

## Counting Out the Omer

by DR. TAMARA GREEN, PH.D.,

Founding Board Member of the NCJH and  
Chair of the Classics Department at Hunter College

**K**ABBALISTIC TRADITION HOLDS THAT EACH OF THE 49 DAYS BETWEEN THE BEGINNING OF PESACH AND SHAVUOT, THE PERIOD OF THE COUNTING OF THE *OMER*, PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE OURSELVES FOR THE MOMENT WHEN WE WILL STAND ONCE AGAIN AT SINAI TO RECEIVE THE REVELATION OF TORAH. DURING THIS PERIOD, EACH OF US IS GIVEN A CHANCE TO RESTORE OUR SOUL TO WHOLENESS, AND TO REESTABLISH OUR CONNECTION WITH ADONAI, THROUGH THE TURNING OF OUR SPIRITUAL ATTENTION TO THE SEVEN *SEFIROT*, THE DIVINE ASPECTS OF ADONAI PRESENT IN THE WORLD AND IN OURSELVES.

The seven *sefirot*, which are said to correspond to the seven weeks of the *Omer* are:

**chesed:** lovingkindness

**gevurah:** strength

**tiferet:** splendor

**netzah:** triumph

**hod:** beauty

**yesod:** foundation

**malkhut:** power

Since each of the seven *sefirot* contains all the others within itself, there are 49 expressions of the link between our souls and the divine; and each day of the *Omer* is to be devoted to the contemplation of one of them. It is a powerful metaphor for those of us who are ill, for it can give direction to our spiritual wandering through the desert as we make our way to Sinai; and each day of the counting can provide the opportunity to rediscover our own paths of healing and completeness. This is how I will begin my journey through the 49 days.

**"Today is the first day of the Omer."**

*Chesed* within *chesed*: lovingkindness within lovingkindness. Sometimes, the pain obscures the amount of lovingkindness that is present in my life; yet, today I am aware not only of the gifts of love that I have received, but I am grateful that I still have the capacity to give love to others.

**"Today is the second day of the Omer."**

*Gevurah* within *chesed*: strength within lovingkindness. *Gevurah* is both strength and anger. The strength to keep going is sometimes hard to find, and the anger too often rises up unbidden, from the center of my soul. Is it possible to locate Adonai's lovingkindness in the midst of pain? Can I turn the anger back into strength?

Perhaps I can gain strength for myself by performing acts of lovingkindness.

**"Today is the third day of the Omer."**

*Tiferet* within *chesed*: splendor, honor, glory, within lovingkindness. At first, it seems that *tiferet* can have no meaning to me, for I know that there is nothing glorious about being sick, and I have learned that pain and suffering have not ennobled me. But perhaps splendor and honor can strengthen lovingkindness, especially mine. Or perhaps *chesed* can temper *tiferet*, and create a balance of spirit.

**"Today is the fourth day of the Omer."**

*Netzah* within *chesed*: triumph within lovingkindness. Sometimes, when asked how I am, I can only answer, "I'm here." But that's victory, isn't it?

**"Today is the fifth day of the Omer."**

*Hod* within *chesed*: foundation within lovingkindness. Knowing that I can still uncover the moments of beauty in my life, even if they are sometimes hard to recognize, is a way of keeping the pain at bay, and is also a source of *gevurah*.

**"Today is the sixth day of the Omer."**

*Yesod* within *chesed*: foundation within lovingkindness. *Yesod* was identified by the kabbalists with our physical natures, the foundation of our being. Can I find a way to still take pleasure in my body, despite the fact that I have so often felt that it has betrayed me? Can I show lovingkindness to my physical self by not pushing so hard against the constraints of illness?

**"Today is the seventh day of the Omer."**

*Malkhut* within *chesed*: power within lovingkindness. May my faith in Adonai provide the power for a spiritual healing of my soul.

## In This Issue

### The Omer

COUNTING THE DAYS,  
MAKING THE DAYS COUNT

**I**n the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, on the second day of Passover, a measure of grain from the first harvest was offered. Since biblical times (see *Leviticus 23: 15-21*) Jews ritually counted seven weeks from that day until the festival of *Shavuot*, marking a period called the *Omer* (an ancient dry measure, and the Hebrew word for "sheaf").

The Torah does not spell out the reason for the *Omer* counting, but its meaning certainly operates on the same two levels as the two holidays it joins—

- agricultural:** hoping for a successful harvest and thanking God for nature and its bounty; and

- historical:** moving from the Exodus/Liberation of Passover to the Covenant/Revelation of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, which was associated with *Shavuot*.

This issue of *The Outstretched Arm* draws on the themes of the *Omer* for Jewish healing perspectives and insights. Since the number 7 is the constant of the period, we offer seven different types of *Omer* "nuggets" for reflection and discussion.

We offer as well, two personal stories which reflect this powerful theme and remind us of the importance of "counting the days and making the days count". And with thoughts of Pesach still in our minds, we explore some thoughtful questions about the "*kashrut*" of the Jewish healing movement.



## The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 1 • SPRING 1998

*The Outstretched Arm* is published  
by the Jewish Board of  
Family and Children's Services  
Editor: S. Kessler

120 West 57th Street  
New York, New York 10019

## A New Address, A New Home

### *Haven't heard from us for a while?*

The National Center has been going through some wonderful changes. Over the last few months we have moved our office, joining the New York Jewish Healing Center in becoming a program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS). Our work will be further strengthened by an affiliation as well with AJFCA, the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies. With their support, we believe that we will become an ever more effective vehicle for spiritual healing in the Jewish community. We thank all of you for your continued support and patience during this time of transition.

### *Please make a note of our new address and phone/fax numbers:*

National Center for Jewish Healing  
c/o JBFCS  
120 West 57th Street  
New York, New York 10019  
Phone: (212)632-4705  
Fax: (212)956-1652

*We ask that all future contribution checks  
be made out to JBFCS, and earmarked for  
our Jewish Healing Program.*

*The Jewish Family Service of Colorado Para-Chaplaincy Program creates a Jewish connection for isolated members of Denver's Jewish community in long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, hospices, hospitals and private homes. Para-Chaplains offer comfort and celebrate Judaism through conversation, prayer, and music. The program is made possible through the generosity of Feldman Mortuary and the Rose Community Foundation, and is a cooperative venture of Jewish Family Service of Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Rabbinical Council, and the Synagogue Council of Greater Denver. The program is administered by JFS Volunteer Coordinator Sandie Eichberg, who received this letter from one of the para-chaplains.*

Dear Sandie,

I just want to let you know how much I have enjoyed my experience as a para-chaplain this past year. It is such a pleasure to visit with folks who so much enjoy and look forward to our time together.

Although I have laughed with, and provided some comfort to all my clients, and gotten into "heated" discussions and exchanges of ideas with some of them, without a doubt my most consistently pleasureable experiences have been with my first client, a 93 year old woman. She never ceases to amaze me with her quick wit and playful nature. When I began seeing her, she did not remember me from one visit to the next. Her long-term memory, however, has always been quite good. We often talk at length about her father's coming to America and making a good life for his family in Massachusetts despite his being Jewish and speaking virtually no English.

At first she wanted me to keep it a secret that she was Jewish because she believed many of the members of the staff at the nursing home were "antis". She has finally overcome that fear and has even allowed me to light Chanukkah candles in full public view. Moreover, she now instantly recognizes me when I come to see her and welcomes me warmly. She introduces me to other residents and staff as that "nice young man" who comes to visit me (I'm 50!). She spent many years as a teacher in the NYC school system. Sometimes I bring along one or two of my young children and she delights in asking them questions about their school.

My saddest experience was when my second client suddenly passed away very soon after I had last visited him. He had been a physically active, successful accountant before suffering a stroke that left him with little use of his legs. We talked often about his life prior to his stroke and his desire to reincorporate some aspects of being a Jew into his life. I felt an enormous sense of loss when he died. My wife and I decided to give our fourth son (born three months after my client's death) the same first name.

I have been having joint visits with my two most recent clients. One was an anesthesiologist before suffering brain damage as the result of a brutal attack by some teenagers. He tends to be somewhat belligerent (constantly challenges whatever I say, especially if it concerns religion) but definitely enjoys our visits. Never once has he failed to thank me for stopping in. The other client, who once cared for his sister, acts annoyed when he carries on and on, yet still insists I call him "doctor" since he has earned the recognition. My family brought both these clients to our synagogue for the High Holy Days. I was very pleased that the doctor was well behaved (he seemed to very much enjoy the experience) and that the other client was thrilled to be out of the nursing home for the first time in many months.

Each time I visit one of my clients I come away feeling as though I have done something really worthwhile. I recommend para-chaplaincy to those interested in sharing some of their time to enrich the lives of others and themselves.

Sincerely,  
Steve Kregstein

*The author of this letter graduated from Harvard Law School in 1972. He now serves as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of ClearVision Laser Centers, Inc., one of the nation's leading providers of excimer laser services for the correction of nearsightedness and astigmatism.*





# "Teach Us To Number Our Days"

The number Seven, which has many associations in the Bible and Rabbinic tradition, is primarily associated with the Creation of the world. It is a number of both generativity and of completion—the week being a basic unit of our lives, culminating in the “perfect rest” of Shabbat. Multiples of Seven, similarly, are related to life, as the Psalmist says: “The span of our life is seventy years.” We may experience in the Omer’s 7x7 a symbolic movement through life, from our launching at birth to our ultimate arrival at death. Counting our days is a lot like counting our blessings; to get from our Start to our Finish, we ought to try to make each day “count,” and to appreciate moments along the way.

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

## THE STORY OF LAG BA'OMER: ON PLAGUES AND SPIRITUAL OPPRESSION



The 33rd day of the Omer, known as *Lag Ba'Omer*, is a holiday whose origins are complex, even murky. Among the central stories that are connected with this day are those about Rabbi Akiva, the great second-century Jewish scholar and communal leader. Although the Romans had prohibited Jewish practice and Torah study, Rabbi Akiva and his many students persisted, at great risk, to carry the torch of our tradition.

Unfortunately, according to our tradition, a terrible plague of some sort hit the community, and as many as 24,000 students perished. Because of this tremendous loss, Jews to this day observe certain mourning customs during the Omer, interrupting grief on the day that the dying apparently ceased—the 33rd day of the Omer.

These stories are interwoven with stories about Bar Kokhba, the leader of the Jewish revolt against Roman oppression. Rabbi Akiva, who strongly supported Bar Kokhba, encouraged his students to join his efforts. Many of these yeshiva students dressed as hunters, with bows and arrows, so they could head to the forests without arousing suspicion.

Though Bar Kokhba was initially successful recapturing and holding Jerusalem for three years, ultimately the Roman Emperor Hadrian ruthlessly suppressed the rebellion, slaughtering many, many thousands of Jews, with countless others dying of sickness and fire. In the year 135 CE, Jews were prohibited from being within sight of their capital and spiritual center, Jerusalem.

The Talmud is noticeably “cool” towards Bar Kokhba and the strategy of open rebellion, as the Rabbis of the first centuries CE feared it would be futile and result not in freedom but tremendous bloodshed. Thereafter, during the Gaonic period of the 6th-11th centuries, the Rabbis, with some distance, were somewhat more objective and identified the end of the plague noted above with the date Bar Kokhba recaptured Jerusalem. (Indeed, the plague may actually not have been due to epidemic but a result of war.) It was thus that the 33rd day, *Lag Ba'Omer*, became a noted semi-holiday, if not a sacred day.

Interestingly, it was not until Jewish nationalism began to emerge just over a century ago that Bar Kokhba became a folk hero. In Europe and in America, Jewish schools mark *Lag Ba'Omer* by having field days—enjoying the outdoors, picnicking, even playing with bows and arrows.

For those dealing with suffering and loss, the confluence of physical suffering and loss with spiritual struggle and transcendence can be very meaningful. Perhaps the 33rd day of the Omer, *Lag Ba'Omer*, can be set aside for a study of Torah, outdoors, with others who can be supportive and understanding of your challenge and hope. There is great healing potential in relating Nature to Torah, Rebellion with Tradition, Freedom with Commitment.

-SYW

## ***Upcoming conferences of interest around the nation...***

### **Denver**

Jewish Healing: A Conference for Jewish Lay Leaders and Professionals  
*Sponsored by CLAL—the National Jewish Center of Learning and Leadership, and made possible through the generosity of the Nathan Cummings Foundation*

Tuesday, May 5  
7:00–10:15 PM  
Shalom Park  
14800 East Belleview Drive  
Aurora, Colorado

*For more information call the Jewish Family Service at (303)759-4890*

### **Philadelphia**

The Rabbi Devora Bartnoff Memorial Conference on Judaism and Healing

Tuesday, April 28  
8:30–4:30 PM  
Gratz College–Mandel Campus  
Old York Road (Route 611) and Melrose Ave.

*For more information call the Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia (215)985-1818*

### **New York**

The Rabbi as Caregiver  
*Sponsored by the HealthCare Chaplaincy Jewish Institute for Pastoral Care, The New York Board of Rabbis, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, and the New York Jewish Healing Center*

Three Sessions  
May 13, 27, and June 10  
1:00–4:30 PM

*For more information call Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum at (212)644-1111, x233.*





The Hebrew word for “counting”, *sefirah*, is closely related to the word for “recounting” a story, *l’saper*. The telling of our people’s story, which we intensified at Passover, continues through the *Omer*, for the story of the Exodus didn’t end at Passover—it was just beginning! The real story, if you will, is about how our Freedom plays out through life, when it ebbs and flows, where we take steps forward and where backward. Drawing on the *Omer*, one can initiate a daily assessment of how one is still in the process of emerging from the bondage of suffering and loss, and how to further one’s path to spiritual enlightenment and transcendence. Some “*Omer* inventory questions” might include:

- ✿ What insights can I gain from Torah narratives and/or laws to help me free myself?
- ✿ What can I do, Jewishly, to somehow use my suffering positively?
- ✿ What snags or obstacles hinder my spiritual growth, and which resources and challenges further it?
- ✿ How has my inner story shifted since yesterday? What might I do to move it along productively today?
- ✿ In my experience of illness, which aspect has not received due expression and exploration, and how/where might I do so constructively?
- ✿ What blessings can I locate that have hitherto not been appreciated enough?
- ✿ The Ba’al Shem Tov, the progenitor of Hassidism, said that our goal should be to become a Torah, ourselves. What Torah have I revealed? What inspiration do/can I bring?

-SYW

# Is Jewish Healing Kosher?

by RABBI JOSEPH S. OZAROWSKI, rabbinic consultant to the NCJH, and author of *To Walk in God’s Ways: Jewish Pastoral Perspectives on Illness and Bereavement* (Jason Aronson, 1995)

**T**he Jewish healing movement, if we can speak of such a thing, is a relatively new phenomenon in our community. It has received considerable publicity in both the Jewish and secular media, and has had a profound impact on the lives of many. Yet it has led me and perhaps other traditional Jews to ask some important questions. For instance, is the movement grounded in Jewish theology from a traditional point of view? Can people who are personally observant in practice, and/or people who identify as denominationally Orthodox, feel comfortable with and even actively support the Jewish healing movement? And specifically, are there conflicts with *Halakha* or *Halakhic* observance with regard to any of the particular programs or modalities being used and developed, such as services of healing?

I have explored some of these issues and would like to share some of my findings and thoughts. In 1979 I was privileged to hear an oral lecture given by Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, which was subsequently included in his book *Shiurim L’Zekher Avi Mori*, in the chapter entitled “*Liz’ok Ul’haria Al Kol Tzara Shetavo*”. In his lecture, the Rav suggested that there are two forms of prayer. The most well known form is *t’filah*, which he understood to mean the structured prayer of our liturgy and siddur. But the second parallel type is a more unstructured prayer which he termed *z’aka*, or crying out to God in times of trouble. He bases his understanding of *z’aka* on Numbers 10:9-10, Talmud Bavli Taanit 18, and the Maimonides code (laws of fasting 1:1); sources which teach us the *mitzva* to blow the *hatzotzrot*, the trumpets, in times of trouble.

I would humbly suggest that the work of the Jewish healing movement falls into the category of *z’aka*. Everything we do, from healing services, the use of psalms, the assistance we give to caregivers, the training we offer clergy and others helps people fulfill this unstructured *mitzva* of crying out to God in times of pain and trouble. We do this because the Torah guides us in this manner and because it helps.

The rabbis of old intuitively knew this. Their understanding is reflected in Torah sources and wisdom which guide us in seeing how visits and prayer can make a difference in the life of someone living with illness. Some wonderful examples from the Talmud in Nedarim are:

*R. Abba said in the name of R. Hanina: One who visits a patient takes away a sixtieth of his pain.*

*When R. Dimi came he said, “Whoever visits the sick causes him to live, and whoever does not visit the sick causes him to die.” How does one ‘cause’ this? Does this mean that whoever visits the sick will ask mercy (pray) that he may live, and whoever does not visit the sick will ask mercy that he should die? Would you think this? But (it must mean) that whoever does not visit the sick will not ask mercy, neither that he should live or die.*



*Rabin said in the name of Rav: From where do we know that the Holy One, Blessed Be He sustains the sick? As it says, "The Lord will support him upon his bed of illness." (Psalm 41) Rabin also said in the name of Rav: From where do we know that the Divine Presence rests above the invalid's bed? From the verse, "The Lord will support him upon his bed of illness."*

Recent clinical evidence shows that the rabbis were right. Dr. Herbert Benson, in his book *Timeless Healing*, and Dr. Larry Dossey in *Healing Words*, have gathered studies showing the benefit of prayer, visits, religious faith and church or synagogue affiliation on those who are ill. Their statistics show that those whose lives include these elements on the whole live longer after critical and chronic illness. In psycho-social terms, it seems clear that religion eases the spirit, relaxes the body, and offers a support system. And of course, anything that can assist people in life and health is certainly acceptable according to Jewish law. But I wonder if we have been ignoring the most important aspect from a religious point of view: that the *Rofeh Kol Basar*, the One who heals all flesh, is listening to our *z'aka* prayers?

The use of "healing services" as a means of bringing elements of our liturgy to those in need has become increasingly popular across the country. I have discussed healing services in general, as well as their possibility within Orthodox settings, with Rav Gedaliah Schwartz, Rosh Bet Din of the Rabbinical Council of America (largest mainstream Orthodox Rabbinic group in the world). He is generally favorable to any efforts that assist people in need regarding mental health, and endorses the idea of creative services as long as they are obviously different from traditional *davening*. In this way, *Halakhic* issues such as seating by gender, counting women for a minyan or using certain prayers requiring these standards do not become obstacles. Since calling such a gathering a "service" may be misleading to some who would confuse it with a traditional *davening*, he suggests finding alternative nomenclature, such as healing "circle" or other such title.

Regarding many of the *brakhot* used in these settings, he suggests that people who have not said *birkhot hashakhar* and *elokai neshama* in the morning may say them all day, since they are not tied to a time frame (even though most people perceive them as "morning *brakhot*."). He did have a *Halakhic* objection to the use of the prayer *asher yatzar*, whose *Halakhic* context is as a "bathroom" blessing. He felt that it can only be recited after use of the toilet (for which it thanks God) or as part of the morning blessings, which are in effect the same thing. He pointed out, however, that there would be no problem in studying or reflecting upon this *brakha*, and suggests that footnotes in service booklets might be included to reflect these considerations.

In conclusion I believe that *z'aka*, the unstructured crying out to God in times of trouble is the central theme of the healing movement. It can be seen as fully sanctioned by our tradition and has been clinically shown to truly help those in need. With sensitivity to *Halakhic* issues, our work can be shared with an ever-widening circle of Jews in need of the Torah's healing power.



A widely-observed *Omer* custom is to study *Pirke Avot*—*Ethics of the Fathers*, focusing on one of the book's six chapters on each of the six Sabbaths between Passover and Shavuot. This book of Rabbinic aphorisms is full of profound ethical teachings, with the last chapter focused on Torah, an appropriate segue to Shavuot, which celebrates the Revelation at Sinai.

As a taste of the rich resource of *Pirke Avot*, which we encourage you to explore, we offer just one saying from each of its six chapters:

*Chapter/Verse*

**1:14**

Hillel used to say: If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?

**2:10**

Rabbi Eliezer said: Let the honour of your fellow be as precious to you as your own, and do not be easily moved to wrath, and repent one day before your death...

**3:15**

All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is granted; and by goodness is the universe judged, and all is according to the amount of work...

**4:1**

Who is wise? The one who learns from all people...

Who is mighty? The one who subdues his/her passions...

Who is rich? The one who is happy with his/her portion...

Who is honored? The one who honors fellow creatures...

**5:10**

There are four kinds of characters among people:

The one who says, 'What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours,' this is the average sort;

The one who says, 'What is mine is yours and what is yours is mine,' this is an ignoramus;

The one who says, 'What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours,' this is a saintly person;

The one who says, 'What is mine is mine and what is yours is mine,' this is a wicked one.

**6:3**

One who learns from another a single chapter, a single rule, a single verse, or even a single letter, ought to render him/her honour...



# "ONE STONE WAS LAID..."

PAUL (PAVEL) PALEY  
(1967-1997)

A FRIEND OF MINE, PAUL (PAVEL) PALEY, BORN AND RAISED IN GOMEL, BYELARUSSIA, EMIGRATED TO NEW YORK WITH HIS WIFE INA, SON ILYA, AND HIS PARENTS MYRA AND YAKOV, IN 1991. THEY LIVED, LIKE MY GREAT-GRANDPARENTS FROM MINSK ONE HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE, AMONG THE THRONGS OF RUSSIAN JEWS IN BROOKLYN. FROM AFAR, I HAD ALWAYS FELT THAT THESE PICTURES AND STORIES OF PEOPLE RECONSTRUCTING THEIR LIVES HAD A SENTIMENTAL SWEETNESS TO THEM.

And that is actually the way I would describe the beginning of my relationship with Paul, the first Russian immigrant I had ever befriended. Having graduated from medical school in Minsk (at the top of his class and the only Jew) Paul began the arduous and uncertain road of trying to secure a medical residency at a hospital in New York. He was working with another physician at the Hospital for Joint Diseases when we met. I immediately recognized that Paul and I had come from similar places and had similar dreams, mine having been made easier by my great-grandparents emigrating from Russia and Austria one hundred years ago. At first glance our common ground seemed obvious: Jews, physicians, Minsk, even our names. But we also shared a certain spirit—of humor, of impatience, and an unspoken recognition for the bitter sweetness of life. I committed myself to helping Paul reach his goals. Paul spent time working on a clinical research project, studying for medical exams, filling out applications for residency, and forging through what seemed to be endless obstacles of adjustment to life in America.

I introduced Paul and his son Ilya to the prayer and music of my synagogue, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun; he told me about the time he was called into the dean's office at medical school, having been "seen" at the synagogue in Minsk, only to be told not to attend the synagogue again if he wanted to stay at the medical school. Paul often challenged me on my optimism, I tried to get him to question his pessimism. Besides, I truly believed that Paul would make it in America, like so many Russian immigrants before him.

Our connections converged further one year later when Paul developed a cough and was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lymphoma of the chest, possibly related to his proximity to Chernobyl during that explosion in 1986. What followed for Paul was eighteen months of a struggle to

be cured, followed by hopes for a prolonged remission, only to be met with recurring existential questions and malignant disease, ending in a sad and difficult death. During that time The New York Jewish Healing Center was able to provide Paul with rabbinic counseling, with people to talk to who had had similar experiences, and finally, with assistance in arranging a Jewish funeral.

Paul's parents built their lives around him and his bright future filled with hope. The same can be said of my own family. My parents had four children, but in 1967, my brother Alan age 9, and my sister Sandra age 12, succumbed to their long struggles with cancer. My oldest brother Eric, and myself, became my parents' hope for a brighter future.

Paul was born *erev* Chanukkah, 1967, the only child of Myra and Yakov. The *Haftarah* of the first day of Chanukkah recounts the story of the Prophet Zechariah who returns from the Babylonian exile to Jerusalem to lead the Jewish people, along with Joshua the High Priest, in the rebuilding of the Temple. It is in this *Haftarah* that we hear the powerful words "Not by might, nor by power, but by spirit, saith the Lord." Zechariah has several visions, one of which is of Joshua clothed in filthy garments standing before an angel. God instructs Joshua to take off his filthy garments and clothes him in robes—the beginning of a transformation of leaving one life behind and starting anew. It is also in this *Haftarah* that God lays before Joshua a stone with seven facets, a symbol of the Temple and its certainty of rebuilding.

Paul's journey from Minsk to New York was filled with hopes of leaving behind the life of exile, of a Russian Jew, and becoming a full-fledged American Jew. Although Paul died before accomplishing this dream for himself, his spirit continues in his family, his friends, and in medicine. Two months after Paul's death I attended

the National Osteoporosis Foundation meeting in Washington, D.C. During that conference I thought about studying osteoporosis in Russian Jews and discussed it with Dr. Clifford Rosen, chairperson of the conference, whose great-grandparents, I later found out, were also from Minsk. Dr. Rosen, Paul's mother, Dr. Myra Pochenkova, and I wrote a proposal to study the environmental and genetic influences of osteoporosis in Russian-Jewish mother-daughter pairs using a new technique, ultrasound of the heel. Myra is our study coordinator and interpreter. We have examined Jews in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach, New York. I will be presenting the results of our findings at a conference in Heidelberg, Germany this coming spring. From Heidelberg we plan to go to St. Petersburg with hopes of continuing the study in Russia. Each turn that this study has taken has been met with incredible enthusiasm and abundant support from the Jewish community, from our study subjects, and by the companies funding the project.

I do not know if osteoporosis would have been of specific medical interest to Paul. I do know that in the beginning of our friendship it was I helping him to move his career forward. For a long time now it has been Paul helping me and my career. I also know that the spirit of his life is with me, with his family, and is clearly the mysterious driving force behind this study.

A long time ago one stone was laid before Joshua to begin the rebuilding of the Temple. A stone is placed on Paul's headstone with each visit to the cemetery, perhaps symbolizing our commitment to rebuilding his life through us his family, his friends and his patients.

PAULA JUDI RACKOFF, M.D.

*Dr. Rackoff is the Assistant Chief of Rheumatology at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.*



## JEWISH HEALING RESOURCES

The new Jewish Institute for Pastoral Care of the HealthCare Chaplaincy in New York announces an opportunity for theological students, ordained clergy, healthcare professionals, and qualified lay persons to begin studies in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

The Quarter Unit program (100+ hours of supervised training) will be held from June 8—July 31st. For more information on this program call Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, director of the Institute at (212)644-1111, x233.

### NCJH will be holding a networking conference in the fall of 1998 in New York City.

If you are part of a healing center or healing project in your community, or if you are planning to begin programming in the near future, consider joining us for this important gathering. Learn what others are doing and how they have been successful. Find out what programs may work best in your community. Discover ways to galvanize community support. Share your ideas, experiences, and materials with others.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS CONFERENCE PLEASE CALL OUR OFFICE FOR DETAILS (212)632-4705.

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

**"Under the Wings of the Sh'khinah"**  
A service of healing published by the Women's League for Conservative Judaism  
For information please call (800)628-5083

**"Give Me Your Hand: Traditional and Practical Guidance on Visiting the Sick"**  
A monograph on Bikkur Cholim by Jane Handler, Kim Heatherington and Rabbi Stuart Kelman. To order please call EKS Publishing (510)558-9200 or fax order to (510)558-9255

For other resources on Bikkur Cholim, call the Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikkur Cholim Coordinating Council of Greater New York at (212)836-1197.

**Healing of Soul, Healing of Body, Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in Psalms.** Edited by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW. (Jewish Lights 1994). 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.

**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.

**A Leader's Guide to Services and Prayers of Healing.** This helpful guide walks you through some of the central practical issues involved in planning and running a service of healing, whether it be free-standing or incorporated into a traditional service. Sample service included.

**MiSheberakh Card.** This card has been artfully redesigned with a short introduction and full Hebrew text; it offers separate masculine and feminine transliteration accompanied by an English translation on an attractive fold-over card that is small enough to fit in your pocket.

**Evening and Morning: A Circle of Prayer.** A beautiful *bikkur holim* gift, containing traditional prayers to say at bedtime and upon awakening, transforming moments of anxiety into comfort and reassurance, and giving expression to vulnerability, fear, hope, and gratitude. Attractively designed prayer card includes introductions, original Hebrew, moving translations, and selected transliterations.

**NEW The Laws of Life: A Guide to Traditional Jewish Practice at Times of Bereavement.** Masorti Publications together with the New North London Synagogue. In the midst of bewilderment and grief there are often difficult responsibilities to be met. This sensitive booklet helps mourners, family, and friends cope with practical arrangements and learn about the insights and structures that Judaism has to offer.

	Quantity	Cost
<i>Healing of Soul, Healing of Body</i>	\$14.95 each	
<i>When The Body Hurts ...</i>	\$4.00 each.	
	*10+ \$3.25 ea.	
	*50+ \$2.75 ea.	
<i>With Healing on Its Wings</i>	\$10.75 each	
<i>Leader's Guide to Services...</i>	\$6.00 each	
<i>Mi Sheberakh Card</i>	\$1.50 each	
	*10+ \$.75 ea.	
	*25+ \$.50 ea.	
	*100+ \$.30 ea.	
<i>A Circle of Prayer</i>	\$2.00 each	
	*50+ \$1.50 ea.	
	*100+ \$1.25 ea.	
	*1000+ \$1.00 ea.	
<i>The Laws of Life</i>	\$8.50 each	

Please accept my additional contribution

Please send order to:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

STATE:

ZIP:

PHONE:

FAX:

Total



## FROM MILK TO MEAT



The Omer begins with Passover—with the full-course feast of the seder meal, and the symbolism of the paschal lamb—and ends at Shavuot—when, traditionally, Jews eat more simple, dairy dishes.

This seven-week long process suggests a transformation from the highly physical joy of Passover/Freedom to the deeply spiritual joy of Shavuot and the Mt. Sinai revelation, from physical liberation to spiritual fulfillment.

-SYW

Some Jews recite Psalm 67 after the daily counting of the Omer, among other reasons, because it consists of 7 verses and 49 (Hebrew) words. Can you detect other thematic reasons for saying this Psalm during the Omer?

## Psalm 67



FOR THE CONDUCTOR ON NIGGINOT;

A PSALM, A SONG:

May God be gracious to us and bless us,  
illumine God's Presence among us, *selah*.

To make known Your way on earth,  
among all the nations, Your saving power.

Peoples will acknowledge/thank You, God;  
Peoples, all of them, will acknowledge/ thank You.

States will be happy and rejoice, singing praises,  
for You will judge peoples, set them in order,  
and lead the nations on earth, *selah*.

The earth will yield its produce;  
God, our God, will bless us.

God will bless us;

The ends of the earth will be awestruck.

-SYW

First Class  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
New York, NY  
Permit No. 4814



120 West 57th Street  
New York, New York 10019  
Attention: S. Kessler

If you receive a duplicate  
of this newsletter, please  
send it along to a friend.

Printed on recycled paper