

Great Miracles:

Eight Healing Lessons from/for Hanukkah

Hanukkah may not seem related to healing—images of Judah and the Maccabees, a military triumph, a restored Temple and national autonomy come to mind. But leave it to those confronting illness—patients, family members, chaplains, doctors, rabbis, *bikkur holim* volunteers—to draw profound healing richness from this post-biblical holiday. Here are eight lessons that we have selected:

- 1.** The Hanukkah story is understood as a struggle for independence and a reassertion of religious-spiritual identity. Jews challenged by illness may or may not be blessed by physical cure, but they can, with the help of God, tradition, and community, re-establish their inner strength and achieve emergence, clarity, and resolution.
- 2.** We need a candle to light the candles—the *shammash* is a critical partner in our efforts to illumine the holiday. Reflected in this requirement is the reality that we need each other to bring healing. And the *shammash* is generally identical to the other lights: ultimately, we are all candidates for both roles, healer and healee. Jewish healing is multi-directional.
- 3.** Long ago, there was a Jewish legal disagreement as to whether one ought to light one candle and grow to eight in the course of holiday, or start with eight and work down to one—the latter, after all, more closely reflects the fate of that miraculous cruse of oil in the Hanukkah story. Ultimately, as we all know, the former approach won out—reflecting the notion that even with physical diminishment, spiritual enlightenment can flourish.
- 4.** Eight is a Jewish number of re-dedication. In the Bible, firstborn animals are consecrated to God on the eighth day after their birth, and Hebrew boys are similarly circumcised on the eighth day. And before a sanctuary can be rededicated, it must undergo a seven-day period of purification. Eight, then, represents a new beginning, a renewed commitment—a helpful number for spiritual healing.
- 5.** All Jews are obligated to light the *Hanukkiah*—including women and children, who, for different reasons, are excluded in the traditional framework from the obligations of many commandments. The reason given for this universal requirement is that everyone took part in the miracle, the entire people, all together. Jewish healing, similarly, depends on the participation of everyone—it takes “the village,” the whole community, to reach for wholeness, comfort, support, and strength.
- 6.** We light the *Hanukkiah* in the window in order to publicize the miracle. The miracles of life—which are as everyday as a step, a word, a breath—must be acknowledged, advertised, shared, celebrated.
- 7.** The Hebrew letters on the dreidel—*nun, gimel, hey, shin*—are reminders of the miraculous event of long ago, but they also point to the ultimate redemption, as their *gematria* (numerical value) equals that of the four letters of *mashiah*, Messiah—*mem, shin, yud, het*. Ultimately, we will reach the supreme Hanukkah—an era of peace, justice, harmony, and tranquility.
- 8.** The Haftarah (Prophetic Reading) selected centuries back for the Shabbat of Hanukkah contains the powerful and somewhat surprising statement: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). This assertion, which counters the Hanukkah story’s potential to over-invest us in military prowess, might also suggest the ultimate triumph of the Spirit over suffering, and the possibility of spiritual healing even when physical cure is remote or impossible.

—RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, CSW
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Making your own "HEALING CARD"

Rabbi Jim Michaels · Temple Israel, Wilkes-Barre, PA

One of the practical ideas I learned at this past January's Refaeinu Conference was that many chaplains and care-givers create and carry their own personalized prayers. They use these prayers either for themselves, or for reading with others. I decided to expand on this idea and to design prayer cards I could give to people whom I visited during a *bikkur holim* call.

I still have my supply of pamphlets, containing additional prayers and readings, which I try to bring with me when I visit people in the hospital. I usually forget them, however. Having ready-made cards of reasonably small size means I can store them in my wallet and always have them with me. If the patient is asleep or out of the room when I arrive, these cards also permit me to leave a message which is appropriate

for the visit, instead of a standard business card.

Very soon after I started using small cards, I realized that older people could not read the fine print of the prayer. That's what prompted me to make the same card in a larger, postcard size. I keep them in my car, and reach for a few whenever I go to the hospital.

The results of using these cards has been quite positive. People are happy to get them; they keep them by their bedsides, and tell me they read them often. I find myself giving the cards to people in my office, or on the street, if they mention they're going into the hospital, or know someone who is ill. As small as it may seem, people appreciate that personalized touch, and the prayer printed on the back.

Here is the prayer I use:

A Prayer for Healing

In my illness, Lord, I turn to You, for I am your creation.

Your strength and courage are in my spirit,
and Your powers of healing are within my body.

May it be Your will to restore me to health.

In my illness I have learned what is great and what is small.

I know how dependent I am upon You.

My own pain and anxiety have been my teachers.
May I never forget this precious knowledge when I am well again.

Heal me, Lord and I shall be healed, save me and I shall be saved.
Comfort me, Lord, and shelter me in Your love.

Blessed are You, Lord, the faithful and merciful Healer. Amen.

THREE KINDS OF FAITH *by Reuven Karni*

Dr. Reuven Karni is an industrial engineer who teaches at the Technion in Haifa. He was treated for prostate cancer in 1993.

Several years ago, I watched a TV documentary about walking across red-hot coals. A religious organization had gathered together a group of its followers and arranged for them to spend time together for several days. During this period they would strengthen each others' faith and resolve; and at the climax they would demonstrate that by walking one by one across a bed of glowing coals.

Many of them did so that final evening. Hyped up and cheered on by their fellows they strode barefoot in rhythm across the dewy lawn, into the fiery bed, and along it to a tub of cool water at the far end. Each one who succeeded was ecstatic; I do not remember (or the TV did not record) any failures to reach the other side, although helpers along the bed stood by to lift up any walker who hesitated too long.

The ceremony was also observed by two physicists, who had come to see for themselves how genuine the firewalking was. Convinced that there was no faking, they set about developing theories and carrying out experiments (with plaster feet!) to explain what had occurred, and why the participants had not suffered.

At this point, enter Johann Gottlieb Leidenfrost. In 1756 he investigated and described the phenomenon that a water drop is long-lived when deposited on a metal surface that is far hotter than the boiling temperature of the water. He discovered that at some specific temperature, a drop could last for over a minute before eventually boiling away - the Leidenfrost point. For temperatures below this, the drop spreads quickly over the surface and rapidly conducts heat from it, resulting in complete vaporization within seconds. When the temperature is at or above the Leidenfrost point, the bottom surface of the drop almost immediately vaporizes. The gas (steam) pressure from this vapor layer prevents the rest of the drop from touching the plate. The layer thus protects and supports the drop for the next minute or so.

The physicists made several interesting findings. Protection of the naked foot by the moisture lasted about 3 1/4 seconds; the rhythmic steps of the participants took them across the bed in 2 1/2 seconds. Although the surface of the coals was hot, it contained little energy. If the walker moved at a moderate pace, his or her footfall was so brief that the foot conducted little energy from the coals. If the feet were wet prior to the walk—from the damp grass or excited sweat—the liquid also helped guard against injury.

Having found all this out, one of the physicists joined into the next group to be organized, shed his shoes and socks, and proceeded to walk across the scorching coals.

At the end of the evening, three of the participants were interviewed by the TV crew.

continued on page 4



*She had proven-
to herself-
that she had enough
faith and confidence
in herself to cross that
threatening bed of coals
and now that she
had succeeded, she could
stand up to any
challenges in life than
would lie ahead.*



THREE KINDS OF FAITH *continued from page 3*

The first was euphoric. Her faith in God had made her impervious to the dangers of the fire and so she had proven her loyalty and devotion to Him. The second was more dispassionate. His calculations had proven to him that he was at little risk of injury; and his faith in science had been vindicated. He did not need an uplifted state of mind to enable him to do the walk unharmed.

However, it was the third interviewee who provides the climax to our story. She had no knowledge of science, and was not particularly attracted to the religious fervor of those around her. But she had achieved something far more important. She had proven—to herself—that she had enough faith and confidence in herself to cross that threatening bed of coals and now that she had succeeded, she could stand up to any challenges in life than would lie ahead.

Three human beings, each with a totally different motivation, each with a different foundation, each succeeding in their own way.

When we confront life-threatening illness, with the accompanying trauma, pain and uncertainty, we must summon three kinds of faith to support us along that long, hard road back to health. We must have faith in our doctors and their recommendations, even when we must endure frightening and debilitating remedies, with the hope that these efforts will contribute to our cure. We must have faith in ourselves, our loved ones and our friends, believing that their love, care, sympathy and support are part of how we are going to make it. And finally, we must have faith in God who created us, who cares for us, who watches over us, and who is firmly behind our struggles and efforts.

So that it may always be before our eyes, let us make this our prayer:

*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil,
For Thou are with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”*

(PSALM 23)



Though hard times lie ahead, we have been given three weapons to overcome our dread and face the hurdles bravely and with dignity: God (Thou are with me), ourselves and our loved ones (the Hebrew for “rod” also means tribe), and our treatment (the Hebrew for “staff” refers to a man-made support).

*“Not by might,
nor by power,
but by My spirit,
says the
Lord of Hosts”*

(ZECHARIAH 4:6;
FROM THE PROPHETIC READING
FOR THE SHABBAT OF HANUKKAH)

BLESSING AND EXTENDING THE LIGHT:

A Ritual of Healing for the Eight Nights of Hanukkah

Hanukkah, the mid-winter Festival of Lights, celebrates the rededication of the Temple after its ritual defilement by the Graeco-Syrians, and the successful resistance of the Jews to assimilation. The holiday bolsters a sense of national pride in our unbroken heritage, as well as gratitude for miracles reflected in the story of the single cruse of oil which lasted for eight full days.

Embedded in the historical and national meanings of the holiday, one may uncover deep universal and personal significance. The Temple in Jerusalem represented God's dwelling with and among the Jewish people – but Jewish tradition teaches that our bodies, too, are “temples,” each one an image of God, housing the spirit of God. Hanukkah offers us an opportunity to recognize the sacredness of our bodies, to offer thanks for the miracles of our bodily functions, and rededicate our physical selves to the service of God and humankind.

Hanukkah comes at a dark time in the calendar, close to the winter solstice with its shortest day and longest night. And at a point in the month when the moon is obscured, it is, literally, the darkest time of the year. Our response is to light candles in an effort to draw light into the world and appreciate even the humblest, most limited light as/with a blessing.

In the Jewish tradition, we are urged to be mindful of all those who are ill, and pray for and with them. Even if we ourselves and those near and dear to us are fortunate not to be suffering, we pray daily for physical cure and spiritual healing for those whom we do not know. Jewish healing is thus an ongoing communal enterprise, potent in its concern for anyone dealing with illness, rich in its influence on the pray-er, and valuable in its ability to encourage “horizontal,”

interpersonal support even if divine, “vertical” intervention seems alien or remote.

Our thoughts and prayers, of course, may be all the more effective when they are tied to the particular needs and hopes of those who are suffering. But how can this be practical, when the kinds of afflictions are numerous, the personalities, challenges, and resources of those who are ill so diverse, and the courses and prognoses of disease so shifting and unpredictable?

One way is to seek to step into the experience of people who are ill, to empathically explore the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual passages they travel. While no two people have precisely the same experience, we offer eight commonly-shared junctures in the journey of illness. For each juncture, we have selected verses from the Book of Psalms centered around images of light—for reflection, study, prayer, chanting, and/or meditation.

We suggest that each night of Hanukkah, just before lighting the candles, we pray for those who are ill, with a particular focus on the designated juncture. Imagining what the experience might be like, recite or chant the verse from Psalms (or, if you are able/inclined, utilize the entire psalm) and offer your own prayer for those living with illness and in need of spiritual strength.

For those who themselves are struggling with illness or other serious life challenges, sitting with the dark and meditating upon the light can provide comfort, inspiration, and perspective.

The greatest “Hanukkah gift” is light. May our prayers, *tz'dakah*, and deeds of lovingkindness spark hope and strength and illumine lives with renewed meaning and direction.

אֲזַיִבְקַע כִּשְׁחַר אֹרֶךְ
וְאֶרְכַּתֶּךָ מִהֵרָה תִצְמַח

*“Then shall Your light burst through like dawn,
and Your healing spring up quickly.”* (ISAIAH 58:8)

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW
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Before lighting the candles, begin each night with the following:

“Adonai/my God, Source of healing and hope, we dedicate this night of Hanukkah to those who (complete with appropriate line below.) Give them and those who care for them rich blessings of strength and support, solace and determination. Illumine their lives with insight and guidance, and shine peace and serenity on their path.”

Recite or chant the appropriate verse from Psalms, and then continue with the traditional ritual of lighting the candles.

The first night of Hanukkah: ...are experiencing pain or symptoms

יהוה אורי וישעי ממי אירא Adonai is my Light and my Salvation – whom will I fear?
יהוה מעוז חיי ממי אפחד: Adonai is the Strength of my life – who can make me afraid?
(Psalms 27:1)

The second night of Hanukkah: ...are moving through tests and evaluations

כי אתה תאיר גרי It is You who lights my candle,
יהוה אלהי יגיה חשכי: Adonai, my God, illumines the darkness.
(Psalms 18:29)

The third night of Hanukkah: ...are receiving a diagnosis

גול על־יהוה דרכך Leave your way to Adonai,
ובטח עליו והוא יעשה: Trust in Adonai, who will do it.
והוציא כאור צדקך Adonai will cause your vindication to shine forth like the light,
ומשפטך כצהריים: the justice of your case like noonday sun.
(Psalms 37: 5-6)

The fourth night of Hanukkah: ...are receiving treatments

שלח־אורה ואמתך Send forth Your light and Your truth –
המה ינחוני They will lead me;
יביאוני אל־הר־קדשך They will bring me to Your holy mountain,
ואל־משכן־תורה: to Your dwelling-place.
(Psalms 43:3)

The fifth night of Hanukkah: ...are undergoing surgery

כי עמך מקור חיים With You is the source of life;
באורה נראה־אור: in Your light do we see light.
(Psalms 36:10)

The sixth night of Hanukkah: ...are recovering from surgery and/or treatments

כי הצלת נפשי ממות For You have saved me from death,
הלא רגלי מדחי O yes, my foot from stumbling,
להתהלך לפני אלהים that I may walk in the presence of God,
באור החיים: in the light of life.
(Psalms 56:14)

The seventh night of Hanukkah: ...are “re-entering” – stepping into the next phase of life

נר לרגלי דרכך A lamp unto my feet is Your word,
ואור לנתיבותי: A light for my path.
(Psalms 119:105)

The eighth night of Hanukkah: ...are surviving – incorporating the illness into their lives and stories

אור נרע לצדיק Light is sown for the righteous,
וילי־שרי־לב שמחה: Radiant joy for the upright-at-heart.
שמחו צדיקים ביהוה O you righteous ones, rejoice in Adonai,
והודו לזכר קדשו: and offer thanks to Adonai’s holy name!
(Psalms 97:11-12)

Praying for Those Who Heal,
for Those Who Care:

Two Mi Sheberakhs

One of the central Jewish prayers recited on behalf of those who are ill or recovering from illness or accidents is known as the *Mi Sheberakh* (the name is taken from the prayer's first two words.) It asks for both physical cure and spiritual healing, seeking blessing, compassion, restoration and strength, within the community of others facing illness as well as all Jews, all human beings. (See page 11 for information on ordering pocket-sized *Mi Sheberakh* cards.)

The Jewish tradition, of course, takes a systemic approach to healing—it is mindful of everyone who feels the impact of illness, pain, and loss, including but not limited to the individuals who are themselves suffering. Indeed, it understands that all those near and dear to the patient face their own set of challenges, at least on a spiritual level. It is important, then, that Jewish healing be multi-directional, and that our prayers not only be about those who are ill, but by them—so that they may express their love for and appreciation of those who are caring for them, in imitation of, and partnership with, God's healing and love.

Towards this end, we present to you two additional *Mi Sheberakh* prayers—one for people who are ill to say for their health care professionals and one to offer for family and friends (soon to be available on pocket-sized cards with Hebrew text). These two versions are suggestive—you may want to add to them or compose your own personal prayer, in your own words. But don't hesitate to "take words with you, and respond to God..."

(HOSEA 14:3)

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW
Rabbinic Director

Mi Sheberakh for Family Members or Close Friends
(to be recited by patients)



May the One who blessed our Matriarchs and Patriarchs
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
bless and strengthen

my (family member, good friend, etc.)

May s/he be instilled with patience and fortitude,
sensitivity and understanding,
with courage and hope.

May others reach out to her/him
with tenderness and lovingkindness
and may s/he receive
the blessings offered
by our community and tradition.

Help her/him to know
how much I appreciate her/his love and devotion.

Give her/him a long, full, peaceful, and happy life
marked by a complete healing,
a healing of spirit, and a healing of body,
now and always,
and let us say,
Amen.

Mi Sheberakh for Health Care Professionals
(to be recited by patients)



May the One who blessed our Matriarchs and Patriarchs
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
bless and strengthen

(my doctor/nurse/etc.)

and all who seek to heal those who are suffering.

Imbue her/him with courage, confidence,
understanding, and compassion
so s/he may join You
in the work of healing.

May s/he not surrender to despair,
uncertainty, or fatigue,
but engage in Your work
with wholeheartedness and devotion.

Help her/him to accompany me
throughout my journey—
to speak with me,
to listen to me,
to be with me
so that together we may strive
for a complete healing,
a healing of body and a healing of spirit,
soon, speedily, without delay,
and let us say,
Amen.

BOOKS WE RECOMMEND

To Walk in God's Ways: Jewish Pastoral Perspectives on Illness and Bereavement, by Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski. Jason Aronson, Inc. Northvale, NJ.

With a gentle hand, and a keen eye to the spiritual needs of contemporary Jews, Rabbi Ozarowski guides us through classic Jewish wisdom on responses to illness and death. Through language that is accessible to the novice among us as well as inspiring and encouraging to the more seasoned, Rabbi Ozarowski opens up the traditional practice of *bikkur holim*. He explores the questions of who should visit, how a visit should be done, what kinds of things one might say. While emphasizing the fact that the mitzvah of *bikkur holim* is appropriate for every Jew, Rabbi Ozarowski devotes an entire chapter to unpacking the particular significance that the visit from the rabbi has on the patient and their family. Every chapter offers traditional sources that frame, guide and enrich the discussions.

The second half of the book is a helpful overview and discussion of the significance of the rituals surrounding death and mourning, and the unique role a rabbi can play here.

Finding Psalms

by Debbie Perlman

Last November, Rabbi Peter Knobel introduced the Center to the wonderful poetic/liturgical work of Debbie Perlman. We asked Debbie if she would permit us to share some of her work with you. What follows is a brief introduction in her own voice, plus a sampling of her psalms.

I did not set out to write psalms. The first was written for a dear friend. About to undergo surgery, she was frightened by the loss of control. The second was my answer to a friend from years before, phoning, weeping her anguish of breast cancer recurrence, her desperate prognosis. After these first few psalms, the words began to be poured into me. They woke me at night and sang in my dreams, sustaining me through a long dark winter and dismal never-did-arrive Chicago spring. I discovered that in a strange and unshakable way, I had been called to write these words. The ancient rhythms that stirred King David were reverberating in me. Somehow, I belonged.

Probably the most remarkable thing that has happened has been what my psalms have done for me. I have found the glass more often half full, often brimming, as I meet and speak with people who pray with my words and are moved by them. When I send a psalm out over e-mail, I am released from the disability that keeps me hooked to oxygen, walking slowly. My psalms remind me again and again of my survival, my tenacity, the blessings of good husband and family and friends. When I write, I let go of the anger and the fright, the anxiety for my daughter at a far away university, growing up, moving on. When I hear my words read in communal worship, I am as transfixed as the first time I saw them on my computer screen. These words strengthen my faith in my ability to weave a lasting thread in the pattern of holiness, bound tightly to God's design.

Psalms For a New Day: Tehillim shel Yom Chadash (Rad Publishers, ISBN: 0-9644570-3-2: \$10.00) is a collection of Debbie Perlman's first 100 psalms. It is available from the publisher, 2849 Birchwood, Wilmette, Illinois 60091. (\$2.00 shipping and handling; Illinois residents add 7.75% sales tax) or can be ordered by your book seller from Independent Publishers Group, 1-800-888-4741.

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NINE

for final healing (z"l: C.R.S.)

Like a pure crystalline tone,
Sounding in the deepest fear of night,
So will You call to me
To leave this land of my distress.

O let me turn to You;
Let me loose the steel bands of my
dread
And listen for the ringing
Of Your summons.

How can I leave with so much
undone?
How can I move away from this place,
And follow, fearless, into the strength
Of Your concern for me?

I am only Your creation,
Striving to create my own
remembrance,
To leave this work with knowledge
Of my passage through it.
So soon You call me to Your harmonies:
To close my manuscript,
To sing unaccompanied
These notes of my life, the final hymns.

Still my terror with clear notes,
Righteous One,
Quiet me with a silken melody;
That in accepting Your judgement,
I might turn to sing with You.

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ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-ONE

To survive the high noon of diagnosis,
We found optimistic eyeshades,
Holy One,
Blinders of hope for years to come,
Setting our love fast with Your love.

To survive illness' overcast glare,
We pulled out woven hats, Holy One,
Our community of treatments
and duties,
A dailiness of life as it was.

To survive the wornaway of days,
the nights,
We wrapped ourselves in hooded
robes,
Waking in dark hours, Holy One,
Praying near dawn for healing,
dreamless sleep.

To survive these ending days,
You draw taut the sheet of courage,
Holy One,
Binding us up in spent
anger transformed,
In enduring love.

To survive alone,
You draw me to You, Holy One,
Remembering joys of unshaded
brightness,
Hatless, uncovered, unscathed.

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ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-SIX (FOR A.CH.S.)

Ease me, Holy One.
Soften these rigid arms
That held pain away,
Unwilling it, refusing.

Ease me away from straight arm lifting
These weights of illness and prognosis,
A contest of what might have been
And what is.

Holy One, ease my fright, mind drifting
Toward tomorrow and tomorrow.
Ease me to single days, focused, kind;
Ease me to quiet nights, dreamless,
calm.

Ease me, Holy One, with memories;
So will I be embraced.
Ease me to Your arms from loving arms:
From hugs to Hug.

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by Deborah M. Perlman*

Fast to Feast:



Adam's Hanukkah in the Garden of Eden— A Jewish Healing Midrash from the Talmud

When Adam saw the day
getting gradually shorter, he said:
“Woe is me, perhaps because
I have sinned, the world
around me is being darkened
and returning to a state of
chaos and confusion;
this then is the death to which I
have been sentenced from Heaven!”
So he began an eight-day fast.
But as he observed the winter
equinox and noted the days getting
increasingly longer, he said:
“This is the world's course,”
and he set forth to keep an
eight-day festivity.

(TALMUD, AVODAH ZARAH 8A)

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