

## BLACK FIRE Upon WHITE FIRE

BY DR. TAMARA GREEN, PH.D.

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

A MIDRASH (fanciful commentary on the Torah) declares that when *Adonai* was ready to create the world, all the letters of the *aleph-bet* clamored and begged, "Create the world through me!" After each letter had made its case and had been rejected, *Adonai* chose the Hebrew letter 'bet,' because it was the first letter of *baruch*, "blessed," the word by which we sanctify *Adonai* and the creation of the world. That is why, the rabbis explain, the Torah begins with the word *bereshit*, "in the beginning." It would seem, then, that not only does the *aleph-bet* have extraordinary power, but that the world is constructed letter by letter.

It was a power that for a long time I never fully understood, for I never saw the inside of a Torah scroll until I was an adult. I had grown up in an Orthodox synagogue, sitting with the other women in the balcony; and even when the scroll was lifted up at the conclusion of the reading of that week's portion, I was too far away to see the letters. I may have learned the meaning of the *mitzvot* contained in Torah, but I could not comprehend the physical presence of the words of Torah. I could not imagine the power that the individual letters might contain.

And then, after sporadically attending synagogue for many years, I joined a "do-it-yourself" egalitarian minyan, in which everyone was encouraged to participate in whatever way they



felt comfortable. Giving *divrei* Torah (homilies) was easy; many years of teaching had prepared me for public speaking, and I loved the scholarly chase that produced an interpretation of the text. But what I really wanted was to see the letters of the Torah, and so first I learned the blessings that are recited between the sections of the reading. This gave me the opportunity to stand next to the Torah; but even looking over the shoulder of the reader, I was still too far away to see the letters clearly. I knew that if I were ever going to understand the physical presence of the Torah, I was going to have to learn how to read it myself.

Of all the activities of my adult Jewish life, nothing has given me more pleasure than learning how to *leyn* (chant) Torah. And nothing scares me more than standing up in front of the congregation on Shabbat, chanting the Hebrew, staring into what seems to me to be the heart of the Jewish people,

staring into my own Jewish heart. No matter how well I know the passage, my heart pounds, the pointer trembles in my hand, and my voice quavers as I read. Perhaps it is "performance anxiety," but perhaps it is that I know that the letters are truly written, as the ancient rabbis said, "with black fire upon white fire." What they meant was that, like fire, Torah is alive, casting shadows on and, at the same time, illuminating the whole of *Adonai's* creation. Surely that must be true, but I have found my own understanding of "black fire upon white fire" as I stand over the Torah scroll.

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From the narrow place of my distress  
I called out to Adonai,  
My answer came from a place  
of divine spaciousness.

PSALM 118, VERSE 5

As we enter the High Holidays, this special and sacred period of time, we have much to think about. These days of repentance—of *teshuvah*—are a time for personal introspection within the context of communal prayer. Some of us are comfortable in the synagogue, at home in the language of prayer. But for others, it can be an experience of frustration and alienation. We may feel kept out of the experience by not being part of a community, by not being familiar with Hebrew, by physical or emotional realities which keep us isolated. Even if we are able to participate comfortably in the communal experience, we may feel constricted by our own fears or our own perception of our limitations. In this issue of *The Outstretched Arm*, our contributors describe some of the barriers that may exist, and help us find ways to explore and transcend those "narrow places".

—SK

## FROM THE DIRECTOR, JANET SHERMAN

### The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

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Janet Sherman, MSW,  
Director

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW,  
Rabbinic Director

Susie Kessler,  
Editor

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

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FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
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### NATIONAL NEWS

This past April, the National Center presented a panel on "How to Start a Jewish Healing Center" at the annual conference of the Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies (AJFCA). Panelists included Karen Zeff, JFS Executive Director from Allentown, Pennsylvania; Seymour Friedland, Boston JF&CS Executive Director; and Pinchas Berger, JBFCs Director of Jewish Community Services. Since the conference, the number of local communities consulting with us about initiating Jewish healing programming is growing. Each week brings new inquiries. The needs exist and communities are beginning to organize themselves to meet them. In this issue of *The Outstretched Arm*, we are pleased to begin a regular feature which will provide information about the development and ongoing work of local Jewish healing centers across North America. (See opposite page).

### BUILDING A BASE OF SUPPORT

One of my goals as Director of **The National Center for Jewish Healing** is to build a consistent, reliable financial base for our operations. We are actively seeking new partners to expand and diversify our foundation support beyond the

### BLACK FIRE *Upon* WHITE FIRE *continued from page 1*

There are no vowel signs on the words written in the Torah scroll, and so it is sometimes difficult to figure out how to pronounce them; and once learned, they are sometimes difficult to remember. It has occurred to me that just as the letters are visible on the page and yet sometimes hard to read, so the black fire is what is visible in our lives, even if we do not always comprehend its meaning. There are too many shadows that get in our way of seeing clearly. Just as we struggle to decipher the letter of Torah, we struggle to find the language to articulate what is painful in our lives, our own suffering or the suffering of those whom we love.

How do we find the language to speak

generous and longstanding grants of **The Nathan Cummings Foundation**. In addition, we are committed to broadening the base of individual supporters who believe that the Jewish community has a responsibility to more fully address the spiritual needs of Jews living with illness and loss. We have included a return envelope for your convenience in making a tax-deductible contribution to make Jewish healing and Jewish healing resources more readily available to those in need.

### NEW STAFF ADDITION

We are delighted to welcome **Rabbi Regina L. Sandler-Phillips** as Assistant Rabbinic Director, with responsibilities for both the New York Jewish Healing Center and The National Center for Jewish Healing. Rabbi Sandler-Phillips was ordained by the Academy for Jewish Religion, a pluralistic rabbinical and cantorial seminary in New York City. With master's degrees in social work and public health, Regina brings to the position extensive experience in community organization/group work, counseling, education and the arts. Her particular talents and strengths in teaching texts and music will be valuable assets to our work. Regina has pursued training in Clinical Pastoral Education, and has served as a hospital and nursing home chaplain, and as a congregational rabbi.

about what seems to be at best incomprehensible, at worst unbearable? What can we do when the words written in black fire seem to fail us? How do we unravel the text to find the healing words that are contained there? Perhaps sometimes we must look behind and around the black fire and focus instead on the white fire, to the spaces between the letters where we can create our own text. The white fire is boundless, offering us a place to express both our terrors and our hopes. The white fire provides us with space in which, letter by letter, we can write our own attempts at understanding, express our own words of prayer, and inscribe our own blessings for healing.

# A Growing Network of Care

The *Outstretched Arm* is honored to share with you this growing list of Jewish healing centers. We're happy to report that this is only a partial list—other centers will be showcased in future editions. Included are brief descriptions of some center highlights, as well as important contact names and numbers. Please do not hesitate to call these centers if you are in need or wish to become involved. If you are able to contribute to the continued growth of the Jewish healing center in your local community through financial support, we encourage you to do so.

We would like to thank everyone for providing us with this information and to express our gratitude for their dedication.

## **BALTIMORE, MD: Baltimore Jewish Healing Network** (with support of Jewish Family Services)

- Offered several adult education programs at local synagogues.
- Received a grant to provide spiritual study/discussion groups for individuals, families, and caregivers struggling with medical illness.
- Continues to offer spiritual support groups through Jewish Family Services.

### **Contact: Israela Meyerstein, LCSW and Rabbi Gila Ruskin**

Ph: (410) 484-2172 fax (410) 484-2373  
e-mail: alephgrp@ocpl.net

## **BOSTON, MA: Jewish Healing Connections**

(A Service of JF&CS)

- Offers bikkur cholim training at area synagogues.
- Co-sponsoring two community education programs in the fall:
- A Jewish Healing weekend with Temple Beth Avodah
- A presentation with the JCC at its Book Fair by Dr. David Freeman, author of *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition*.

### **Contact: Marjorie Sokoll, Director of Jewish Healing**

Ph: (617) 558-1278 Fax (617) 5250  
e-mail: msokoll@jfcscboston.org

## **CLEVELAND, OH: Cleveland Jewish Healing Center**

- Sponsoring in the fall in conjunction with Jewish Family Service "R'fuah Shleima: A Day of Spirituality, Study, and Healing for all affected by HIV/AIDS."

### **Contact: Rabbi Susan B. Stone**

Ph: (216) 381-6119 fax: (216) 291-2010  
e-mail: rabsues@aol.com

## **DELAWARE: Kimmel-Spiller Jewish Healing Center of Jewish Family Service**

- Holding parlor meetings in local homes on topics related to Jewish healing.
- Creating bikkur cholim volunteer training manual and program.
- Conducts monthly Jewish healing service and on-going spiritual support groups.

### **Contact: Rabbi Myriam Klotz, Director**

Ph: (302) 478-9411 fax (302) 479-9883  
e-mail: klotzstein@aol.com

## **LOS ANGELES, CA: The Jewish Healing Center at Metivta** (a center for contemplative Judaism)

- Conducts healing services at Metivta and with local synagogues.
- Trains, places and supervises bikkur cholim volunteers who visit people in hospitals, nursing homes, at home and in hospices. Maintains monthly spiritual support group for volunteers. Teaches bikkur cholim to synagogue communities.
- Teaches continuing education classes about spiritual care for professional staff at JFS.

### **Contact: Ellen Winer, R.N., Director**

Ph: (310) 477-5370 fax (310) 477-7501  
e-mail: metivta@metivta.org

## **MIDDLETOWN, NY: Jewish Family Services of Orange County**

- Offers training/ongoing support for bikkur cholim volunteers at local synagogues.
- Coordinates Friendly Visitor program for home bound elderly.
- Provides resources, referrals, and advocacy for those who are ill.

### **Contact: Donna Haviv**

Ph: (914) 341-1173 Fax: (914) 342-6436

## **NEW YORK, NY: New York Jewish Healing Center**

- Implemented monthly Jewish healing Torah study and support group for doctors at St. Vincent's
- Created a Jewish bereavement support group program in partnership with the JCC of the Upper West Side
- Received a major grant from UJA-Federation of New York in partnership with Mt. Sinai hospital for a collaborative model of outreach to connect discharged patients and outpatients with resources for spiritual healing in the New York Jewish community.

### **Contact: Janet Sherman, Director**

ph: (212) 399-2320 ex. 209 fax: (212) 399-2475  
e-mail: jsherman@jbfcs.org

## **ORANGE COUNTY, CA:**

### **Jewish Healing Center of Orange County**

- Center has 5 program components: support groups, chaplaincy, religious services, bikkur cholim, and information and referral.
- Planning a conference on providing comfort and support to Jewish families affected by mental illness.
- Developing a program to train hospice volunteers.

### **Contact: Mel Roth, Executive Director, JFS**

Ph: (714) 445-4950 fax (714) 445-4960  
e-mail: jfsocmroth@earthlink.net

## **PHOENIX, AZ: Shalom Center for Education, Healing, and Growth**

- Offers monthly healing services of hope and comfort.
- Trains bikkur cholim volunteers and runs a Bikkur Cholim Caregivers Renewal and Support Group.
- Provides life transition support and education groups for Jews dealing with divorce, separation, illness, loss, and caring for aging parents.

### **Contact: Sharona Silverman, Director**

Ph: (602) 971-1234 Fax: (602) 971-5909

## **PITTSBURGH, PA: Healing Center In Formation**

- Conducted program at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center for health care professionals, "What do Judaism and Psychoneuroimmunology Have in Common?"
- Scheduled conference for fall '99 integrating medical, psychological, social, and Jewish perspectives on healing.
- Preparing a relaxation tape for inpatients with Jewish prayer, meditation, and music.

### **Contact: Gayle Rosner Abrams and Rabbi Larry Heimer**

Ph: (412) 421-6912 fax (412) 648-6871  
e-mail: Gabrams18@aol.com

## **ROCHESTER, NY: Jewish Family Service**

(healing center in planning stages)

- Has completed a community-wide needs assessment.
- Currently seeking start-up funding for healing center program.

### **Contact: Brent Porges**

Ph: (716) 461-0110 fax: (716) 461-9658

## **ST. LOUIS, MO: Jewish Family & Children's Service** (in cooperation with Congregation Shaare Emeth)

- Offered two support groups; for children of aging parents, and for people living with cancer.

### **Contact: Sharon Weissman**

Ph: (314) 993-1240 fax: (314) 993-0238  
e-mail: shweissman@aol.com

## **TAMPA, FL: The Jewish Healing Center of Tampa Jewish Family Services**

- Sponsored training for bikkur cholim volunteers.
- Provides visitors for hospitals and haverim/friends for one-on-one telephone contact and support
- Will be offering bereavement support groups, and support groups for health care providers.

### **Contact: Erni B. Goldstein**

Ph: (813) 960-1848 fax (813) 265-8239  
e-mail: tjfs@gte.net

## **TORONTO: The Toronto Jewish Healing Project**

- Offers Jewish support groups for people with terminal/chronic illness.
- Recently received a grant from the Hebrew Memorial Park, given to the JF&CS to support the work of the Toronto Jewish Healing Project.
- Will be offering a six-week program in the fall entitled "Six Rabbis, Six Psalms" and a three-week training session for health care professionals.

### **Contact: Etta Ginsberg McEwan, Coordinator**

ph: (416) 944-3359 fax: (416) 968-1996  
e-mail: Etta@interlog.com

## **WASHINGTON, DC:**

### **Washington Jewish Healing Network**

- Offers spiritual support groups, adult education courses, healing services, training, and consultation.
- Recent groups include: Jews living with illness; bereaved parents; bereaved sibling; parents of estranged children; issues of aging; spiritual autobiography.
- Taught course on incorporating spirituality into psychotherapy for staff of JSSA.

### **Contact: Carol P. Hausman, Ph.D., Coordinator**

Ph: (202) 966-7851 fax: (202) 966-5422  
e-mail: washheal@aol.com

In this edition of *The Outstretched Arm*, our teaching section will focus on Psalms or *Tehillim*. Psalms have long been a traditional resource for dealing with illness and loss. But for many of us, the language of Psalms can be difficult to “crack”. We may find it difficult to relate to the unfamiliar, and at times, archaic, images and metaphors. In looking for ways to overcome these potential barriers, we have asked Rabbi Simkha Weintraub for his help and guidance. He has provided us with a wonderful overview on Psalms, and shares with us a methodology for a guided approach to unlocking the deep power of individual Psalms. We encourage you to try this approach in your own exploration of this timeless resource.

## FROM THE DEPTHS

### *Psalms as A Spiritual Reservoir in Difficult Times*

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

**S**ickness, suffering, and loss mute us—they leave us without words. Overwhelmed, confused, distraught, despairing—and/or profoundly grateful, reflective, renewed, attuned—whatever our state, we are often left speechless, feeling that words fall flat, or do not convey what we want/need/intend. In the face of these challenges, those who are in pain, as well as those who care for them, may need new ways of communicating, new tools for talking, and new modes of relating.

Enter the Psalms. For centuries, Jews (and others) have turned to the biblical Book of Psalms for solace, guidance, catharsis, renewal, and much more. The 150 Psalms that constitute this important component of the “Writings” section of the Jewish Bible reflect a wide range of experience and expression—anger and acceptance, complaint and comfort, despair and delight, fatigue and faith, and so on. In approaching this body of ancient spiritual or sacred poetry, many have found words that “work” for them, or that help uncover their own words, hitherto obscure or inaccessible. Even though some of the language or images may seem alien, when one digs deep enough one may find wellsprings of great impact.

Psalms pervade the established Jewish liturgy of morning, afternoon, and evening prayer services, but our tradition made the Psalms into a very “flexible” resource—encouraging us to turn to them when we need them, and be less bound by, for example, strictures that require certain prayers to be recited at certain times of the day. Thus, although certain Psalms are, indeed assigned to certain junctures (for example, from Sunday through Shabbat we travel through Psalms 24, 48, 82, 94-5, 81, 93 and 92 as the “Psalm of the Day”), we may always turn to the Psalms as “ad hoc” sources of support.

The Levites sang the Psalms in the ancient Temple, not unlike the way growing numbers of congregations welcome Shabbat on Friday night by chanting their way through six Psalms (95-99, plus 29) praising the beauty of nature (corresponding to the six days of Creation) and culminating in the Psalm for Shabbat (92). Psalms may be heard at many moments in life: at the bedside of those who are ill, at the beginning of the blessing after meals, at funerals, when visiting a grave, and in many other settings. They are there to help express our great joy and our devastating despair, our gratitude and our distress, life’s “ups” and, of course, its “downs.”

So, what do you do with these Psalms?

To answer that question, it would be helpful to identify seven “functions” that Psalms have developed in Jewish life:

**Ritual:** As a source of regular expression, to mark certain moments and create a container for feelings, ideas, and values, either in an established traditional, communal context, or in one’s own personal, innovative time and place. One recent

example is a Jewish support group that began each meeting with a Psalm of despair or complaint (such as 13, 77, or 88) and ended with a Psalm of gratitude (such as 18, 91, or 118.)

**Prayer:** As with other forms of Jewish prayer, Psalms may provide various opportunities: for giving words to hopes, fears, wishes, etc.; to both experience the pain and transcend it; to “name” one’s distress or gratitude; and/or to reconnect to tradition and community, or to a basic inner sense of wholeness.

**Song:** So many lines of Psalms have been put to music, and even calling on the melodies without the words can have great impact. Here are several examples of lines from Psalms that have become known as “Jewish healing songs” because of their words and/or music: Psalm 27: Verse 4 (*Ahat Sha’alti* / “One Thing I Ask”); Psalm 118: Verse 5 (*Min HaMeitzar* / “From the Narrow Straits”); Psalm 121: Verses 1-2, (*Esa Einai* / “I Lift Up My Eyes”).

**Study:** The Hebrew of the Psalms is often obscure or otherwise hard to “crack,” having gone through centuries of recopying. This means that there is a lot to explore—for example, to compare how different editions translate the same lines.

**Meditation:** Once you find a piece from Psalms that resonates, that has meaning for you, you might want to focus in on it for a set period of time. Words of Psalms can be a valuable tool in refocusing, centering, and quieting oneself. Some people post a verse, phrase, or word on their office computer screen so they can freely turn to it in the course of a workday; others make their own audio recording to be able to play it back while sitting in a quiet, undisturbed setting.

**Community:** One profound Jewish practice organizes members of a Jewish community into a *Hevra Tehillim*, a “Psalm Fellowship,” which gathers with some regularity to study/chant Psalms together. In some places, when an individual is ill, the community has divided the 150 Psalms among all its members, so that the entire book of Psalms is read and dedicated daily to healing, cure, strength, solace, and/or recovery. Community is an—maybe the—essential component of Jewish healing.

**Conversation:** In time, as certain words or phrases from Psalms become especially meaningful to you, consider weaving them into your speech—so that the ancient words bolster your ability to heal and integrate.

The strength of Psalms lies substantially in *you*—in what the reader brings to the words and infuses in to them. Psalms are a container for our fears and hopes, a catalyst for the freeing up and offering up of our profound and deep-set wishes, prayers, desires, and insights.

## “FROM THE DEPTHS” One Approach to Exploring/Experiencing a Psalm

© Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW, 1997  
Rabbinic Director, The National Center for  
Jewish Healing

1. Read the Psalm through once out loud—and then once to yourself, quietly.
2. Look for a section, sentence, phrase, or word that speaks to you, and circle it.
3. Chart the Psalm in terms of its meaning:
  - a. Can you label 2, 3, or 4 distinct sections? Mark and label them.
  - b. Are there distinct voices? (Psalmist, God, Enemies, Others? Label them.)
  - c. Can you summarize the "flow" of the Psalm –e.g. from pain to despair to searching to reaffirmation? If so, please describe briefly:

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4. Do you experience something in some way familiar? Where?  
Verse (s):

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5. Where do you encounter difficulties in meaning? Verse(s):

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- a. What is foreign? What needs clarification?

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- b. What would you eliminate? (which words, verses, ideas?):

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6. If you were asked to amplify or develop one piece of this Psalm, what might you write? Feel free to offer 2 or 3 lines:

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7. Finally, if you had to name this Psalm, as one would a poem, what would you call it? (Feel free to use something from the Psalm or from outside it.)

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From the beginning of the Hebrew month of Elul—one month before Rosh Hashannah – and all the way through the holiday of Sukkot, traditional Jews add Psalm 27 to their daily prayers. Though this Psalm was chosen by the rabbis to accompany us through this High Holiday season, it also has much to offer those of us struggling with illness—whether as patient, family member or friend, or health care provider. Our tricky “balancing act” of acceptance and activism, of living in the moment but fighting for the future, finds expression in these ancient words attributed to King David. Read it through using the accompanying approach to exploring Psalms as a guide. As you discover the phrases or ideas which resonate for you, consider revisiting the Psalm with some regularity, alone or with close ones, during this season of Return and Response. Perhaps it will trigger your own creative writing effort to articulate your deepest prayers. It will certainly link you to a community and a tradition of support, faith, affirmation, and hope.

## Psalm 27 A PSALM OF DAVID

Adonai is my Light and my Help;  
whom will I fear?  
Adonai is the Strength of my life;  
who can make me afraid?

When evil people draw near to devour my flesh –  
it is these foes and enemies who stumble and fall.

Even if an army rises up against me,  
my heart will have no fear!  
Even if a whole war besets me,  
I will still feel secure.

One thing I ask from Adonai,  
one thing I seek:  
to dwell in Adonai's house all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of Adonai,  
to explore Adonai's sanctuary.

Adonai will shelter me in a Sukkah  
on an evil day;  
Adonai will conceal me in the secret shelter of a tent,  
raise me up safely upon a rock.

My head is high above my enemies around me;  
I sacrifice in Adonai's tent, to the blasts of trumpets,  
singing and chanting a hymn to Adonai!

Adonai – *sh'ma*/hear my voice when I call!  
Have mercy on me and respond!

You seek my heart,  
My heart seeks You—  
I seek Your Presence.

Do not hide Your Face from me;  
Do not turn Your servant away in anger!  
You have always been my Help  
so do not abandon me, do not forsake me,  
my God, my Saving One.

Even if my father and mother abandoned me,  
Adonai would gather me in.

Teach me Your ways, Adonai,  
Guide me on a straight and level path,  
because of my watchful enemies.

Do not hand me over to my foes;  
ignore the false witnesses and unjust accusers  
who rise up against me.  
breathing violence!

I believe I will yet see Adonai's Goodness  
in the Land of Life.

Hope in Adonai!  
Be strong inside, and let your heart be brave!  
Yes, yes, hope in Adonai!

TRANSLATION BY RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, CSW ©1995

**Over the centuries, certain Psalms became associated with particular moments or transitions in life, for example:**

**For times of communal distress:** 20, 28, 85, 86, 102, 130, 142

**For recovery from illness:** 6, 30, 41, 88, 103

**For thanksgiving:** 9, 21, 57, 95, 116, 138

Reb Nahman of Bratslav, the Hassidic master of some 200 years ago, designated ten psalms as having special power for healing: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, and 150; he saw these as embodying the "ten kinds of song" outlined by Rabbi Joshua ben Levi in the Talmud (Pesachim 177a.)

Mention must be made of “the Psalmist in you.” Readers may be familiar with the remarkable writings of Debbie Perlman, Psalmist-in-Residence of Beth Emet The Free Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois. Through her various challenges in life, Debbie has blessed us all by turning pen to paper and creating contemporary Psalms that bridge the tradition with an intimate, first person, contemporary voice. Her most recent book is called *Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing and Praise* (distributed by Independent Publishers Group: 1-800-888-4741.)

**Here are a few references for further exploration of Psalms/Tehillim:**

**Feuer, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim.** *Tehillim Treasury: Inspirational Messages and Uplifting Interpretations of the Psalms of David* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1994)

**Hirsch, Rabbi Samson Raphael.** *Sefer Tehillim: The Psalms* (Jerusalem/New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1978)

**Levine, Herbert J.** *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

**Sarna, Nahum M.** *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel.* (New York: Schocken Books paperback, 1993)

**Weintraub, Simkha Y.** *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body: Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in Psalms.* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994)

A REMARKABLE CELEBRATION OF LIFE:

# THE STORY OF A NEW HEALING RITE

By Rabbi Judith B. Edelstein



When I learned that my new friend, Ina Safra, had been diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor, my immediate impulse was to comfort her. We met for dinner that week, and amidst corned beef and knishes our discussion centered around God. I can't recall what I said, but as Ina has often repeated, our conversation helped to revitalize her faith to deal with the shock of her circumstances. It was evident that she was spiritually strengthened and prepared to fight against what lay ahead with enormous courage. Nearly a year after her first symptom appeared, during which time she underwent grueling and extensive treatment, Ina was told that it would take a miracle to cure her. Yet she held steadfast in her belief and remained undaunted.

During one of our many conversations, I offhandedly asked her if she would like me to lead a healing service for her. She was thrilled with the idea and immediately began to plan the service. Despite my offer, I found that I wanted to postpone it. For the truth was that I had spoken impulsively (as is my nature), never having led or even attended such a service! Finally we decided to set a date for a couple of months later, geared to the outcome of another planned surgical procedure. In the interim, each time we spoke, Ina grew more excited about the service.

Her plans evolved from hosting a small group in her apartment to having the service in the sanctuary of the Brotherhood Synagogue. Ina decided to invite everyone to whom she wanted to express her appreciation. One day, she called to tell me she had made arrangements with a musician. A few days later, she informed me that a deli dinner would follow the service. As the day grew closer, it became clearer to me that the focus of Ina's healing was her desire to celebrate life. I had to work hard at "letting go" of my own control of the healing service, and together with her began to create a format for the service itself. I suggested that she ask people to bring her "found gifts"—items that reminded them of her, nothing specially purchased. She loved the idea and asked several of her closest friends to present her with these gifts at her service. In addition they were to explain why the item reminded them of her. Ina chose various people to read aloud several prayers which she selected from a healing booklet I had given her earlier. She had been reading these prayers daily.

A printed program was distributed at the service, which included the prayers interspersed among words to songs of healing, alternating with gift giving. The title page read "Healing Service and a Celebration of Life, Ina Safra." The service began with the *mincha* service led by Rabbi Dan Alder of the Brotherhood synagogue. The rabbi emeritus, Rabbi Block, who himself has been stricken with Parkinson's disease, spoke eloquently about the psalms, and Cantor Emeritus Diamond chanted Psalm 23 with incredible pathos.

I didn't know what to expect even after it began, feeling more like an emcee than a rabbi. At one point, the musician's playing and singing of the song "Kol HaOlam Kulo" was so spirited that I jumped off the *bima*, grabbed people's hands, and we danced around until the aisles were overflowing—a first in the history of the Brotherhood Synagogue! The "found gifts" provided Ina's closest friends with the opportunity to publicly express what they valued in her while Ina was well enough to absorb their love. One friend brought a candle in a small glass and described how the candle was symbolic of the miracle of Chanukah, which reminded her of the miracle of Ina's life.

Indeed, the service was a remarkable celebration of Ina's life in which all 120 people present participated in Ina's healing. For the next several weeks she received calls and notes from the participants, describing how meaningful the service had been to them. The planning, experiencing and reliving that afternoon has helped Ina immeasurably. Even now, she plays the tape of the service, looks at the photos and rereads the mail.

When I spontaneously blessed Ina at the culmination of the service, singing the ancient words of the priestly blessing, "Yivarechecha Adonai, viyishmerecha...", I felt energy surging from my toes into my hands. It seemed as if the Spirit of Life leapt from my palms which were covering Ina's head, into her brain, caressing it, if only temporarily. Even the voice that sang out from the depth of my soul sounded different to my ears that day. In blessing my beloved friend, my life was transformed. I understood through her illness and belief that the best we can do in our lives is to serve God.

RABBI JUDITH B. EDELSTEIN is the spiritual leader of Temple Hatikvah in Flanders, New Jersey

## JEWISH HEALING RESOURCES

### THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR JEWISH HEALING

would like to compile information about local Jewish healing prayer services. If your healing center or synagogue conducts regular services, Write or fax our office. Please include all appropriate information plus a contact phone number.

### New and Noteworthy

**Cardin, Rabbi Nina Beth.** *Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss.* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1999)

**Diamant, Anita.** *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew.* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998)

**Freeman, Dr. David, Ed. and Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams.** *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999)

"T'shuvah/Repentance, T'fillah/Prayer and Tz'dakah/Righteousness may avert the severity of the decree."

So we say, so we pray on the High Holidays: that our actions can, indeed, influence our suffering—at least in terms of how we approach it, relate to it, manage it, use it.

In this issue, we touch on T'shuvah and T'fillah, seeking to build a bridge between these central Jewish ideas and practices and those who are confronted with illness and loss.

When it comes to Tz'dakah—which comes from the word for Justice but is used for "philanthropy"—we need you. Please use the enclosed envelope to make a contribution in honor of the New Jewish Year of 5760, helping us in our growing and deepening efforts. May it bring you health, happiness, peace, and fulfillment.

—SYW

**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.** A 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.

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

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# Save the Dates

The National Center for Jewish Healing

is pleased to inform you of several

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Fall/Winter 1999-2000

*For Clergy, Health Care Professionals,  
Healing Center Staff and Volunteers*

### **NEW YORK CITY: NOVEMBER 7, 8-9, 10, 1999**

12th Annual *Bikur Cholim* Conference  
Sunday, November 7

Sponsored by The Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin  
*Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council\**

### **Sustaining Our Spirits: Jewish Spiritual Support Groups**

A 2-Day Intensive Training for Co-facilitators  
Monday & Tuesday, November 8 & 9

Sponsored by The National Center for Jewish Healing\* in  
collaboration with the AJFCA

### **End of Life Issues and Care: Jewish Perspectives**

Wednesday, November 10

Sponsored by The Shira Ruskay  
Jewish Hospice Information Services\*

*For Rabbis and Cantors*

### **NEW YORK CITY: NOVEMBER 30, 1999**

When a Child Dies: Helping the Rabbi Help

A one-day symposium for those who provide spiritual  
support within a congregational setting.

Co-sponsored by The New York Jewish Healing Center\* and The Jewish  
Institute for Pastoral Care of the HealthCare Chaplaincy in partnership with  
the New York Board of Rabbis and UJA-Federation of New York

### **PARKSVILLE, NY: NOVEMBER 12-14, 1999**

JACS Spiritual Retreat  
Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent  
Persons & Significant Others\*

*For Rabbis*

### **SUMMIT, NEW JERSEY: FEBRUARY 27-29, 2000**

*Refaeinu III: A Practicum on Healing and the Rabbinate*

Sponsored by The National Center for Jewish Healing\*

For more information, please call (212) 399-2320 Ext. 0

\*A Jewish Connections Program of JBFCS

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