

Conference Presenters and Participants:



Rabbis Michael Paley, Samuel Barth, Sam Weintraub



Rabbis Amy Eilberg, Dayle Friedman



Rabbi Nancy Flam

# Refaeinu 1996

**T**hey came from all over to *Refaeinu 1996: A Practicum on Healing and the Rabbinate*. From California to Boston; Toronto to Israel. The weather was crisp and wintry, more accommodating than at the first conference two years ago. The landmark hotel was warm and gracious, matching the atmosphere of the gathering itself. The biennial conference provided the more than 130 rabbis and Jewish professionals who came together in Summit, New Jersey on January 28-30 with the opportunity both to mine traditional Jewish approaches to illness and healing and to explore the creation of new ones. In plenaries, workshops, study sessions and *chevra* groups (small peer-led discussion groups for debriefing and sharing), the participants discussed the role of the rabbi in bringing spiritual well-being to those who are ill, explored the power of ritual and prayer, studied traditional and not-so-traditional texts, took part in a variety of healing services, and davenned together.

And to further lift everyone's spirits there were *niggunim*,

*Rabbinical students from three seminaries participated at Refaeinu.*

singing with Debbie Friedman, and an evening of spirited music and dancing led by Rabbi Moshe Shur, the "Rockin' Renaissance Rabbi."

The first plenary session: "The Rabbi as Healer" opened with a warming welcome and spiritual charge by David Hirsch, Executive Director of *The National Center for Jewish Healing*. Moderated by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Associate Director of the Center, this session set the theme of the conference: Rabbis Nancy Flam, Israel Kestenbaum and Lavey Derby offered reflections on their spiritual journeys into the world of Jewish healing.

When asked to define what spiritual healing means, Rabbi Flam, Director of the Jewish Community Healing Program of *Ruach Ami: Bay Area Jewish Healing Center* in San Francisco, responded, "I don't see myself as a healer, but as a midwife of the spirit, moving over and making room for God. I try to stay grounded in the *anochi*, that is, in God, and not in the *ani*, myself."

Rabbi Kestenbaum, Director of Pastoral Care at Beth Israel Hospital in New York, spoke of healing not as an event, but as process. He offered that healing is not something one does for another, but with another. Rabbi

*continued on page 2*





## The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

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Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin  
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**The National Center for Jewish Healing**  
(NCJH) is a not-for-profit educational,  
programmatic, consultative and resource  
organization dedicated to helping local  
communities meet the spiritual and  
emotional needs of Jews who are ill and  
their loved ones, through the guidance,  
wisdom and traditions of Judaism.

photographs by Joanne Dugan

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Derby of Congregation Shofar in Tiburon, California, described healing as "presence." He used the kabbalistic metaphor of *tsimtsum*, the "contraction" of God in order to make room for the creation: "I try to leave myself at the door to make room for the other."

The second day's plenary, "Professional Choices Within the Community", was chaired by Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, Rabbinic Director of the *New York Jewish Healing Center*, who posed the question, "What do you do that you regard as healing?" Peter Knobel, Rabbi of Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, spoke of affirming the worth of each individual, and helping the person who is sick to uncover the courage to make her life a blessing. "Healing is not a program, but that for which we are present."

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Director of Kol Haneshamah, the Jewish Hospice Program of *Ruach Ami: Bay Area Jewish Healing Center* in San Francisco, said that she tries to bring to those who are ill a Torah of *chesed* and *rachamim*, evoking images of healing that are focused on God and faith. She prays for the presence of the Shechinah, that it may act as a conduit for the yearnings of the one who is ill. For Rabbi Dayle Friedman, Chaplain of the Philadelphia Geriatric Center, healing for those who are near the end of their lives is "nurturing the part that is still whole by creating a life of celebration, of meaning, of connection in whatever place they find themselves... There is no age of retirement from performing mitzvot."

The third plenary, a dialogue between Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Director of the Jewish Life Program at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man, the Executive Director of Metivta in Los Angeles, expanded the theme of "Rabbi as Healer" beyond the boundaries of individual and community into the wider world. Their topic,

*The biennial conference provided the more than 130 rabbis and Jewish professionals who came together in Summit, New Jersey on January 28-30 with the opportunity both to mine traditional Jewish approaches to illness and healing and to explore the creation of new ones.*

healing, to include the creation of healing communities as a way of healing the larger Jewish community.

In addition to the plenaries and the *chevra* groups that followed them, 48 workshops and text study sessions provided further opportunities to embark upon new spiritual journeys. Workshop topics ranged from "Sharing Religious Stories: Developing a Language for Spiritual Assessment" to "Death as a Teacher: Jewish Insights on Life, Death, and the Afterlife," from "To Walk in God's Ways: Using Torah to Develop a Practical Theology" to "Kol Ha-Neshama: Embodying Prayer with Movement and Breath." Texts of every sort formed the basis of the study sessions as Talmud and Torah, Maimonides and the Mi Sheberakh, Hasidic tales and life stories as healing narratives demonstrated the remarkable power of language as part of the healing process.

The myriad of details that came together to make *Refaeinu* a success were ably and seamlessly guided by the steady hands of Conference Coordinator Susie Kessler, Director of Education and Training of the NCJH, and Maria P.A. Sudock, Director of Operations. They were assisted by their fine staff, Debbie Shea, Lisa Gelber, Janet Offel and volunteer Mollie Kessler. As everyone gathered at the closing circle, all agreed that much had been accomplished since *Refaeinu 1994*, but that there was still much to be done.



Conference Coordinators:  
Lisa Gelber, Debbie Shea, Maria Sudock, Susie Kessler



# Welcoming Rabbi Simkha Weintraub

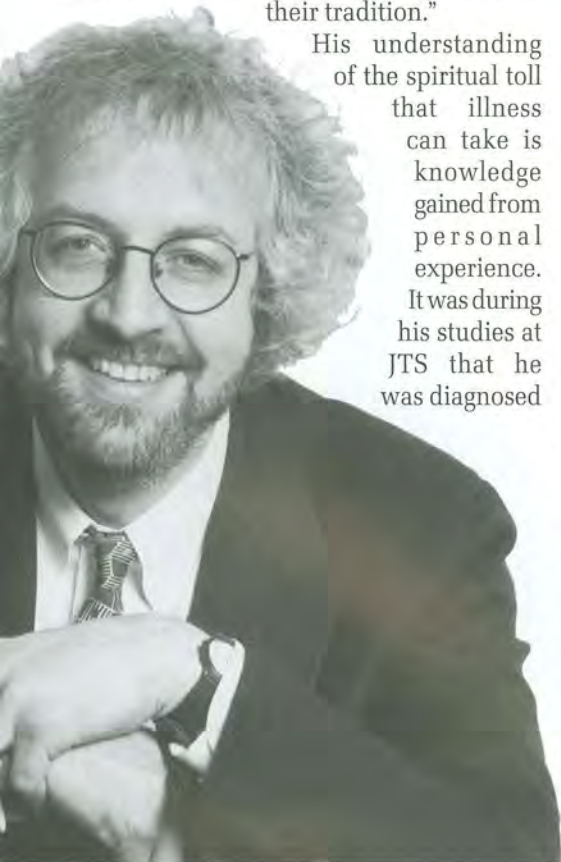
**SIMKHA WEINTRAUB**, newly named Rabbinic Director of *The National Center for Jewish Healing* and the newly-founded *New York Jewish Healing Center*, sees his engagement with the mission of the Center as emerging from a confluence of professional roles (as rabbi and family therapist) and personal searching. Ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1982, Simkha received an MSW the following year, and did further training at the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health in couples and family therapy. Simkha's work in the Jewish communal world has been wide-ranging, from teaching 4th and 5th graders at the Heschel School in New York City to serving as Educational Director at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. He also served as Curriculum Coordinator at the Melton adult mini-school program, and for the past 8 1/2 years, he has been Director of Public Affairs at the New Israel Fund.

Simkha is no stranger to the NCJH. Since its earliest stirrings in 1991, he acted as the Center's Program Consultant. His goal is to help the Center "give a voice to any individual, at any stage, in the 'illness universe'. Those who are suffering, those who have been ill, and those who have had to deal with illness of loved ones often feel alienated and distant from the community and from their tradition."

His understanding of the spiritual toll

that illness can take is knowledge gained from personal experience.

It was during his studies at JTS that he was diagnosed



## Frances BRANDT

When Frances Brandt, co-chair of the Board of *The National Center for Jewish Healing*, found out that she had lymphoma, she didn't want to tell anyone, even though she felt she would explode. "Our culture idolizes the healthy and the fit, so when you're sick, you feel like you're out of step." Even while she was undergoing treatment and trying to come to terms with what had happened to her, she kept up her busy schedule as Chair of the Women's Task Force of UJA-Federation, a group of lay and professional women who discuss and study issues of concern to Jewish women.

Her commitment to Jewish communal life came "by osmosis in the Bronx." Nevertheless, although she had been active in a variety of Jewish organizations and had worked on health care issues such as AIDS and breast cancer, she had never thought about her own illness in a "Jewish" way, until someone gave her a copy of *The Outstretched Arm*, and an article by Susan Sobel-Friedman caught her attention.

The essay had as its starting point the talmudic discussion about the meaning of a prayer recited in vain. The rabbis say that if a man is on his way home and, hearing cries of distress, prays that the alarm is not coming from his house, this is a vain prayer, because there is no point in asking God to change what has already happened. Instead, the man should pray for the guidance and strength to cope with whatever situation he must face when he returns home. "It was as if a light bulb had been turned on."

She was deeply moved by the response to a service of healing sponsored by the NCJH held at the Council of Jewish Federations General Assembly in Boston this past November. "More than a hundred people came to the service wanting to know more about what we are up to. I understood what a tremendous need there is, both spiritually and Jewishly, for what the Healing Center does. We never talk about what is really part of our tradition."

Yet, Frances is convinced that the message of healing can be and should be incorporated into every service in the synagogue. She envisions as the Healing Center's major task the creation of a heightened awareness of the importance of spiritual healing traditions within the broader Jewish communal world and within every Jewish community. "It's so important for rabbis to be trained, since so often they, like the rest of us, don't know what to say or how to offer comfort. And those in the medical profession too often see themselves as scientists, not as healers." What is clear to all the staff at the Center is that Frances brings to our work her own special ways and strengths of healing.



Frances Brandt (left) with Board member Dr. Tamara Green

as diabetic; two years later, he developed thyroid cancer. And then, when he and his wife tried to have children, they struggled with infertility. In many ways, he says, that was the most spiritually wrenching of all. "Because it is natural to want to run from illness, whether our own or that of those we love, we need to put spiritual healing on our agenda, both in the here and now and for the future. The Jewish world needs this work: not only rabbis and health care professionals, but each of us as individuals."

One of the Center's programs he is most excited about is "Sustaining Our Spirits," (see story on page 6) three spiritual support groups for three distinct (but interrelated) constituencies: those who are ill, family members of those who are ill, and Jewish health care professionals. Sponsored jointly with the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, the

groups offer "opportunities to draw strength, support, and solace from the rich resources of the Jewish tradition together with psychological understanding and practical information."

Among these rich resources are the psalms, traditionally considered to be a source of comfort in times of difficulty. In his earlier role as consultant, Simkha served as editor of the Center's first book, *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body*, which contains reflections by ten prominent contemporary rabbis on the 10 psalms identified by the 18th century Hasidic master Nachman of Breslov as having special power to bring a true and complete healing of body and soul: *refuat ha-nefesh* and *refuat ha-guf*. The text, Simkha says, is just one of the ways that the voices of the Jewish traditions of spiritual healing continue to speak to us.



created by DR. SHERRY BLUMBERG

The impetus for this Haggadah came out of my personal experience with cancer surgery just before Passover. My family and I celebrated the seder at a big metropolitan hospital. At first we were thrilled that such a seder was provided for the patients and their families. However, the experience of the seder was so frustrating and alienating that on the second night, when I was alone in my hospital room, I found myself creating a different kind of Haggadah.

Not that the Rabbi wasn't learned, and not that it wasn't wonderful to have his explanations, but present at that Seder were patients in wheelchairs, on drips, weakened, dying and frail. Most of the patients left before we even got to the blessing for Matzah. Next to my family was a family whose father was—at that very moment—having brain surgery. (The twelve and a half year old son was wondering if his father would live to witness his Bar Mitzvah.) Across from us was a family who gathered around the grandfather who would not see "next year" in Jerusalem or with them. Even I could only stay until the meal was to be served—my own strength faded after 1 1/2 hours at 9:00 pm.

Yet, not once during this seder did I hear a mention of the terrible pain, the illness, the hopes for healing. My husband and son remained as I was taken back to my room and they heard none in the second half either.

The second night, I began to imagine what could be done. As I read through the Haggadah myself, I imagined many additions. Later in the week I began to write and illustrate them. Through the sampling presented below, we share with you some of the texts that I created in the hopes that you (perhaps your congregants or loved ones) may find these meaningful when woven into your seder this year.

As you read them, as you use them, please consider adding your own. Some texts below are incomplete, inviting you to complete them. And if you do, please send them—along with your other additions—to us by June 1st so that we may have the benefit of including even more voices in our full **Haggadah for Healing** which we plan to publish next year.

Livrakhah u'refuah sheimah - with blessings and wishes for a complete healing.

# HAGGADAH

*Before kiddush (the first cup of the evening) one might say:*

☞ We begin by pouring the wine. I pour it for you, as you sit here next to me, and ask that you in turn pour it for the one next to you and so on.

☞ Think about how our cup of life is filled. What does God do for us? What do we do for each other?

☞ I hold the cup differently as well. I hold it with both hands, with the fingers entwined. One hand symbolizes the part of me that is in need of healing; the other the hand that heals. On this night of Passover, the two come together as we celebrate.

☞ Smell the wine or grape juice. Relish its sweetness. See its rich color. Hear the melody as we chant the blessing. Then, after we say the blessing we will drink deeply from our cup.

☞ Each of these acts symbolizes that we must drink deeply from our cup of life, aware of all of our senses. During this season of freedom we celebrate each drop of life. Each is precious and should be savored. We do not know what will be tomorrow.



*Our cup of life*

*To accompany the Four Questions:*

The four questions are traditionally asked by the youngest child at the seder. Tonight, we add four other questions that each of us may be moved to ask.

☞ A person struggling with illness may ask...  
Why me? On this night as all others I wonder why me?

☞ A person who is the loved one of someone ill may ask...  
How can I help? On this night as all others, what can I do to bring comfort?

☞ A doctor or nurse may ask...  
Will I have the skills to help save lives and mend broken bodies? On this night and throughout my life, will I be able to heal?

☞ A community may ask...  
How can we create a haven of safety, a support system, and a place of true prayer for those whose lives revolve around illness and healing? On this night and all nights, how can we serve God and the Jewish people?

What are the questions you would ask on this night?

*Maggid: Telling the Story*

*B'chol Dor Va'Dor...* In every generation there is illness and disease. Illness can be a form of slavery. Some of us are again in physical bondage to bodily and mental ills that keep us from thinking that we are or can be free. On Passover, as we commemorate our people's deliverance from the physical bondage of Egyptian slavery, we need also to "tell our story". Where does your story begin?

☞ "And he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there..." (Deuteronomy 26:5) What is your Egypt?



# for Healing

☞ "And the Egyptians ill-treated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard burdens." (Deuteronomy 26:6) How are you afflicted? What are your burdens?

☞ "And the Eternal brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; with great terror and with signs and wonders." (Deuteronomy 26:8) What has been your journey towards healing and freedom? What has God done? What great terrors have you felt? What have been the signs and wonders?

## The Three Symbols of Passover

We tell the story of Passover through our symbols: *pesah* (the Passover sacrifice); *matzah* (unleavened bread) and *maror* (bitter herbs). As we hold up the symbols tonight and explain their ritual meaning, let us hear what they mean in terms of our own lives.

☞ *Pesah*...this is the sacrifice that we make in our own lives to help those who are in need. For those whose illness is chronic, it may mean the sacrifice of certain life styles. For those whose illness is terminal, it may mean the sacrifice of some dreams never to be realized. What does it mean to you?

☞ *Matzah*...this symbolizes that which has been left undone in our lives as we struggle with illness, disease and the pains of daily living. It has been called the bread of affliction, and the bread of redemption. What is left undone in your life? What is that can be both an affliction and a redemption? What does the *matzah* mean to you?

☞ *Maror*...*maror* is sharp and bitter. We eat it with *haroset*, the sweet. We remember that bitterness is a part of everyone's life. We also know that it can be an opportunity for a moment of sweetness. Our liberation from the bitterness of illness is like leaving *Mitzrayim* (Egypt): to be redeemed, we must open ourselves to vulnerability. Both take courage.

## Dayenu

*Dayenu* is a song of gratitude. Each of its verses moves us from one stage of awareness to another. While no one step is truly sufficient, and while with each step we continue to seek more, still, we must not overlook the blessings that we encounter along the way, step by step.

*Dayenu* is traditionally composed of 15 stanzas, reminiscent of the 15 steps of ascent in the Temple. In this *dayenu* we give you but a few verses that are steps towards healing. We urge you to write your own verses. Like the *dayenu* of the Exodus...we begin with the mundane and move to the spiritual, trying to feel gratitude for whatever we have:

☞ If we were blessed with early diagnosis, but not with wise doctors, *dayenu*.

☞ If we were blessed with wise doctors but not with a hospital nearby, *dayenu*..

☞ If we were blessed with a hospital nearby but not with a warm and dedicated nursing staff, *dayenu*..



☞ If I couldn't enjoy seder in my own home, but could share it with those I love, *dayenu*.

☞ If I am not blessed with complete healing of my body, but I am blessed with a healing of my soul, *dayenu*.

*At the end of the seder  
we might say:*

Illness and Disease can be  
either a fence or a gate.

As a fence, it divides, keeping  
people either in or out.  
While protection is important,  
and may be necessary at times,  
there is beauty on both sides.

As a gate, it joins,  
opening up new vistas,  
new friendships  
and new knowledge.

Illness and Dis"ease"  
are not what we would  
have chosen for ourselves,  
but they are what we have  
in our or our loved ones' lives.

Let us learn to see the  
gateways it provides  
and to move through  
them as the truly beautiful  
images of God that we can be.



*Next year in Jerusalem.  
Next year may we all be free.*

drawings by Hank Blaustein



# Sustaining Our Spirits

## Groups Launched in New York

Now underway in New York City are three different kinds of Jewish support groups related to serious illness: one for Jewish men and women who are seriously ill, one for family members of Jews with serious illness, and one for Jewish health care professionals working with those who are seriously ill.

Co-facilitated by Harriet Feiner, CSW of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services and Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW, Rabbinic Director of the New York Jewish Healing Center, these groups share the goal of drawing on Jewish tradition and Jewish community to offer support, strength, solace, and hope. Jewish resources — including, but not limited to, stories, legal and ethical literature, prayer, ritual, music, poetry, and song — are integrated with psychological understanding and practical information in a search for meaning, insight, and guidance. The closed groups meet for six weeks at Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, which is co-sponsoring these programs with the Healing Center.

**"...these groups share the goal of drawing on Jewish tradition and Jewish community to offer support, strength, solace, and hope."**

Asked about the impact of these groups, one participant commented on how helpful it was to bring the voice of an ancient and yet diverse tradition to bear on difficult medical decision-making. Another stressed how unique it was to draw on one's "extended Jewish family" in the face of great pain, profound loss, and seemingly bleak prospects. A third expressed how the group enabled him to "heal" his relationship with Judaism, which had been extremely limited and felt irrelevant until then. Yet another felt that her "spiritual repertoire" had been expanded with new practices and texts to utilize.

Anyone interested in these groups — or who has relatives, friends, and colleagues in greater New York who might be — is encouraged to call Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW at (212) 332-9787, extension 1.

Announcing a Major National Conference

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June 9, 1996

For registration information call Susan Chiat at 617-271-1237

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*We apologize if your name was omitted.  
Please call so we can include it in our next  
newsletter*



# Gemilut Chesed

**Rabbi Eleazar said:**  
*when one performs acts of charity and justice it is as though one has filled the entire world, all of it, with loving kindness, as it is said, "When one loves charity and justice, the earth is full of the loving kindness of the Lord."*

We would ask that you too perform such acts of charity which enable us to extend this tradition of loving kindness to our world through the work that we do.

*Yes*, I would like to make a contribution for your important work.

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*We would be pleased to send a friend, colleague, doctor, patient or family member a copy of our newsletter and other mailings. Just send us their name and address - via mail or fax - and we will do the rest.*

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## THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH HEALING RESOURCES

*Healing of Soul, Healing of Body, Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in Psalms.* Edited by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW. A source of solace for those who are facing illness, as well as those who care for them. These psalms and the inspiring commentaries that accompany them offer an anchor of spiritual support.

*Joining Heaven and Earth, Maimonides and the Laws of Bikkur Cholim.* Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard's modern commentary on Maimonides' explication of the laws of bikkur cholim (visiting the sick).

*When The Body Hurts, The Soul Still Longs to Sing.* The prayer booklet of heartfelt blessings for times of illness (written by Jewish laywomen). A loving gift for anyone needing spiritual uplift in the midst of illness.

*With Healing on Its Wings.* Masorti Publications, London. A healing collage of selections from the shabbat and weekday liturgy, Genesis, Psalms, Talmud, medieval and contemporary Jewish literature.

*Out of the Depths: Personal Stories of Illness & Healing.* Transcribed copies of the discussion from the opening plenary session of *Refaenu 1994: A Practicum on Healing and the Rabbinate*. A few strong individuals share their personal stories of illness and healing.

**NEW**  
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# A MOVEMENT GROWS

From Toronto to Orange County, Kansas to Miami,  
the North American Jewish Community is organizing programs to address the  
spiritual needs of Jews living with illness and loss.

**W**ith remarkable energy and commitment to quality and a professionalized sensibility, Jewish organizations and community leaders are coming together across professional disciplines and denominational affiliations to develop new gateways into the richness and relevance of Jewish tradition for those confronting pain and crisis.

What makes this movement even more remarkable are the shared efforts of synagogues, Jewish Family Service agencies, Federations, JCC's, hospices, Jewish chaplains, hospitals, local Boards of Rabbis and seminaries. If, as African wisdom suggests, "it takes an entire village to raise a child," so too, then, does it take an entire community to provide hope, comfort and insight to a Jewish family confronting serious illness and pain.

Over twenty communities across North America are developing plans for community-based "centers" with programs including spiritual counseling and community support groups led by experienced rabbis or clinicians.

In cities such as Kansas City, Toronto and New York, the local commitment to address these needs is so broad-based that seldom is any singular institution at the helm. Rather, local amalgams of services along a continuum of care are being developed with shared responsibilities across institutions.

In other cities such as Las Vegas, efforts are being guided

by the Jewish Family Service agency. Elsewhere, the efforts are being developed around particular local needs. In Minneapolis/St. Paul, attention is focused on Jewish hospice. In Denver, an innovative para-chaplaincy effort has taken root. In Orange County, the needs of Jews living with chronic illness is at the center for their healing program.

Other local programs are developing unique formats. In Miami, a hospital is at the lead in organizing retreats for Jews living with cancer. In New England, Camp Ramah plans its second annual summer retreat on healing after its first program drew over 200 people.

Dozens of synagogues in cities including Boston, Philadelphia, Dallas, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Washington, and Chicago are sponsoring liturgical Services of Healing (also called Services of Hope and Comfort) while an even greater number are re-doubling their attention to 'healing' prayers during traditional daily and Shabbat services. Federations and JCC's are organizing seminars and classes exploring Judaism's response to and resources for coping with illness and loss.

If your community or organization is developing programs and seeks models or networking with other communities, feel free to phone David Hirsch at the National Center at 212-772-6601.

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