

## LAHMA ANYA: BREAD OF AFFLICTION

*Seven Healing Lessons of the Matzah*

Maggid, the central "Recounting" section of the Passover seder ritual, begins with the following declaration, proclaimed as the matzah is raised for all to see:

*Ha Lahma Anya/This is the bread of affliction  
that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt:  
All who are hungry — come and eat!  
All who are in need — come join in our Passover!  
This year we are here; next year in the land of Israel!  
This year enslaved, next year free!*

Around this sheet are several "healing lessons" the matzah may offer.

**LAHMA ANYA —  
BREAD OF AFFLICTION**

This simple, direct series of statements expresses how our historical experience of suffering must motivate us to call out to those in need, here and now, today. In this opening paragraph, we can sense at least two distinct tasks and interrelated challenges: to extend ourselves to others in (spiritual as well as physical) need and, in an ongoing way, to be honest about our own states of exile and subjugation. Implicit in this declaration is empathy that leads to action, inner sensitivity that translates into active support for others. A key to healing is this balance of reaching in and reaching out, healing ourselves by helping others...and, of course, letting others reach out to us.



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**BREAD OF SLAVERY,  
BREAD OF FREEDOM**

As a paradoxical symbol of both oppression and liberation, the matzah embodies the creative tension of the seder itself, a complex interweaving of celebrating freedom while identifying with bondage. Those bearing the burdens of suffering, pain, and disruption can easily relate to this ambiguity — treatments can

be both healing and worse than the disease, care can be helpful and harmful, medical struggles can be both stifling and life-affirming, disease may bring secondary gains alongside weakness and diminishment, and emergence can feel like a curse and a blessing. Just as one must not deny the horror and the loss, one must also not neglect the moments of joy, love, peace, and fulfillment.

**NAHMA ILA'AH — CELESTIAL BREAD**

The Zohar (the Book of Splendor, 13th century "bible" of the Kabbalah) calls matzah *Nahma Ila'ah* — "celestial bread." Leaven represents, metaphorically, boastfulness, untamed pride, and decay — matzah, conversely, represents the pure of heart, "tis a gift to be simple," back-to-basics, less is more. Departing Egypt meant leaving behind the fleshpots of its civilization, a false dependence on and subservience to material riches, and aiming for a life of spiritual quest and community. It would be unwise and unfair to simplistically parallel the Exodus from Egypt with the journey of illness (the latter is anything but freedom), but in the wilderness-wandering of suffering, many have found themselves freed from prior spiritual constraints into a new openness and a deeper relationship to self, others, nature, and God.

**THREE MATZOT**

Various interpretations have been offered for the use of three matzot in the seder ritual: they have been seen as representing the Jewish subgroupings of Cohen, Levi, and Israel; the three sets of Patriarchs and Matriarchs

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## The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

The *Outstretched Arm* is published by  
The National Center for Jewish Healing

VOLUME V • ISSUE 4 • SPRING 1997

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*Address correspondence to:*  
The National Center for Jewish Healing  
9 East 69th Street  
New York, New York 10021  
Phone 212-772-6601 Fax 212-772-6908

*The National Center for Jewish Healing  
is the beneficiary of a grant from  
The Nathan Cummings Foundation*

**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.

*All contributions are tax-deductible.*

WHAT CAN I POSSIBLY "TOAST"?



WHAT FOUR ELEMENTS IN MY TROUBLED LIFE  
BRING ME MOMENTS OF JOY?



Dr. Tamara M. Green

DURING THE DAY, DURING THE WEEK,  
WHERE CAN I FIND A SENSE OF  
TRANSCENDENCE AND REDEMPTION?



HOW CAN MY CUP BE IN ANY WAY "FULL"?



What are your Four Cups of Wine?  
What four blessings can you speak,  
even now?

# YIZKOR *and the* GUESTS AT MY SEDER

BY DR. TAMARA M. GREEN, PH.D., *founding board member of the NCJH and  
Chair of the Classics Department at Hunter University.*

ALTHOUGH MOST JEWS ASSOCIATE THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WITH YOM KIPPUR, THE YIZKOR PRAYER IS RECITED AT THE THREE MAJOR FESTIVALS—SUKKOT, SHAVUOT, AND PESACH—AS WELL. UNDERSTANDING WHY WE RECITE THIS PRAYER ON THE MOST SOLEMN OF DAYS IS EASY, BUT ONLY LAST YEAR AT PESACH DID I REALLY SENSE WHY WE DO IT ON THE OTHER HOLIDAYS AS WELL. THIS IS WHAT I REMEMBER...

I have had a particularly bad fall and winter; a month in the hospital with a life-threatening infection has left me weak and filled with an exhaustion that constantly threatens to drown me. The fragility of my spirit seems to be only a painful reminder of the fragility of life. And yet, for reasons that are not very clear, I know that I need to make the seder and invite our collective families. After much cleaning, cooking, and washing of dishes, I manage to carry it off, but I come to shul on the first day of *Pesach* exhausted, barely able to participate in the service. What had I been trying to prove, and to whom, and why?

I shlep through the rest of the week, but now, finally, it is the seventh day of *Pesach*, and I am back in shul again. My attention wanders; but then, as we get ready to recite the *Yizkor* service, recollections of my seder suddenly float into my head. We are all sitting around the table, and this is what I see: my nephew beaming at his first serious girlfriend as he reads from the Haggadah in flawless Hebrew, my oldest niece holding hands with her new husband, my brother-in-law who had been widowed a couple of years ago with his girlfriend and her mother. I am taking great pleasure in the fact that both our mothers are here with us, and feel delight that my youngest niece

has learned enough Hebrew to recite the four questions.

But as in my daydream I look around the room, I realize I had not noticed the presence of others who, unseen like Elijah, had joined us at the seder table: my father, who had died when I was very young, who never saw his youngest daughter, my sister, sitting at the seder table, and who never had the pleasure of hearing his grandchildren recite the four questions; my bubba and zeida, who had found nothing more wonderful than to have their family gathered

*We are the product of countless generations of the Children of Israel, and every time we recite the kaddish, we recall all those who came before us.*

around the seder table, even as my zeida denounced religion as nothing more than the superstition of the masses; my oldest brother, who had died when still a child and whose kiddush cup was on the table, waiting for Elijah; Marty's father, whose shul had been the center of his life in the years before he died. They, too, were all guests at my seder.

It is often said that the strength of the Jewish community comes from the fact that not only is it a horizontal one—that is, the Jewish world in which we live right now—but that it is vertical as well, stretching backward and forward in time. We are the product of nearly

4,000 years of tradition. We are the product of countless generations of the Children of Israel, and every time we recite the *kaddish*, we recall all those who came before us.

And that, I realized, is the meaning of the *yizkor* service. We remember those whom we have loved who are no longer living. We are called upon not only to remember them with prayer and with a *yahrzeit* candle, but also to think about their lives: what their lives meant to us when they were alive, and what they mean to us now. *Yizkor*, then, is a way of

keeping them alive within us. It is a way of making sure that they live with us in the sukkah, that they witness the miracle at Sinai with us at *Shavuot*, and that they sit with us each year at the seder table. I know that in one way or another, no matter what happens, I will always be there, too.

And as I recite the *yizkor* prayers, I remember the *shehecheyanu* that is recited at the beginning of the seder, but I change the words a little: "*Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling all of us to celebrate this day.*"

*A reminder of the importance of healing (caring for) the healer (myself).*

*I am "in gratitude" that there exists an opportunity for me to learn of the many gifts that Jewish healing can give the world: thank you.*

*This program helped me integrate my love for Judaism, my desire to do service work in the community, my professional and my personal life in a mutually caring and supportive atmosphere.*

*This program enabled me to make a spiritual connection that allowed for some personal healing: it offered a rich menu of tools that I shall bring back to my congregation so that we can begin the process of becoming a healing center.*

*That I am not alone, there are others who share similar views, aspirations, etc. Thank you for making this experience possible.*

# JEWISH HEALING

## TRAINING CONFERENCES DEEPEN INSIGHTS, ENRICH SKILLS, AND RENEW SPIRITS

by Rabbi Amy Eilberg

A group of rabbis, mental health and health care professionals, lay leaders and bikkur holim volunteers sit around a large circle. Each person is paired with a partner, silently looking into the other's eyes. Each person is first asked to imagine his/her partner as a sick person, with something that needs to be adjusted, changed, fixed. Then each person is asked to see the other as one of an infinite number of faces of God in the world, imagining their partner's journey through life, from childhood to the present to old age, a journey with many twists and turns, sorrows and joys and wonders. After the exercise, one seasoned rabbi responds with gratitude, "It felt so good to be relieved of the sense that it was my job to fix the other person's pain!"

A skillful psychotherapist with 27 years of experience working with individuals and families speaks to the group of her recent experiences doing bikkur holim visits. She speaks of a sense of the holiness of the work, of the times she finds herself spontaneously sharing words of prayer during her visits. As she speaks, she is moved to tears, freely expressing the ways in which she feels the mitzvah work is transforming her life.

A rabbi tells the story of a man who, facing terminal illness, decided to put mezuzot on every doorway of his house. The rabbi, at first concerned not to encourage the use of Jewish ritual as magic, nonetheless decided to lend his support to the use of mezuzot as a meaningful practice for this man. At a synagogue-based healing service, the rabbi made the gift of a mezuzah to the man, but first passed the mezuzah around the room, asking each participant in the service to whisper a word of prayer into the mezuzah. When the man left the service that evening and hung the mezuzah at home, it carried the prayerful wishes of everyone at the healing service.

A woman shares with the group that it was hard for her to play her assigned part in a role play exercise, which simulated a spiritual support group. The woman had been asked to play the role of a group member who was struggling with painful anger at God in connection with her illness. After the exercise, the woman reported that it was challenging for her to stay in role, because the other members of the group were so gentle, kind and loving that it was difficult to act angry with God.

These are a few scenes from the NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH HEALING's first round of regional training conferences in the art of Jewish healing, offered in Los Angeles and the Washington, D.C. area in early 1997. We were delighted to work with three of the new local Jewish Healing Centers that are emerging across the country: THE LOS ANGELES JEWISH HEALING CENTER, THE JEWISH HEALING CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY and THE JEWISH HEALING NETWORK OF WASHINGTON, DC. The conference series, which will

# EAST AND WEST:

continue in Florida and Toronto, and also include a special one-day workshop in New York City for health care professionals, offers the concepts, tools and programs of Jewish healing to people who do healing work - as health care professionals, mental health professionals, rabbis and cantors, lay leaders, or bikkur holim volunteers.

Each two-day conference begins with a full day program entitled, "What is Jewish Healing?" This overview day includes talks on the basic concepts and resources of Jewish healing and on sample programs for embodying these concepts in the synagogue or community, then a multi-disciplinary panel featuring professionals talking about how they make use of Jewish healing concepts and images in their everyday healing work. With opportunities for like-minded professionals to talk and network over lunch, the day continues with a series of in-depth afternoon workshops on topics in Jewish healing, and the day closes with a brief healing service.

The second day of the conference offers participants an opportunity to deepen their familiarity with a specialty area of programming in the field of Jewish healing. In Los Angeles, participants could choose between a full-day workshop on "Bikkur Holim, Creating a Caring Community," co-led by Anne Brener, LCSW, and Rabbi Amy Eilberg and "Sustaining our Spirits: Creating Spiritual Support Groups," led by Dr. Susan Shavin and Rabbi Nancy Flam. In Washington, D.C., the offerings were "Sustaining our Spirits: Creating Spiritual Support Groups," led by Dr. Carol Hausman and Rabbi Nancy Flam, and "Kol Haneshama: Services and Prayers for Healing," led by Rabbis Phil Pohl and Amy Eilberg. Each specialty day included a presentation of the theoretical rationale for the program being studied, both Jewishly and in terms of its healing potential, demonstrations of parts of the program (*bikkur holim* volunteer training, a sample session of a spiritual support group, and a model healing service), and detailed guidance on how to create and maintain the program.

Both conferences drew together large groups of professionals and community leaders, some new to the Jewish healing community, others having practiced in the field for many years. Participants were people of great devotion, creativity and sophistication, and most responded with great enthusiasm that it was an extraordinary opportunity to come together in dialogue, and to deepen their knowledge and insights in the practice of Jewish healing.

At the close of these conferences, participants returned home to places as far as Amherst, Nashville, Phoenix, Houston and Seattle, and as close as their home synagogues and agencies in the host communities. One group of lay leaders from four synagogues left the conference having agreed to form a consortium to jointly offer spiritual support groups to their community. People left the conferences filled with new insight and information, a powerful sense of connection to others engaged in Jewish healing work, and renewed energy and inspiration. Before leaving, we offered one another blessings: we wished one another strength and energy, joy in our own lives, insight into our own healing gifts, and the reward that comes to those who extend themselves in sacred acts of lovingkindness. May the circle of blessing continue to expand.

*To be a healer I must be aware of my own wounds and deal with them first. Then I can bring comfort and healing to others.*

*Profound, healing, spiritual and fulfilling.*

*I felt personally and professionally held, embraced, and blessed by the healing presence of our teachers, our tradition, and our G-d. Kol Hakavod!*

*A chance to hear of and talk about and learn about prayer and spiritual healing, with gentleness and fellowship.*

*The Jewish healing conference on both days was outstanding. It was exceedingly well organized, outstanding speakers, wonderful Judaic content, and done in a very sensitive and caring manner. The materials presented were practical and will be of great help to me professionally and personally. I would go back to another workshop at every possible opportunity. It is with deep appreciation that I write this.*

## How (Long) to Pray?

A certain disciple who led services in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer prolonged the prayers excessively.

"Master," said some of the other disciples,

"how long-winded is this one!"

Rabbi Eliezer replied,

"Is it more drawn out

than that of our teacher Moses,

of whom it is written (Deuteronomy 9:25),

'I threw myself down before

God for 40 days and 40 nights?'"

Another time, a certain disciple

who led services in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer cut his prayers short. "How brief is this one's prayer!"

said his disciples. He replied,

"Is it briefer than that of our

teacher Moses, who prayed

(for his sister Miriam's recovery, Exodus 12:13),

'Please, God, heal her now!'"?

(MEKHILTA, BESHALLAH)

## WHY ME?

*What meaning is*

*there in my suffering?*

*How can I get through this?*

*What will come after this?*



**What are your**

**"Four Questions"?**

**As you approach the**

**Passover celebration,**

**the Exodus commemoration,**

**what do you need answered?**

# FOR OURSELVES AND OUR PATIENTS:

## Innovative Support Group for Jewish Health-Care Professionals


*by Deborah Brandt, M.S., P.T., C.M.A.,  
a Manhattan-based Physical Therapist, and the  
contact person for the Jewish Spiritual Support Group  
described in the following article.*

**T**he definition of what it means to be terminally ill is changing as research into aging, AIDS, cancer, and genetic disease progresses. Medical science may be helping terminally ill people to live longer lives, but it may be a life encompassed by prolonged disability, increasing weakness and protracted pain.

For everyone involved in health care, patients and practitioners alike, this is a stressful time. HMOs are gaining ever-increasing power over what medical providers can and cannot do, and medical institutions may be forced to make changes that are hard to anticipate and difficult to prepare.

In this context, one that strains the creativity and energy of those who care about and for ill people, Simkha Weintraub, rabbinic director of the NCJH, and Harriet Feiner, CSW, of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services organized a support group for Jewish health-care professionals who work with terminally ill and dying patients. Two physical therapists, two occupational therapists, and three social workers formed our group which met for six Tuesday evenings.

Our sessions began and ended with a *niggun*, a wordless melody, which we used to help us focus. Otherwise the group was free form, with no special agenda. Members were encouraged to bring in problems from work, not so that they might be solved, but so that we could learn from



**The kind of reflection our leaders encouraged allowed us both individually and as a group to recognize familiar paths and discover new ways by which our Jewish faith might be a source of strength for ourselves and our patients.**

Serge J.-F. Levy

each other. In addition, the group leaders brought various Jewish texts for us to study and discuss; and we offered our own interpretations to selections from, among others, I. L. Peretz, Maimonides, *Modern Medicine and Jewish Ethics* by Fred Rosner, M.D., and *Disease as a Way of Life* by Eric Cassell.

The group provided more than a study session; it was an opportunity to ask questions based on our own needs and curiosity. We were a group of Jews searching to become more attuned to, and educated in, Jewish teachings, and exploring ways to use those resources in our everyday lives. The kind of reflection our leaders encouraged allowed us both individually and as a group to recognize familiar paths and discover new ways by which our Jewish faith might be a source of strength for ourselves and our patients. For some members of the group, being part of an experience that evolved from the needs of the group was an unfamiliar format that brought new challenges and rewards.

After the scheduled six sessions, we decided to continue meeting on our own on a monthly basis, with support from

our leaders. We have now met twice. In our first meeting, we discussed the ways in which we had been spiritually injured in our work environments, and we shared the ways in which we had dealt with and recovered from those injuries. At our second session, we spoke about how we had handled painful feelings that had been evoked by specific patients: feelings of loss upon discharge of a patient with whom the therapist had a particularly close relationship; feelings of guilt for not being able to solve all of a patient's problems; feelings of responsibility for the patient's future. We will be looking for Jewish teachings to help us handle these issues, both in the workplace and within ourselves.

No one knows how our group will evolve. We each come with our own needs and wishes. The NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH HEALING will continue to provide spiritual support and professional expertise. We look forward to a continually enriching experience in which we grow together as health-care workers, as individuals, and as Jews.

in Genesis; the unfree, the free who don't care and the free who care (see commentary by Ed Greenstein in *The Jewish Holidays* by Michael Strassfeld, page 18.) Certainly another helpful approach is to identify one with the ancient liberation from Egypt, another with the ultimate messianic redemption, and the third with our current state of being *beinonim*, "in-between." And isn't that where we all are — hanging in the balance, alive but not immortal, sandwiched between a fragile, limited, animal self and our eternal Divine image.

#### CONSUMING THE MATZAH FIRST

The seder ritual seems to have it backwards: One would think that we should first eat the *marror*, the bitter herbs, just as the bitter slavery preceded the liberation, when the matzah was created. But in truth, our chronology is not so simple — we need to have tasted freedom to deeply understand oppression. As flat and tasteless as it may seem to our jaded palates, freedom/matzah ought to be savored first — maybe its lingering aftertaste can help see us through suffering and affliction. This matzah-then-marror order also points to the ongoing need to free ourselves, again and again, or more and more, and urges us to confront every form of slavery, at each stage of life. Finally, the marror "sandwich" compels us to integrate its bitterness with the sweetness of the *haroset* (ironic, in itself, since, one would think, these "bricks of slave labor" ought not be sweet!) — and to frame it between two pieces matzah, our "freedom bread."

#### THE "PERILOUS PROXIMITY" OF HAMETZ AND MATZAH

It has often been pointed out that the three Hebrew letters comprising the words *hametz* ("leaven" itself, but also all forbidden foods on Passover) and *matzah* are virtually identical — indeed, to make them exactly alike takes but a smudge of the pen. How close health and illness, well-being and suffering, can be! A tweak of fate can turn us from the one reality to the other. Perhaps this ought also remind us of the shared vulnerability of those labeled "ill" and those deemed "well" and help us reconstruct a world where unhelpful barriers break down, and Jews/ people enable each other to bear the burdens of mortality with a deepened sense of community and relationship.

#### LEHEM ONIM: BREAD OF RESPONSE

The seder, of course, ought to revolve around an active exchange and discussion, a multi-level question-and-answer format meant to draw people's voices and associations out. A tempting pun on the word *anya*, affliction, reads it as stemming from the related Hebrew cognate, *onim*, answerers. This bread, of both slavery and freedom, is "food for talk." There may, indeed, be no "answers," but a live, real, honest, open-ended dialogue about suffering and redemption can yield a healing responsiveness, both internally and from others.

*A happy, meaningful, liberating Passover to all.*

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, CSW  
*Rabbinic Director, NCJH*



*I must be  
the Wise one —  
seeking meaning from  
all this pain and  
suffering...*

*I must be  
the Wicked one —  
feeling disdainfully  
unrelated to all  
this to-do...*

*I must be  
the Simple one —  
asking 'What is this?' ...*

*I must be  
the One Who Knows  
Not What/How to Ask —  
reach out, then, to me.*

**How are you like  
any of the  
"Four Children"?  
Like all of them?**



# Calendar at a Glance

April 13



**Judaism and Healing for Health Care Professionals**  
co-sponsored by New York JBFCS and  
the Wiener Educational Center of NY UJA-Federation

NEW YORK

May 12\*



**Mei'ayin Yavo Ezri:**  
**An Exploration of the Liturgy of Healing**  
Part I: Familiar Prayers of Healing  
co-sponsored with Hebrew Union College-Jewish  
Institute of Religion, The Jewish Theological Seminary,  
and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

NEW YORK

June 1

**A Day of Learning on Jewish Healing**  
at Drisha Institute for Jewish Education  
co-sponsored by NCJH and CLAL

NEW YORK

June 22



**Death as a Teacher**  
CCAR Pre-Conference Kallah  
open to CCAR members

MIAMI

September 8  
and  
September 9



**What is Jewish Healing?**  
and  
**Sustaining our Spirits:**  
**Creating Jewish Support Groups**  
or  
**Bikkur Holim:**  
**Creating a Caring Community**

TORONTO

September 14



**Healing Community Network:**  
**A Conference for Healing Centers across North America**

NEW YORK

\*please note date change from training brochure

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please call (212) 332-9787, ext. 4.

*Which program  
is right for me?*



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If you are a **COMMUNAL PROFESSIONAL OR LAY LEADER AND  
THOSE WORKING FOR OR INTERESTED IN BEGINNING A  
HEALING CENTER**



If you are a **HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL**



If you are a **RABBINIC OR CANTORIAL STUDENT**

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How can I make  
this night different  
than other nights,  
experiencing measures  
of freedom alongside  
the imprisonment  
of suffering?



How is this season  
of my life unique?



What gives me pause?



What narratives might  
I read and recount to  
lend meaning to this  
juncture in time?



Perhaps the overarching  
question of the Seder is:  
Why is this night different  
from all other nights?  
Where can you take this  
question to draw meaning  
from this Passover?

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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.

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*“Raba said, ‘...One should not depend on a miracle...’* (BABYLONIAN TALMUD, PESAHIM 64B)

Sure, but how can someone say that in *Pesahim*, in discussing Passover?!

Isn't the Exodus story – from the Burning Bush through the 10 Plagues through the Crossing of the Sea through the Revelation at Sinai – the greatest example of miracles?!

Yes, but.

Yes, but we should still not depend on them...

Yes, but one person alone should not depend on them – they can only happen in a caring, sacred community, in relationship to God and humankind.

Yes, but our people were not (are not) really free until we liberate ourselves, which is the real miracle, the real Redemption.

## Make a miracle happen.

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