



## Sukkot



by DR. TAMARA  
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### “Welcome, honored guest.”

The custom of inviting *ushpizin*, or spiritual guests, into the *sukkah* has its origin with the 16th century kabbalists of Safed; on each of the days of *Sukkot*, one of the three patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David are called upon successively to partake of the evening meal. Their presence, representing the enduring bonds that link each generation of Jews to each other, is a reassuring counterbalance to the impermanence of the *sukkah*, with its reminder that we have all wandered, like our ancestors, in the desert at one time or another in our lives. It is a way of anchoring our spiritual lives, a way of measuring loss against enduring memories.

I have constructed my own list of spiritual guests whom I plan to invite to gather around me in the *sukkah*. The patriarchs and matriarchs have been included not only because they represent essential links in the chain of my own Jewish identity, but because I have so many questions I want to ask them about their own spiritual struggles in the face of personal loss. But truthfully, the most important guests are those who

have brought me the deepest personal understanding of the continuous tension between impermanence that is inherent in our lives and the power of enduring memory.

My father, a rabbi, died when I was very young. I would like him to know that I have tried to emulate his championing of Jewish social justice that arose from his deeply-held belief that all Israel is responsible for one another. I have always felt the loss, but his memory endures in my own beliefs and ideals.

“Welcome, honored guest.”

My *Zeide*, on the other hand, lived to be 97 and was an ardent socialist who believed that all religion, including Judaism, was the curse of the working class. I lived in his house when I was growing up, and despite the fact that he never set foot in a synagogue, he taught me that the ideals of Judaism can be expressed in other ways. Twelve years after his death, I miss him more than I could have ever imagined, but he, too, is a part of what I am.

“Welcome, honored guest.”

*continued on page 2*

### TEMPORARY DWELLING, ETERNAL HOME

Three biblical commandments govern the holiday of *Sukkot*: to dwell in a temporary dwelling (a *Sukkah*); to gather the four species (the *etrog*/citron, the palm, the willow, and the myrtle); and to rejoice (the holiday is known as “The Season of Our Joy” or “*z’man simkhateinu*”). According to Jewish Law, a variety of materials can be used to build the *Sukkah*, and guidelines for its dimensions are quite flexible. The bottom line though, is that the *Sukkah* must not be a permanent structure—even its roof must be open enough to permit viewing of the stars. Thus, the *Sukkah* itself conveys a paradoxical notion of protection, suggesting that true shelter does not come from the vain attempt to deny, evade, or transform cosmic natural forces, but from the celebration of God’s eternal safeguarding and providence. Through the holiday of *Sukkot*, we are given a unique opportunity for intensified appreciation and hopefully integration of life’s blessings and challenges; beauty and vulnerability.

For those of us facing illness and loss, and for those of us who care for others who are suffering, the rich symbols and customs of *Sukkot* provide powerful resources for spiritual nourishment. In this issue, we draw upon the power of four—reflected by the *arba minim* (the four species)—to bring you four pieces on *Sukkot*, which offer Jewish healing insights and perspectives.

All of us at the NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH HEALING join in wishing you a holiday season of growth and change, peace and contentment, community, and healing.

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB  
Rabbinic Director

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## The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

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*Greetings*  
from JANET SHERMAN,  
New Director



It is my pleasure to write to you as Director of the *Jewish Healing Center*, encompassing both the National Center for Jewish Healing and the New York Jewish Healing Center. Jewish spiritual healing is being discussed in many venues and is being incorporated into an increasing number of Jewish communities, as our tradition and our community are being re-invigorated to meet the needs of those facing illness and loss.

This is a pivotal time in our own development, as we solidify our new relationship as a program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services of New York, working in collaboration with the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies. Since beginning work at the end of August, I have actively and enthusiastically immersed myself in the important

*"Welcome, honored guest!" continued from page 1*

My best friend from childhood died very suddenly two years ago. We had not seen very much of each other in the years since we graduated from college, but I had always expected that we would somehow reconnect. Her parents were survivors who had somehow managed to rebuild their lives. Despite the fact that she had spent her earliest years in a d.p. camp in Germany after the war, her house was filled with warmth and laughter and such good food. I spent half my adolescence on the phone with her, and even now I have the urge to call her and giggle. I want so much to be able to continue our conversation. But she is in my heart forever.

"Welcome, honored guest."

I draw comfort and strength from the presence of my *ushpizin*.



The following prayer is a simple adaptation of the traditional Aramaic words welcoming the *ushpizin* into the *sukkah*.

*We are ready to fulfill the commandment given to us;  
that every Israelite shall dwell in a sukkah for seven days,  
in order for all generations to know that the Children of Israel  
lived in such booths when the Holy One brought them  
out of the land of Egypt.*

As we sit down to our evening meal we say:

*Welcome, honored and holy guests (add names of your chosen ushpizin),  
Enter this Sukkah, exalted guests.  
In the shade of the Holy One, be seated —  
be seated at our table.*

*Source of all Life,*

*You are as the eagle who hovers vigilant over its nest.  
We ask that the sheltering protection of Your wings reach out to enfold us.  
May we continue to find ourselves covered by Your canopy of peace.  
Amen.*

work being done; becoming familiar with the administrative/organizational aspects as well as the programmatic needs to be met.

On a personal note, this position offers me the opportunity to integrate my professional experience and educational background. For the past 6 1/2 years at Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), I worked largely in the area of campaign planning and financial resource development. I was also involved with Federation community planning, and published an annual update of local Federation activities in such areas as human services and Federation-synagogue partnerships.

Prior to CJF, I served as Director of Regional Activities for New Israel Fund, supervising fundraising in both professional and volunteer-led communities throughout North America. After earning my Master's degree in Social Work from Florida State University, I lived for seven years in Israel and worked as Assistant Director of the Israel office of the American Jewish Congress and as Israel Program

Liaison for two U.S. Jewish Federations.

Over the next few months, together with Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, Susie Kessler, and colleagues at JBFCF and AJFCA, I will be developing a strategic plan for the Jewish Healing Center. It will present a vision to lead us forward, including resource, board and program development. Your input is welcome. Please feel free to contact us.

Across North America, our community has made tremendous progress toward creating an environment in which those living with pain and illness, as well as their caregivers, are able to understand and address Jewish spiritual needs in a more systematic and thorough manner. With your continued help, we will move forward to build upon that foundation and create a strong, solid base from which to further grow and flourish. I am delighted to have joined this enterprise and to be part of the lay and professional team which will lead it into the 21st century.

**ARBA MINIM:**  
*The Four Species*

As a central ritual of *Sukkot*, Leviticus 23:40 commands us to gather together four species: the three branches which make up the *lulav* (the palm, the myrtle, and the willow), and the *etrog*, or citron. This custom, combined with the particular qualities of these natural elements, has provoked many interpretations over the centuries.

In one interpretation, the *arba minim* are seen to represent four types of Jews, each rated according to taste (learning) and fragrance (good deeds). Joining all four together reflects our hope that our respective strengths will enable us to complement one another and overcome our individual limitations.

Another popular approach is to assign parts of our bodies and human abilities to each of the four species: to the *etrog* - the heart and emotion; to the palm—the spine and action; to the willow—the lips and speech; and to the myrtle—the eyes and insight.

One way to expand and deepen the daily ritual of saying a blessing while joining *lulav* and *etrog*, is to add a special *kavannah*, or meditation based on the healing potential of these interpretations. We offer the following example, but encourage you to think about composing your own personal prayer.

**MEDITATION ON THE *Arba Minim***

May it be Your Will, *Adonai* our God,  
that in joining together these *arba minim*  
I may unite my body and soul  
in a complete and peaceful healing.

Just as these four species represent the coming together  
of different types of Jews  
and the ultimate reunion of our people in Zion,  
So may they be the harbinger of a true *re'fuah shleimah*,  
a total healing of all aspects of my being;  
of organs, limbs, senses and faculties;  
of mind, heart, spirit, and soul;  
of thoughts feelings, actions, and words.

Let me share fullness with all,  
gathering strength from all in my community  
and from You and Your Shelter of Peace,  
*Sukkat Shalom*.

Amen.

-SYW

DEBBIE PERLMAN is the Resident Psalmist at Beth Emet, The Free Synagogue, of Evanston, Illinois. Her beautiful psalms have provided comfort and support for many of us. We are honored to share with you Debbie's psalm for *Sukkot*.

ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FIVE

IN THE  
SUKKAH



Sit beside me, Kind Visitor,  
Between these billowing walls,  
Broken light through roof branches:  
Hold me fall breezes.

I invite You, Kind Healer,  
To sit in my *sukkah*,  
To rest in my presence  
As I recline against Yours.

I invite You to sweeten these days  
With the *etrog's* fragrance,  
Tart and pleasing,  
A boon to my weary senses.

I invite Your companions  
Of hope and faith,  
Healing and wishes,  
Wholeness returned.

Allow my hospitality,  
In this place of peace,  
Where together we plan recovery,  
Fragility turned to strength.

©DEBBIE PERLMAN

To order her newest book of psalms, *Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing and Praise*, call Independent Publishers Group at 1-800-888-4741.

What does the question “Are your sufferings beloved or meaningful to you?” mean?

This question means something like “Have you reached the spiritual and psychological point of acceptance, growth, and the ability to be more mindful of your blessings?”

In a spiritual support group for people living with illness, an elderly woman who had a marked, painful limp announced one day that she had decided to love her shortened leg. She began rubbing cream on it every night and speaking tenderly to it. Were her sufferings welcome to her?

Were she then to grow in some important way — become empathic to other disabled people, involved in *tzedekah*, or filled with more lovingkindness — would that mean that her sufferings were welcome to her? Were she even to realize how much she has for which to thank God despite her bad luck, and keep her blessings in mind more of the time, would she welcome her sufferings?

Since the answer in our text is, “neither they nor their reward,” the sufferer is offered the healing power of community, *bikkur holim*, study and empathy to help him reach that point of transformation.

CAROL P. HAUSMAN, PH.D., is a Clinical Psychologist and a founder and coordinator of the the Washington, D.C. Jewish Healing Network.

What do you hear in the reply “neither they nor their reward”?

This reply, “Neither the sufferings nor their rewards are welcome to me.” emanates from the shattered physical level we are stuck at when we are ill—broken—distant from G-d. We understandably cry about our pain and physical mortality. We are locked within our own jail.

Yet within this shattering, we can be reached by another’s outstretched arm and healing touch, and be lifted and healed. We may not be cured in the physical sense, but in reconnecting to the Source of All Life, we can heal emotionally and spiritually. We move from fragmentation to unity, to *shalom*. *Bikkur Holim*, reaching out to someone within his or her illness, is truly participating in *tikkun olam*, partnering with G-d to repair the world.

DINAH JACOBS, retired from corporate life, volunteers as a para-chaplain in a nursing home, and actively pursues Jewish learning.

In the third story, how do you interpret the nature of the light which radiates from R. Johana’s bared arm?

Sometimes a glowing arm is just a glowing arm. The phenomenon of a perceived luminosity of the human body, or even of other living beings, is well attested in biblical and talmudic sources, and throughout later medieval and modern Jewish mystical traditions. Moshe’s face shone in a manner visible to all after his sojourn on Mount Sinai. In the *Talmud* tractates *Horiot* 12a and *Keritot* 5b-6a there is reference to a technique for perceiving one’s own aura in a darkened room. In Lurianic *Kabbalah* and later in the Hasidic tradition, aura gazing was a central diagnostic technique used as an aid in physical and spiritual healing.

When R. Johanan went to visit R. Eleazar, depressed on his sickbed in a dark house, he exposed his glowing arm. An aura

“A drug may be beneficial for one person and not for another, but the Torah is a life-giving medicine for all Israel.” (R. Judah ben Hiyya, *Talmud Eruvin* 54a)

As a community, we join to support one another in times of illness and loss. *The Outstretched Arm* invites you now to join in a moment of study together, as we share several contemporary comments about a piece of classical “healing” text from the *Talmud* (Tractate *Berakhot* or “Blessings”, 5b)\*. As in a page of *Talmud*, we present the text itself in the middle of the page, with the commentaries placed along the bottom and sides. Please send us your thoughts on any of the questions raised as we hope to include them in a future issue...

well-intentioned but contradictory advice. As a result, not only I, but my wife, my son, and daughter-in-law (both doctors) became increasingly confused and emotionally distraught. Finally, when the pangs of indecision had become nearly intolerable, one wise physician friend said, ‘What you need is a doctor.’... When that excellent advice was followed, my family and I sensed immediate and immense relief. The incapacity of enervating worry was dispelled and I could return to my usual anxieties, such as deciding on the fate of manuscripts or giving lectures like this one.”

Ingelfinger’s experience, though separated from R. Johanan’s by almost two millennia is nevertheless strikingly similar and suggests a quality to illness that transcends time and space. Ingelfinger was one of the

great physicians of his era just as R. Johanan was one of the great healers of his, yet each became not only physically but also spiritually incapacitated by disease. Both stories remind us that the sick often feel trapped and isolated by illness and that healing begins with an acknowledgment of our common human frailty. For both the doctor and the rabbi, liberation and reconnection required the warmth of human concern.

Our bodies, source of our individuality and our proud ability when healthy, are painful reminders when we fall ill of how much we need each other. The role of the healer, then, is not just to dispense accurate information, but to serve as the community’s agent of reconnection; providing a stable, caring and trustworthy presence when life threatens to spin out of control.

DR. ALAN B. ASTROW, M.D. is Associate Chief and Program Director for Hematology and Oncology at Saint Vincents Hospital and Medical Center of New York.

In the first story we see a simple model of a successful visit. What went right?

Illness and suffering are lonely experiences, isolating the patient even from those nearby.

By extending one’s hand to the stricken person we build a bridge which helps to establish contact and provides a way for the ill person to find their way back to the surrounding world.

This facilitates healing of the spirit and allows the body to heal, also.

FRANCES BRANDT is a founding board member of the National Center for Jewish Healing and the New York Jewish Healing Center.

In the third story, R. Johanan poses three questions to R. Eleazar. What did R. Eleazar’s answer to these questions accomplish?

R. Eleazar’s answer initiated the pivotal moment at which healing could begin. As a person doing the mitzvah of *bikkur holim* knows, creating a relationship of empathic connection is central to healing. However, in this case, the visitor (R. Johanan)

## BABYLONIAN TALMUD, *Berakhot* 5b

**R**abbi Hiyya bar Abba fell ill and Rabbi Johanan went in to visit him. He (R. Johanan) said to him: ‘Are your sufferings welcome to you?’ He replied: ‘Neither they nor their reward.’ He (R. Johanan) said to him: ‘Give me your hand.’ He gave him his hand and he (R. Johanan) raised (healed) him.

Rabbi Johanan once fell ill and Rabbi Hanina went in to visit him. He (R. Hanina) said to him: ‘Are your sufferings welcome to you?’ He replied: ‘Neither they nor their reward.’ He said to him: ‘Give me your hand.’ He (R. Hanina) gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? They replied: ‘The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.’

Rabbi Eleazar fell ill and Rabbi Johanan went in to visit him. He (R. Johanan) noticed that he (R. Eleazar) was lying in a dark room, and he (R. Johanan) bared his arm and light radiated from it. Thereupon he noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: ‘Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learnt: The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven. Is it perhaps lack of sustenance? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables. Is it perhaps because of the (lack of) children? This is the bone of my tenth son!’ - He (R. Eleazar) replied to him: ‘I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to rot in the earth.’ He said to him: ‘On that account you surely have a reason to weep.’ And they both wept. In the meanwhile he (R. Johanan) said to him: ‘Are your sufferings welcome to you?’ — He replied: ‘Neither they nor their reward.’ He said to him: ‘Give me your hand’ And he gave him his hand and he raised him...

can be seen under any lighting conditions, but it is especially striking in the dark, as the *Gemara Horlot* suggests. In showing R. Eleazar how to see the glowing of his arm, R. Johanan helps R. Eleazar make a perception and attitude shift, essential as a first step in healing, helping rouse R. Eleazar out of his depression. This new mode of perception assists his attunement to R. Johanan's own healthy energy field, preparing R. Eleazar to receive the therapeutic hand of R. Johanan directly, and rise up from his bed, whole and healed. (see note, page 7)

RABBI DR. MEIR SENDOR is the rabbi of the Young Israel of Sharon, Mass.

### *In the third story, what is the nature of the questions asked by R. Johanan?*

In this story, the text reveals two therapeutic approaches. First, we see that the word "notice" (in aramaic *haza* and *hazaiah*) is used twice. This demonstrates R. Johanan's awareness of R. Eleazar's condition. He notes the darkened conditions of the room, and he bares his arm to light it up (subject for another *drasha!*). Then he notices R. Eleazar weeping ("seeing sounds" is not unheard of: see Exodus 10:15, where after the Sinaitic revelation, the people "saw the voices").

Secondly, R. Johanan uses questions to zero in on R. Eleazar's suffering, and uses techniques of empathy to connect with and comfort him. He probes three areas:

1. Are intellectual/religious issues bothering you? With regard to learning, the Torah itself values quality over quantity. R. Johanan uses the term *shaninu*...meaning "surely we learnt together," attempting to form an empathic and sensitive connection with his colleague, R. Eleazar.
2. Are there livelihood issues? Well, not everyone (including R. Johanan himself) gets rich (the analogy of the two tables).
3. As far as suffering goes, having buried ten children, R. Johanan can truly empathize with R. Eleazar. He, too, has known suffering and loss.

RABBI JOSEPH OZAROWSKI is the spiritual leader of the Elmont Jewish Center and a rabbinic consultant to the NCJH.

### *What do we learn from the differences between the second story and the first story?*

I am fascinated in both stories with what seems to be a formula for Jewish healing:

The question, are sufferings welcome?

The answer, neither they nor reward.

The beckoning, give me your hand.

The giving of the hand and subsequent raising up.

To me, the answer conveys a sense of surrender, a lack of investment in the illness, a place of equanimity that is a requirement for healing. Many times, I cannot surrender when ill, but rather find myself in spiritual and emotional turmoil. The presence of a friend helps lift me out of the depths of pain and suffering to give me new perspective and help carry me to the other side of the dark place, to attain healing.

DEBORAH BUCKLEY, hands-on healer and cancer survivor, is a volunteer in the Bikur Cholim/Para-Chaplaincy Program of Jewish Family Service of Colorado.

רבי חייא בר אבא חלש, על לגביה רבי יוחנן. אמר ליה: חביבין עליך יסורין? אמר ליה: לא הן ולא שכרן. אמר ליה: הב לי ידך! יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. רבי יוחנן חלש, על לגביה רבי חנינא. אמר ליה: חביבין עליך יסורין? אמר ליה: לא הן ולא שכרן. אמר ליה: הב לי ידך! יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה. אמאי? לוקים רבי יוחנן לנפשיה! - אמרי: אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים. - רבי אלעזר חלש, על לגביה רבי יוחנן. חזא דהוה קא גני בבית אפל, גלייה לדרעיה ונפל נהורא. חזייה דהוה קא בכי רבי אלעזר. אמר ליה: אמאי קא בכית? אי משום תורה דלא אפשרת - שנינו: אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים! ואי משום מזוני - לא כל אדם זוכה לשתי שלחנות! ואי משום בני - דין גרמא דעשיראה ביר. אמר ליה: להאי שופרא דבלי בעפרא קא בכינא. אמר ליה: על דא ודאי קא בכית, ובכו תרוייהו. אדהכי והכי, אמר ליה: חביבין עליך יסורין? אמר ליה: לא הן ולא שכרן. אמר ליה: הב לי ידך, יהב ליה ידיה ואוקמיה.

'raised' or 'healed' by touch. How do you understand this part of the story?

As a body worker, I am struck by the fact that the person who is ill responds each time by giving the healer his hand. By this act he signifies that he is willing to be healed, which in my experience is crucial to the

healing process. Through touch, the person who is ill and the healer enter into a dynamic partnership. The work of the healer is not to take on the pain of the other, but to offer an experience of reconnection, thereby 'raising' the person who is ill to a different level of understanding.

JANICE S. ROUS is a teacher and body worker living in New York City.

\* The *Talmud* (literally 'study') is a vast, organic compendium of opinions and teachings of ancient Jewish scholars over a period of some eight centuries (from 300 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.). It consists of two parts; the text (*Mishnah*) and related discussion (*Gemara*), and includes both legal (*Halakhah*) and narrative (*Aggadah*) elements. The *Talmud* is subdivided into sections known as 'tractates'. Tractate *Berachot* ('Blessings') is the first of these and deals generally with the laws regarding prayers and blessings. But by page 5, the rabbis are heavily engaged in a searching discussion concerning the meaning and purpose of suffering. These stories reflect a part of that discussion.

was unsuccessful in creating an empathic connection to the person he was visiting (R. Eleazar). Rather than listening for the truth of R. Eleazar's suffering, R. Johanan voiced his own conjectures, thereby frustrating the possibility of creating the groundwork for such a healing relationship.

R. Eleazar's reply, surely sharpened by his state of illness, reflects that he was deeply aware of both the exquisite beauty of creation (symbolized by R. Johanan) and the truth that all such beauty passes away. At the moment that R. Eleazar voiced his thoughts, he was able to create the empathic connection that R. Johanan had been unable to foster. Hearing his friend's words, R. Johanan knew not only that R. Eleazar was crying in awareness of life's finitude, but also that R. Johanan himself was part of the miracle of creation that would one day pass away. "Visitor" and "visitee" are always both human, mortal, and vulnerable. R. Eleazar was able to create a relationship of mutual empathy, the partners linked by their mutual awareness of their own mortality. Only then could a truly healing relationship begin.

RABBI NANCY FLAM, is the founder of Ruach Ami: The Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, and rabbinic consultant to the National Center for Jewish Healing.

### *In the first story, what do we learn from the interaction between R. Hiyya and R. Johanan?*

R. Johanan offered R. Hiyya the crucial opportunity to express something—anything—about how he was doing with, and what meaning he was making of, his suffering. Then, he didn't challenge R. Hiyya's forthright and honest response, which certainly contrasted markedly with some of the pious notions about suffering that were being articulated in the *yeshiva* academy in those days (such as the idea that sufferings were God's "chastisements of love"). Finally, R. Johanan gave R. Hiyya the opportunity to hold hands, to reach back to the one reaching out, if he was so inclined, joining him in simple "post-verbal" human presence, physically re-forging a link with the community of the "temporarily well" while maintaining a position of autonomy, efficacy, and choice for the one who is suffering.

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, CSW, is the Rabbinic Director of the National Center for Jewish Healing and the New York Jewish Healing Center.

# Brave Hearts

In April, 1998, the Philadelphia community led by the Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia, hosted a conference on Judaism and Healing in memory of their beloved member and colleague, Rabbi Devora Bartnoff, z"l. The conference opened with a keynote panel entitled "Jewish Spiritual Journeys in Healing". Members of the panel included Daniel Gottlieb, Ph.D. (patient); Judith Kleppel, M.D. (physician); Shoshana Silberman, Ed.D. (family caregiver); and Rabbi Brian Walt (congregational rabbi). Panel moderator, Vanessa Ochs, along with conference coordinator, Myriam Klotz, have given us permission to share Vanessa's opening remarks with our readers.

I wish I could say that the people who are seated here on this panel are the only people in the world who can speak from his or her perspective: the one healer of bodies, the one healer of souls, the one caregiver, the one ill person. Each speaker is representative of gazillions of others; I know I alone could fit into all four categories—as Dr. Mom, as performer of *bikkur cholim*, as a caregiver, as someone too capable of going through the Merck manual and saying, "been there, done that". I imagine many of you, too—because you are human, would also qualify as a representative of all four categories.

We are here on this panel because we are, by our training or our innate skills, willing to speak publicly, honestly, about matters that are intimate, and experiences that reflect all our vulnerability.

Everywhere people are sick. Everywhere, illness mucks things up, causing pain, chaos, despair. Jews have no monopoly on suffering of this kind, nor are our responses to suffering more resourceful, more effective, more eloquent. But we do indeed have a language of responses to illness and suffering; a language that is textual, ritual, liturgical, relational; a language that is wise, brilliant, pliable, reliable... a language that is ours. In my own work as a cultural anthropologist with a special interest in Jewish healing, I happen to be especially interested in the rich ritual vocabulary Jewish tradition has evolved in response to illness: *chinui hashem* (the name changing ceremony); the *misheberakh* prayer for healing; the *birkat gomel* prayer for recovery; reciting psalms, giving *tzedaka*,

learning in the name of an ill person, *bikkur cholim*, the performance of everyday Jewish observance...just to name some.

But with all the Jewish traditions I know, and all the sacred and contemporary texts I can cite, I can still find myself—not as a scholar, nor as a Jewish teacher—but as a person facing illness from any role, any angle—feeling angry, hopeless, desperate, baffled by its meaninglessness, the unfairness of it all, and unresponsive to claims that illness is a teacher, not impressed by the promise that even without cure, healing can still come.

The hardest part for me is the isolation of illness, the feeling of being alone. It does not really help when someone says, "I know just how you feel." I could marshal numbers of counter-arguments: no one knows just how I feel; to claim so is to lessen the integrity of my own experience. It does not help when someone says, "I have been there, just like you." I pull out my best arguments: no one stands in my place alongside me; my story is mine alone. It does not help when someone tells me I will learn lessons from illness, that one day I shall be grateful. As Shira Ruskay of blessed memory once told me, "Any lessons I learned from illness I would gladly not know." And despite all the defenses and intellectual arguments I put up, I so yearn to be rescued from the isolation of illness or the prisons of fear or pain. I know that in order to experience any healing, I have to open myself to the possibility of becoming remoralized; of restoring and preserving dignity. I know too, that if I cannot make my experience

meaningful in some fashion, it is really too trying to go on.

Today we have the privilege of listening to our own living hearts and the hearts of our tradition that open themselves to us. Brave hearts, knowing hearts, Jewish hearts that have discovered that despite all the darkness of illness, hope is possible, connection is possible, transformation, wholeness, meaning is possible. You will hear wise, feeling words—but know too, that you could choose to experience these words as touches, embraces, outstretched hands that can offer you light and lightness when both seem lacking.

You will hear stories. Stories are life that has been arranged, life that has been organized, reflected upon, sifted for poignancy and humor, given meaning. *Maggid*: the telling. Stories: they are how we share life, share what we have learned. They are how we find meaning as we give meaning in the process of weaving, connecting and seeking.

Our panelists have been asked to reflect upon the extent to which their experiences have challenged their faith, their practice, their communal ties. They have been asked what Jewish observances, beliefs, connections have sustained them; what Jewish resources they have wished for and those they have known.

As you hear the stories of our panelists, listen for your own stories.

VANESSA L. OCHS  
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continued from page 5

Rabbi Dr. Sendor adds: "The *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, Rhineland mystics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, discuss the aura, as do kabbalists of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, such as R. Isaac of Acre and R. Menahem Recanati. The *Zohar* includes a monograph devoted to mapping the complex human aura structure. The techniques of using aura gazing as a central diagnostic tool in physical and spiritual healing are still in use today among true kabbalists, and the methods for developing these skills are known and practiced in small circles of dedicated Jewish mystics. The phenomenon actually has a scientifically verifiable basis, and I am working currently on an article on the subject."

**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.

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# ✿ A Time for Every Purpose ✿

**O**n the *Shabbat* that falls during the middle of *Sukkot*, some Ashkenazic Jews read *Sefer Kohelet* (the book of Ecclesiastes). Ecclesiastes is an unusual book in many ways. On the one hand, it proclaims the almost hedonistic exhortation to “eat, drink, and pursue pleasure”, expressing how “all is vanity and transitory”. But Ecclesiastes also includes the beautiful, comforting

verses popularly known as “To Everything there is a Season” (Chapter 3: 1-8). Certainly a central theme of *Sukkot* is the reaffirmation of one’s part in the cycle of life. Singing these lines (Pete Seeger composed a well-known melody for the English version), embracing their meaning—even writing them on the wall of the *Sukkah*—can become a part of a meaningful ritual for those who are ill and those who care for them.

## ***A season is set for everything, a time for everything under heaven:***

- ✿ *A time to be born and a time to die;*
- ✿ *A time for planting and a time for reaping;*
- ✿ *A time for slaying and a time for healing;*
- ✿ *A time for tearing down and a time for building up;*
- ✿ *A time to weep and a time to laugh;*
- ✿ *A time to wail and a time to dance;*
- ✿ *A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones;*
- ✿ *A time to embrace and a time to be distant from embraces;*
- ✿ *A time to seek and a time to lose;*
- ✿ *A time to keep and a time to discard;*
- ✿ *A time for ripping apart and a time for mending;*
- ✿ *A time to be silent and a time to speak;*
- ✿ *A time for loving and a time for hating;*
- ✿ *A time for war and a time for peace.*

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB  
*Rabbinic Director*

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