

The Outstretched Arm

Vol. IV No. 1

Fall 1994

Completing The Circle

Tishri is a month of endings and beginnings. Rosh HaShanah, which glorifies Adonai's creation of the world, is a time when the boundaries between the old and the new year stand open. Shabbat Shuvah, the sabbath between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, makes the plea to return to the faith that has sustained the Jewish people at the same time that we are preparing ourselves for the Day of Atonement. On Yom Kippur, we take the measure of our lives during the past year, remembering those who are no longer with us, even as we pray to be inscribed in the Book of Life for the coming seasons. During the days of Sukkot, we relive the forty years of wandering in the desert, before the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land; but we

also commemorate their life in that land, when they went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the goodness that Adonai had given them there. But of all the holidays in *Tishri*, it is Simchat Torah, the celebration marking the end of the yearly cycle of Torah readings, that most vividly teaches the inseparability of endings and beginnings. For those who are ill, it is a most valuable and precious lesson.

Simchat Torah is, of course, a joyous celebration. On the evening of the holiday, all the Torah scrolls are removed from the ark, and the *hakkafot*, or circlings, begin. Around and around the synagogue the Torahs are carried, while the congregation follows behind, singing and dancing. Even if your arms are no longer strong enough to carry a scroll, even if your legs won't allow you to dance, even if your voice no longer has the strength to sing, you realize that you still can be encircled by the joy of Torah.

Yet, if the mood on the eve of Simchat Torah is one of unalloyed joy, whose source is the completion of Torah, the first Torah reading on the following morning speaks, ironically, of another ending, one that fills us with sadness and a sense of loss: the death of Moses.



*Torah Case: Silver and copper.
Jerusalem, Israel, 1949.
Artist: Ludwig Wolpert*

Inside

Completing the Circle	1
To Join Heaven and Earth	2
When the Body Hurts	3
Profile: Navah Harlow	4
JHC Update	6
<i>Todah Rabbah</i>	7
JHC Synagogue Consortium ...	7
Resources	8
Events	10
"Well-Healed"	11

Continued on page 2

Completing The Circle, continued

Two scrolls are removed from the ark. We unroll the first one to the final story in Torah. Moses is old; he is worn out, and he knows that he will soon die without ever entering the Promised Land. Although he is ready to die, it is hard to let go. He worries about the Children of Israel: will they remember the words of Adonai that he has taught them? And they are worried, too. What will they do without the man who led them out of Egypt through the wilderness? Who will intercede with Adonai for them? Who will guide them into that strange land? There will never be another prophet like Moses who knew Adonai "face to face." And yet, although chosen by Adonai, he is a human being, and they know that he will die. We are equally moved by the frailty of this old man and by the anticipation of the Israelites' desolation.

Then, as soon as this reading is finished and the blessings recited,

we open the second scroll to the first chapter of *Bereishit*: "In the beginning Adonai created the heavens and the earth." Suddenly, there is endless possibility, boundless creative force all around us. As we hear the words, we recreate anew the world and everything in it, including ourselves, even as the grief over the death of Moses may linger in our minds. On this single day, then, we read two portions from the Torah, one that tells the story of a single death, the other that invites us to witness the miracle of creation. Endings and beginnings, beginnings and endings.

What can the juxtaposition of these two passages mean to someone who is seriously ill, perhaps facing death? We must each write our own *d'var Torah* for every story, but this is what the linking of these readings on Simchat Torah means to me. Not only are beginnings and endings intertwined, but even at the end of the story, there is a way to make a new beginning. The past

year may have been hard and filled with pain, but the possibility is always there to recreate my world, to look once again for the awe and wonder. Every shabbat, at the end of the Torah reading, we sing these words: "*Etz chaim hi lamachazikim ba, v'tomcheha m'ushar*. It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and happy are those who support it." I may no longer be able to dance with the Torah in my arms, but I can still reach out and touch it, and feel its power encircle me.

I can always feel the sorrow that illness brings, but sometimes I need to be reminded to feel the joy. I am always aware of the limits that illness imposes, but the boundless creative force is also all around me. The physical boundaries of my world may be growing smaller, but endless possibility of the spirit still remains.

Tamara M. Green
Board of Directors
Jewish Healing Center



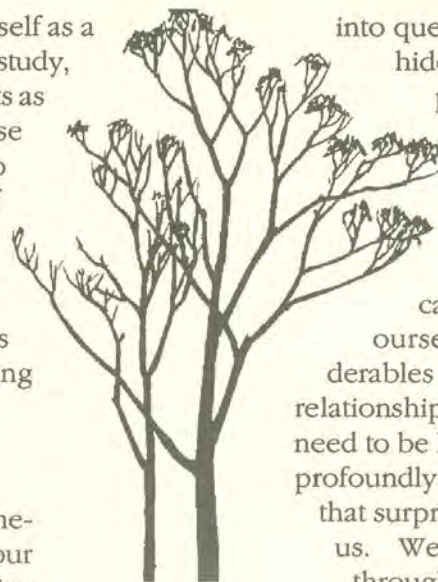
To Join Heaven And Earth

Maimonides and the Laws of Bikkur Cholim

Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard describes himself as a person who lives and breathes traditional study, and who continually turns to Jewish texts as a way of deepening his response to those who are ill. One text that he has found to be especially rich is that section of Maimonides' *Mishnah Torah* which deals with the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick. The following is an excerpt from a commentary that he has written on that text for the Jewish Healing Center.

Introduction

Illness, whether our own or of someone we care for, has a way of focusing our attention on the essential issues by calling



Tree of Heaven

into question the conventional beliefs we use to hide from our own vulnerability. Illness punctures our defenses, leaves us wide open and exposed to a welter of emotions; we are prey to our imagination and to our fears; we feel weak and powerless.

As we scramble to confront the practical problems that illness brings, we find ourselves pondering the seeming imponderables about the meaning of our lives and our relationships. We perceive, however dimly, that we need to be healed; and not just physically, but more profoundly, spiritually as well. I have come to believe that surprising opportunities to heal are all around us. We need only to be open to them. Read through the text and react to it.

Continued on page 5

When The Body Hurts

Rabbi Nancy Flam, West Coast Director of the JHC, wrote: "In the Jewish tradition, every human experience holds the possibility of calling God to consciousness. The practice of reciting blessings (*brachot*) helps us connect with the Source of creation through the seemingly mundane acts of daily life."

When Rabbi Flam was studying the traditional morning blessings with a group of more than 60 women in the Bay Area, she asked them what words might help them to connect to God at times of illness, what words might offer them the possibility of sensing God's presence. Their responses have been collected in *When The Body Hurts, The Soul Still Longs to Sing*. Here are a few of them.

- Blessed is our Eternal God, Creator of the Universe, who has allowed me to experience both great pleasure and the chance to learn of life, for the hope offered by this new day.
- I awake in pain, misery, and utter confusion; but still I awake. My life is sacred. My life has purpose and my soul houses holy spirit. I pray for healing and to heal others. I gratefully acknowledge today with its infinite possibilities and opportunities. And let me say, Amen.
- Blessed is the Eternal One who gives me the ability to remember those blessings which are still mine to affirm, and the strength to arise anew this day.
- Blessed are You, Spirit of Life, who has the power to release me from life but sustains me for Your purpose. Give me the strength to accept this life until that purpose is fulfilled.
- Dear God: Thanks for providing me with so many rich experiences and helping lead me down a path woven with loving friends and family. My fond and grateful memories sustain me during this difficult time. I never feel alone with Your guiding presence surrounding me.



"Rebekah: Giver of the Wellsprings of Life"
Linen Fiber Sculpture by Laurie Gross © 1993
Collection of The Jewish Museum San Francisco
in memory of Helaine Fortgang

- Dear God, heal my spirit, salve my pain, help to make me whole again.
- Blessed are You, *Mekor Chayim* (Source of Life), who has given me consciousness once again. With each day of life may I continue the task of *Tikkun Olam* (perfecting/repairing the world), and take wonder and joy in the miracle of life.
- Although I am ill and failing, and my body is frail, thank You for still allowing me to experience the wonder and sacredness of life on this earth.



Many, Many Thanks to The Shefa Fund

We are enormously grateful for the fiscal management and organizational guidance provided to the JHC by the The Shefa Fund. With the help of Jeffery Dekro and his talented staff, we are now ready to branch off on our own. We will always value our special relationship with The Shefa Fund.

Profile: A Visit with Navah Harlow

How can we help a person maintain a sense of dignity and self-determination in the face of serious illness? Although arising from radically different interpretations of medical practice, both the *Shulchan Aruch*, the compendium of Jewish law and ethics, and a New York State law passed 25 years ago provide remarkably similar answers. Navah Harlow, Director of the Department of Ethics in Medicine at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center, sees a direct connection between the provisions of New York State's Patients' Bill of Rights and the precepts of the *Shulchan Aruch* concerning care of the sick. Both, she says, are grounded in the belief in the inherent worth of an individual life.

Mrs. Harlow joined Beth Israel's staff in 1979, when she was asked to establish the hospital's Patient Representative Office. Her charge was to insure that the hospital implemented fully the provisions of the Patients' Bill of Rights. This document, enacted in early 1970's as part of the State's Hospital Code, had as its goal the reinterpretation of the relationship between those who are ill and those who care for them.

When we are well, we might assume that we have some control over our lives; but to the person who enters the hospital, it often seems that individuality and autonomy are stored away in the closet along with one's clothing. Pain and fear may make it seem impossible to think rationally or to assert one's will. The person who is sick is surrounded by people whose name tags he can barely read, whose func-

tions he cannot understand, and who use medical terminology that is often incomprehensible. He has been suddenly cast into the new, often frightening, and sometimes confusing role as "patient."



Paper cutout. Eastern Europe, nineteenth century.

The goal of the Patients' Bill of Rights is to remove as much of the fear and confusion as possible, to humanize the hospital experience, and what is most important, to insure that every patient is treated with dignity and respect. Like those precepts of the *Shulchan Aruch*, it is concerned with meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of patients, and covers a wide range of ethical questions about illness, such as privacy, the right to know, and patient participation in

the decision-making process.

Jewish tradition, however, speaks not only of the needs of the person who is ill, but also insists that every individual has the obligation to take care of his body, since it

is entrusted to us by Adonai. Thus, every patient entering Beth Israel receives a brochure, available in a variety of languages from Chinese to Yiddish, that contains not only a statement of the provisions of the Patients' Bill of Rights, but a statement of the Patients' Responsibilities. These Responsibilities include providing accurate information about the patient's medical history, following the recommended treatment plan, and being courteous and considerate of other patients and hospital personnel.

Mrs. Harlow, who began working at Beth Israel after a career in counseling and Jewish education, was the moving force behind the establishment of Beth Israel's Jacob Perlow Hospice, the first hospice in New York organized under the aegis of a Jewish organization. Although it is sponsored by a Jewish organization and has a Kosher kitchen, its services are available to everyone. "We are the Jewish community," she says, "and this is part of our communal obligation."

Her newest role, as Director of the Department of Ethics in Medicine, arose from her service as a member of the hospital's Ethics Committee. The Committee provides consultations for patients and their families when faced with mak-

Continued on page 5

Profile, continued

ing decisions about such questions as the continuation of further treatment, the use of a respirator for a terminally ill person, or signing a health care proxy. But these are questions that must be faced not only by those who are ill, but those who care for them as well. How does a doctor, who has dedicated himself to preserving life, come to terms with a patient's wish to sign a "do not resuscitate" consent form, or with a family's request to end life support? Because these situations can create wrenching dilemmas not only for patients and their families, but for members of the house staff as well, the Department also sponsors in-house training and education.

Mrs. Harlow makes it clear that these discussions often focus as much on spiritual as on medical issues: "Every patient has spiritual needs." A patient or a doctor may ask, "What is divine about a human life?" The answer is most often grounded in the person's spiritual outlook. In the process of helping someone who is ill to answer these questions, it is essential, she says, to respect the particular religious beliefs of every patient. For observant Jewish patients, these questions may have to be considered in light of the strict observance of *halacha*, for Jews who may not be familiar with what Judaism has to say about these issues, the tradition can prove to be an unexpected source of strength for facing such difficult questions. When asked what perspective her own Judaism brings to her work, she answers, "acknowledging the Divine Presence."

Tamara Green
Board of Directors
Jewish Healing Center



Heaven and Earth, continued

Mishnah Torah, Chapter 14

It is a positive rabbinic commandment to visit the sick . . . (It is) an act of *chesed* (lovingkindness), done with one's body and has no fixed requirement . . . (It is) included in the commandment, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself," that is, anything you wish others to do for you, do the same for your brother in Torah and *mitzvot*.

Visiting the sick is a *mitzvah* that everyone is obligated to perform . . . The more one visits, the more praiseworthy it is, as long as this does not bother the patient.

When one visits the ill, it is as if he takes away a portion of the patient's illness and lifts the burden of the illness.

When one does not visit the sick, it is as if he has shed blood.

When visiting the sick, one should not sit on a bed or on a chair higher than the patient nor above the head of his bed.

But one should wrap himself up, sit below the head of the bed, request divine mercy on the patient's behalf, and (only then) leave.

Commentary

In order to motivate us to perform the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick, Maimonides underscores its importance by declaring the act as beyond gender and social status, limited only by practical considerations, and endowed with great healing powers: a personal, communal and divine response to human vulnerability. In the face of illness, friends and supporters come not only as individuals, but as part of a communal response to need. And that response embraces practical action to alleviate pain and suffering, concern for human dignity, and reaching out for divine mercy and support.

To be human is to be vulnerable. All of us, sick and well, share the pain, fear and terrifying powerlessness inherent in that fact. But sharing our vulnerability gives us a way to understand and support each other. G'd shares with us our moments of vulnerability and supports us in facing that pain, fear and powerlessness.

When we visit the sick, we not only share our common vulnerability, but we identify with G'd through a supportive presence; we are "there" for the sick person, just as G'd "is there." Thus, in visiting the sick, we become both more human and more G'dlike.

Why do we perform this *mitzvah*? Halachically, visiting the sick is part of a wider commitment to love our neighbor, either because we have become aware of our own needs, and therefore, feel responsible for meeting our neighbor's needs; or we may do so because we recognize that at some important spiritual level, all human beings are the same and must be loved as such. Or we may love our neighbor because of our search for holiness and our desire to do the will of G'd who has given us this *mitzvah*.

As with all commandments, visiting the sick takes us beyond ourselves without demanding that we leave ourselves behind. We can both rediscover ourselves and connect to the person we have come to visit as we understand the shared humanity that transcends time, place and circumstance. Ultimately, through the performance of this *mitzvah*, we may suddenly find a holy place where heaven and earth join, at that very spot on which we are standing together with the person who is ill.

Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard
Senior Teaching Fellow and
Manager of Institute at CLAL

JHC Update

Those of you who have watched the development and growth of the Jewish Healing Center over the past three years know that the impetus for its founding was our desire to make accessible the broad range of concrete responses that Judaism can offer to Jews struggling with illness. The wellspring of this vision was the knowledge that Judaism can and must bring comfort and spiritual healing to Jews who are in pain, for as the Talmud declares, there can be no greater *mitzvah* than bringing comfort to those who are ill.

What have we accomplished thus far?

Most important, we have succeeded in putting the issue of spiritual healing on the Jewish communal agenda, both locally and nationally, by creating the vocabulary, conceptual frameworks, and forums for discussion. But Judaism is grounded in *mitzvot*, and we knew from the beginning that actions carry more weight than any ideology.

With the support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, among others, we began our efforts on a local level, and the Jewish Healing Center established in San Francisco has become a model for what we hope Jewish communities across the country can do. Under the direction of Rabbi Nancy Flam, the JHC has flourished in the Bay Area.

Among its accomplishments are:

- the founding of *Kol HaNeshama*, a Jewish hospice that provides spiritual care for the terminally ill, under the direction of Rabbi Amy Eilberg.
- the development and sponsorship of a service of healing, held

twice monthly at a local synagogue, and the creation of a consortium of synagogues that are committed to integrating healing programs into congregational life.

- the organization of support groups for Jews who want to gain a spiritual perspective on living with illness, and the provision of one-on-one counseling for hundreds of individuals who are ill.
- the organization of a training and support group for local rabbis who want to further develop their pastoral work with those who are ill.
- the sponsorship of workshops and presentations on Jewish approaches to illness for health care professionals in the Bay Area.

The communal response to and support for the JHC in San Francisco have uncovered broader needs everywhere for Jewish teaching, texts and rituals that cannot only bring spiritual comfort to people facing serious illness, but also provide guidance and support for Jewish professionals who work with those who are ill. Thousands of individuals have written or called the San Francisco office to receive information on Judaism and healing.

At the same time, we have been building a national rabbinic network through workshops and lectures at professional meetings. Hundreds of rabbis have studied and learned about traditional texts and Jewish resources for dealing with illness at JHC-organized workshops given at national and regional rabbinic conferences. In February

1994, the JHC sponsored "*Refaeinu 1994: a Practicum on Healing and the Rabbinate*," a three-day conference on Jewish responses to illness, attended by more than 130 rabbis and other Jewish professionals. So moved were those present that speaker after speaker began with the words of the *shehecheyanu*, the blessing traditionally recited when giving thanks for reaching a great goal. Finally, the JHC's scope of educational activities has been widened further through consultation provided on programs and services for more than 50 Jewish communities across the country and in Canada.

Recognizing Judaism's commitment to the power of the word, the JHC has begun to locate those traditional Jewish texts that can serve as spiritual resources for those dealing with illness and loss, and has created new texts and rituals that have proven to be of value to those who are ill. In addition, members of the JHC have written articles on illness and spiritual healing that have appeared in national Jewish journals, such as *Reform Judaism* and *Sh'ma*. Through the production and distribution of these materials, we have been able to reach out to a wider Jewish audience.

Where Are We Headed?

Having laid the groundwork over the past three years, we are beginning to see more clearly the outlines and goals of a national organization. At a series of seminars held this summer in New York, leaders of the Jewish community and health-care and communal professionals came together with members of the JHC Board to discuss what future they envisioned for the Jewish Healing Center. The topics

of conversation ranged from the spiritual meaning of visiting the sick to the relationship between mind/body medicine and Judaism, from the personal experience of illness to the need for in-service training for rabbis and health care providers. These seminars have helped not only to clarify and identify communal concerns and needs, both national and local, but have served to start the process of building a national board and putting the JHC on a sound financial footing.

This year, we plan to expand our programming in New York by building partnerships with local Jewish social agencies, community centers, and rabbinic groups. The metropolitan area, with its great variety of Jewish institutions, will be an excellent laboratory for building models of spiritual healing that can be replicated by local communal structures across the country.

Members of the JHC Board



Jewish Healing Center Synagogue Consortium

The JHC has launched a new program for Bay Area synagogues: *The Jewish Healing Center Synagogue Consortium*. Member congregations will receive a variety of services to support the synagogue in meeting the spiritual needs of congregants living with illness. Synagogues have been invited to join at various levels appropriate to the synagogue's need and program plans for the coming year.

- *Level A* provides synagogues with materials, consultation and library use.
- *Level B* provides all the above, in addition to a one-time lecture, sermon, training session or healing service.
- *Level C* provides all the above in addition to a Scholar-in-Residence weekend, a four-part adult education series or a four-part *Bikur Holim* Committee training program.

A *Level C* program has been successfully completed this Spring with Rabbi Daniel Pressman's Congregation Beth David. Please call the JHC office for further information (415)387-4999.

Todah Rabbah!

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

Bob Ameri
Barry Barkin
Denah Bookstein
Congregation Beth Shalom, S.F.
Robin Fisher
Tamara Green
The Jewish Museum, S.F.
Shifra Raffel
Tina Rotenberg
Jean Schram
Janice Segall



JHC's Wish List

The JHC's antiquated equipment is slowing down. We really need a **fast** IBM PC or MacIntosh computer and a **fast** PRINTER. All gifts are tax deductible. We thank you for your support!



Return Postage Guaranteed

The Outstretched Arm
141 Alton Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94116

The Outstretched Arm

The Outstretched Arm is published by
The Jewish Healing Center.

Vol. IV, No. 1 Fall 1994

Managing Editor: Marsha Mignon Guggenheim

Editor: Tamara M. Green

Layout and Design: Bonnie Rochelle Gallaty

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 Haneshama 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