a growing sense of strength, sturdiness, independence. Open the door and step out. You walk forward in confidence and with a strong sense of self. You are no longer walking *with* God, but are walking *before* God. The memory of when you were like Abram: “*Hithalech lefanai, veheyeh tamim:* Walk before me and be blameless.” (Genesis 17:1)

Continue walking. You are walking along a path that seems to stretch forever into the distance. Walking . . . walking . . . walking . . . Many years of sturdy walking *before* God, trusting your body to take you through life in strength. Your eyes focused on the future - the memory, the turning back and looking back on the time of blameless wholeness *with* God has faded, is so vague.

You have been walking a long time now. Though your body continues to move forward, very gradually you are becoming weary, tired . . . no longer master of strength, sturdiness, optimism. Feel the weariness.

“What’s the point of this long journey?” you ask yourself. At times you feel resigned, other times angry. Lately, it’s protest. Why this body . . . only to betray me? A body I don’t recognize. Where can I be if I am not with God, nor am I with myself as I have known myself for so many years? “*U-mah betzah ki shamarnu mishmarto v’chi halachnu k’doranit:* What have we gained by keeping God’s charge, and walking in mourning, before the Lord of Hosts?” (Malachi 3:14)

So much darkness, the heaviness of mourning for what you have lost makes it harder to continue on. Each step slower now, and often painful, as if you’re leaving behind the body you once knew and are entering a valley of darkness.

But strangely, you are not frightened; you are calm. You remember the purpose of your journey. The place from which you have come is the place to which you are going, a safe place. “*Ki holech adam el olamo:* For [we set out], we walked to [our] eternal abode.” (Ecclesiastes 12:5)

Continued on page 6

Walking: a Medication, continued

When the dust of this journey settles, you realize your lifebreath will return to God. “*V’yashov be-afar al-ha’aretz keshebayah v’ha-ruach tashuv el-ha-Elohim asher netara*: And the dust returns to the ground as it was, and the lifebreath returns to God who bestowed it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Notice the calm stillness as you stop walking. Look around, see that though you are no longer walking, God is there with you, right behind you, as always. God has been as constant as your most constant companion. “*Gam ki-elech b’gey tzalmavet lo-ira ra ki-atah imadi*: Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no harm, for you are with me.” (Psalm 23:4)

You have been in God’s presence always. You do not have far to turn to return to the breath of all life. Return to God and God will return to you. “*Shuvu elai v’ashuvah aleichem*: Return to Me and I will return to you. *Shuvu elai v-ashuvah aleichem*.” (Malachi 3:7)

(To prepare for this meditation try to re-experience feelings of physical strength and weakness in your body. In your mind liken the “journey of life” to a very long walk from infancy on. Sense the presence of God as you re-experience different stages, both of strength and weakness, in your life.)

Rabbi Susan Freeman is the Education Director of Congregation B’nai Israel in Northampton, MA. and a member of the Board of the Jewish Healing Center.



Clay in the Hands of the Potter: *The Maker, The Medium, The Healing Relationship*

The liturgy of the High Holidays is replete with moving and evocative prayers and poems whose aim is to provide tools for *t’shuvah* — “return” or “repentance” — in its various dimensions: individual insight, interpersonal change, communal and spiritual healing. Certainly one of the most compelling is *Ki Hineh KaHomer*, “For We Are As Clay,” an anonymous *piyyut* (liturgical poem) probably dating to the 12th century CE, which uses the Prophet Jeremiah’s parable of “God the Potter, Israel the Clay” (18:1-11) as the image for exploring our relationship to Divinity. In the course of seven stanzas, the poet expands on the theme by imagining God as six other artisans: the mason, the iron welder, the mariner, the glass blower, the embroiderer, and the silversmith. My free translation appears below.

As a former clay sculptor, I was initially drawn to the poem by its opening reference, but this year I realized that it culminates in an address to God as *mamtzi l’mazor teref*, roughly, “the Healer of the ailing.” I knew that there was more to this *piyyut* than meets the eye, and I was determined to explore its healing potential.

*As clay in the hand of the potter:
At his will, he expands or contracts it.
So are we in Your hands, Loving Creator.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our weakness.*

*As stone in the hand of the mason:
At his will, he preserves or shatters it.
So are we in Your hands, Source of Life and Death.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our weakness.*

*As iron in the hand of the welder:
At his will, he forges or breaks it.
So are we in Your hands, Sustainer of the poor and cast down.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our weakness.*

*As the helm in the hand of sailor:
At his will, he guides or lets it go.
So are we in Your hands, Good and Forgiving God.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our weakness.*

*As glass in the hand of the glassblower:
At his will, he inflates or dissolves it.
So are we in Your hands, Forgiver of all transgressors.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our weakness.*



*“And the spreading out of God’s wings shall fill the breath of thy land.” The Art of Laurie Gross.
Photography by Martin Rand*

*As fabric in the hand of the embroiderer:
At his will, he stretches or folds it.
So are we in Your hands, Stern and Exacting
God.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our
weakness.*

*As silver in the hand of the smith:
At his will, he mixes or makes it pure.
So are we in Your hands, Healer of the
ailing.
Your covenant recall, and ignore our
weakness.*

In order to gain greater insight to the poem, I interviewed seven artisans:

Simba Rosenberg, a clay sculptor and potter, described how clay is malleable, pliant, fluid — almost like skin and muscle. It can take on transient characteristics and then transform them, when the clay is fired, into something enduring and permanent. Indeed, no one knows how long clay can last, since the shards of the most ancient pots retain qualities they had thousands of years ago. The drawbacks of clay are the flipside of its strengths: lacking tensility, it can collapse when you work with it, and it shrinks in the process of

drying and firing, losing scale in the process of transformation.

Mason Selvon Persad spoke of the satisfaction and reward of stonemasonry: the finished product after an investment of hard work, time and patience. In talking about granite, he stressed how both the material and his skill were a “gift from God,” implying great responsibility and challenge. The difficulties, he said, were not only getting the job (which would not be a problem, of course, for the Almighty One), but setting the stone in its place, an often daunting task.

Isaac Yobananu, an iron welder, talked of the feeling of having created something anew and of the satisfaction of doing a good job “with no leaks or anything.” As heavy as iron is to work with, it is also easy because it is strong; lighter metals would be gentler on their handlers but more complicated to work with because of their fragility.

Larry Smith stressed the contradictory but complementary feelings of humility and power in sailing. He saw himself as a fragile link between the forces of the wind and the current, becoming one with them in a truly exhilarating convergence. If you harness them, going with their essence and not opposing them, you are able to go in the intended direction.

Glass blower Victor Chiarizia spoke of a sense of history and mystery he feels in pursuing his ancient craft. He pointed to the sensual nature of glass blowing (one feels and hears and sees it move and shift), and to the magical quality it has of being a moment frozen in time, a molten, fluid mass that becomes fixed. For Victor, too, the pleasure is the difficult challenge itself: glass changes so fast and is so hard to manipulate that one really needs to be a maestro to excel — and that takes a long time.

Steve Diamond works in computerized embroidery. He takes delight in the many colors and textures with which he works, and spoke of the satisfaction in the creativity they spark. The difficulty, he explained, is that various fabrics take embroidery differently; fabric that has body is more desirable than fabric which is fine or sheer or which stretches.

Silver is attractive in color, malleable, and can be combined with a remarkable number of other materials, said silversmith Michael Jacobs.

Silver can take dissimilar objects and mediate between them; when otherwise unrelated or even clashing objects are placed on or in silver, they “grow” together and can coexist harmoniously. But its drawback is its extreme reactivity: it oxidizes rapidly and is highly sensitive to light. “If only there were some way to stop the tarnishing,” he said.

From a dialogue between these practitioners and the text of this *piyyut*, I derived the following “healing” lessons:

1. The various metaphors and images point to multiple realities in our relationships to God. These relationships not only differ from individual to individual, but shift in the course of a day, let alone a lifetime. I may have certain strengths at one point that become liabilities the next . . . I may face obstacles today that evolve into stepping stones tomorrow. Furthermore, since Judaism enjoins us to focus on community, I may draw upon the variety of resources represented by family, friends, and fellow travellers, and not feel restrained by my own “material,” my own limitations.

2. The relationship between artisan and medium is one of intimacy, passion, interdependence, and often idiosyncrasy; the matter desperately wants to become something, and the maker has a fundamental need to create with it. Through a relationship that is both caring and demanding, predictable and unfolding, complementary and dynamic, both maker and material are brought to self-actualization and emergence. As both the Hassidim and the contemporary theologian-activist Abraham Joshua Heschel have stressed, God is in need of and in search of humankind.

3. Critical to the poem’s structure is the refrain, loosely translated, “Recall the *b’rit* (covenant), and ignore the *yetser* (matter, referring especially to the weaker aspects of our moral constitutions).” Here we ask God not to focus on our natural, material beings (our “flesh,” if you will, which can be so problematic), but on our

agreement with God, our potential. As in any intimate relationship, at certain points there must not only be a serious evaluation, but a renewal, a renegotiation. We urge God to “remember our agreement,” but we also suggest, “let’s re-examine our arrangements.”

4. Even the expert makes errors, rejects certain elements, undoes or redoes work in progress. The particularity of the material and the personality of the artisan are intersecting factors in the creative process. Neither partner is totally in control; neither the artisan nor the medium can call *all* the shots. How special to be in the hands of the Master Crafts person — but how intimidating, too! For some of us, it can be initially upsetting, and then pointedly reassuring, to learn that S/He does not always get it right the first time.

5. Each stanza and each interview expressed an artistic, life-affirming, individualistic purpose, in some ways more reassuring and more inspiring than a linear blueprint or a rational, scientific plan. I certainly do not want illness and suffering to be utterly random and meaningless, but neither could I stand them to be part of some punitive scoresheet. To locate myself in a permanent covenantal relationship, characterized by creativity, continuity, and courage, is, in itself a source of comfort, solace and reassurance.

6. Implicit in this poem is a fundamental democracy, for no one medium or artistic calling is preferred over another. Relatively fragile glass is no less valuable than powerful iron, expensively embroidered cloth no more significant than humble clay. Each stands in an equal, relationship to its respective artisan, who is answerable to it . . . and the world is in need of each and every creation.

7. The subtext of this poem is mortality. In much lovelier words, it reminds us that, when all is said and done, we are but “dust and ashes.” But through the

b’rit, the covenantal relationship, we stand eternal.

To me, there was something intrinsically healing about my process of inquiry. To join with poets who turned to the arts around them to explore and define their relationship to God was deeply moving; to dig into the reality of artisans doing their craft was similarly inspiring. Those coping with illness — their own or that of a loved one — may want to take a clue from the poet of the *piyyut* and create a poem of parallel structure with personally meaningful images:

For we are:

As movement in the limbs of the dancer . . .

As dough in the palms of the baker . . .

As words in the mouth of the poet . . .

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW
Program Consultant, Jewish Healing Center



Today Rabbah!

Thank you to all of you who have donated your time, energy and other resources to the Jewish Healing Center:

Jennie Cohen
Congregation Beth Sholom, SF
Direct Language, Inc.
Russell Discher
Susan Greenspan
Eryn Kalish
Jan Offel
Maya Trilessky
Shifra Raffel
Janice Segall
Diana Shoshana Wachner
Diana Wechsler

“What Do I Say?”

Q: I am about to visit a friend who has just been diagnosed with a very serious illness; what do I say?

A: Visiting someone who is seriously ill can be anxiety-provoking. To be with a person who is ill can stir up many feelings: our own fears of sickness and death, sadness we suffered when a loved one died, or discomfort with what is unfamiliar. Often we feel at a loss for words when we see this person in such great distress. Or, we may feel nervous that we will say something that will “make the situation worse.” For all these reasons, it is understandable that one would want guidance in saying the right thing.

The truth is, however, that there is no “right” thing to say. Nothing you can say will shrink the tumor, remove the fear, or “make things the way they used to be.” What you **can** do is be present with this person wherever he/she happens to be; this is the spiritual gift you bring when you fulfill the mitzvah of *bikur holim*.

Being present is what *bikur holim* is all about. By visiting, we hope that the one who is sick feels less isolated, more loved, and more truly in the company of God; our presence should be a vehicle for magnifying the person’s feeling that God is near. In the laws of *bikur holim* we learn that God’s presence (the *Shechina*) dwells at the head of a sick person’s bed, and that therefore we are not to sit there. I understand this *halacha* as a metaphorical teaching: whatever we say or do when we visit, we should make sure that we are not an obstacle to the *Shechina*! We should not be so focused on our own agenda or desire to find the “right” words that we fail to be present with our loved one.

In order to be lovingly present with another person, we must learn how to quiet our own internal dialogue (“He looks awful... Why isn’t she angry about what’s happening? She must be in denial... I wish I hadn’t just said that... Why is he talking about the football game?). We must learn to be aware of those times when our own agenda, judgments or preoccupations interfere with our ability to stay present with the thoughts and feelings of the person whom we are visiting.

To establish connection and be present with our friend, relative, or neighbor, not only is it helpful to quiet our own internal dialogue, but also to follow the person’s lead in conversation; to be able to listen; to be comfortable with silence; to be willing to communicate nonverbally; to be willing to show love; and to be oneself. In the course of visiting, we might say, “I love you;” “I’m sorry that this is happening to you;” “I’m here for you;” or “I’ll pray for you/you’ll be in my thoughts.” Such comments can express true love, care and respect.

Although there is nothing magical to say to someone who is seriously ill, it is usually **not** helpful to say: “Cheer up;” “Don’t feel/upset/angry/depressed/sad...” “It could be worse/count your blessings.” “It’s God’s will/God gave this to you for a reason” or “It’s going to be okay (you usually do not know this).”

Remember that what you say is less important than who you are. Your presence really says it all.

*Rabbi Nancy Flam, West Coast Director,
Jewish Healing Center*

Jewish Healing Center Events

- ❖ **Kol Hanesbama: Jewish Hospice Care Program** will be launching its Hesed Corps, a volunteer program in the San Francisco Bay Area. Volunteers will be working with *Kol Hanesbama* Director Rabbi Amy Eilberg to offer the mitzvah of *bikur holim* (visiting the sick) to terminally ill Jews and their families. All are invited to an informational meeting on September 13, 1993. Training will begin November 7, 1993. Call the office for more details.
- ❖ **PAJE Seminar: "Healing and Wholeness: How Judaism Helps Us Cope."** This three-part series, taught by Rabbi Nancy Flam, will cover such topics as: *bikur holim*, prayer, and theological perspectives on suffering. October 12, 19 and 26 at Peninsula Sinai Congregation, Foster City. For more information, call 349-1523.
- ❖ **San Francisco State Hillel Shabbat Program: "Focus on Jewish Spirituality."** Reflections will be shared by Rabbi Nancy Flam. October 15, 1993. For more information, call 333-4922.
- ❖ **Refa'inu 1994: A Practicum on Healing & the Rabbinate.** This intensive two-day experience for rabbis of all denominations will be dedicated to exploring the spiritual needs of Jews who are ill, and to sharing traditional resources and innovative strategies for meeting these needs. February 13-15, 1994; Stony Point, New York. Call the office for registration materials.
- ❖ **Spiritual Support Group for Jewish Women with Cancer:** Please let us know if you are interested in joining a group of Jewish women to explore such issues as the role of prayer in healing, Jewish views of the body and soul, feminist perspective in Jewish life, and Jewish rituals to celebrate daily life.
- ❖ **Service of Healing:** The service combines prayer, study, song and silence as a means to strengthen hope, faith, comfort and community for those with a range of healing needs. The first and third Mondays of every month from 6-7 pm at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav (220 Danvers Street, San Francisco).
- ❖ **Jewish Healing Circle:** We would like you to know about a monthly event taking place in Berkeley (the Healing Circle is not sponsored by the Jewish Healing Center). Contact Phyllis Emanuel, 510/527-4374.
- ❖ **Information & Referral:** Marsha Guggenheim can refer you to books, articles, audiovisual material, bibliographies and Bay Area agencies to help you learn more about Judaism and healing; call the Jewish Healing Center office (415) 387-4999 M,W,F.

Jewish Healing Center Resources

Spiritual Resources for Healing. An audiotape of a presentation given by Rabbi Harold Kushner (author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*) and Dr. Herbert Benson (author of *The Relaxation Response*) at the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, co-sponsored by The Jewish Healing Center, May 1992. To order audio-tape, call Convention Cassettes Unlimited, (1-800) 776-5454: \$10.00.

When The Body Hurts, The Soul Still Longs to Sing. A booklet of contemporary prayers written by Jewish laywomen for those dealing with illness.

"This striking collection of straightforward responses to illness and pain leads us to courage and renewed faith and sustains us with hopefulness. It is also a test which can help anyone find his or her own way in personal prayer."

Rabbi Jules Harlow

"I was deeply moved by the range, sensitivity and compassion exhibited in the Jewish Healing Center's blessings booklet, *When The Body Hurts The Soul Still Longs To Sing*, and I would recommend it to anyone."

Rabbi Harold Kushner

Mi Sheberach/Original Prayer

A prayer card for Jewish health care professionals which includes the traditional prayer for healing on one side, and a prayer to be recited at a patient's death on the other.

When the Body Hurts The Soul Still Longs to Sing

One copy: \$4.00 • 10+ copies: \$3.25 each • 50+ copies: \$2.75 each

"Mi Sheberach"/Original Prayer
(laminated 3" x 5" prayer card)

One copy: \$1.75 • 10+ copies: \$1.50 each • 50+ copies: \$1.25 each

To order, fill out this form:

I Would Like To Order:

	Quantity	Price
Blessings Booklet	_____	_____
Prayer Card	_____	_____
Subtotal		_____
Sales Tax*		_____
I want to make a tax-deductible contribution		_____
TOTAL		_____

Please send my order to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone or send your order to: "Jewish Healing Center/The Shefa Fund," 141 Alton Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94116; (415) 387-4999; FAX: (415) 661-9403

* California residents: please compute appropriate sales tax and include it with your payment.

Return Postage Guaranteed

The Outstretched Arm
141 Alton Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94116

“Well-Healed”

Some day, we hope that this double-entendre
will accurately describe the Jewish Healing Center.
But we're not even *close* yet.
Help bring us closer.
Support the Jewish Healing Center
with a tax-deductible contribution today.

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Make checks payable to:

“Jewish Healing Center/The Shefa Fund,” and send to 141 Alton Avenue,
San Francisco, CA 94116

The Jewish Healing Center is generously supported by grants from the Nathan Cummings Foundation,
the Jewish Community Endowment Fund and the Bialis Family Foundation.
A Project of The Shefa Fund.

The Outstretched Arm

The Outstretched Arm is published by
The Jewish Healing Center.

Vol. III, No. 1

Fall 1993

Managing Editor: Marsha Mignon Guggenheim

Editor: Tamara M. Green

Layout and Design: Black on White + Color

THE JEWISH HEALING CENTER EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Rabbi Rachel Cowan
Rabbi Susan Freeman
Tamara M. Green, PhD
Ellen Hermanson
Debby Hirshman
Rabbi Rolando Matalon
Nessa Rapoport

West Coast Director: Rabbi Nancy Flam

Kol Hanesbama Hospice

Care Program Director: Rabbi Amy Eilberg

Administrative Director: Marsha Mignon
Guggenheim

Program Consultant: Rabbi Simkha
Weintraub, CSW

Please address all correspondence to:
The Jewish Healing Center, 141 Alton Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94116 (415) 387-4999