

Shavu'ot and Healing

When Heaven and Earth are Joined

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Like every festival in the year's cycle, *Shavu'ot* has both a physical and spiritual meaning: it marks the time of the Spring harvest, when we gratefully acknowledge the fruitfulness of *Adonai's* creation, and it is a time that we are present at Sinai to receive Torah once again. To mark its connection to this world, we can decorate our homes with green boughs and flowers, as a sign of renewed abundance. And we can recognize its spiritual meaning by participation in a *tikkun leyl Shavu'ot*, spending the night studying texts of revelation. We recognize the bounty of this world even as we might be awed by the blinding light of *Adonai's* gift of Torah. We stand at the boundaries of both worlds, being nourished in both body and soul.

The Talmud tells us that when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, there were flashes of lightning and the blowing of trumpets, while *Adonai* "bent the heavens, moved the earth, and shook the bounds of the world, so that the depths trembled and the heavens grew frightened . . . and opened, and Mt. Sinai, free from the earth, rose into the air, so that its summit towered into the heavens." Yet, the children of Israel slept through it all, unaware of that moment when the skies opened up for a brief instant, and heaven and earth were joined. Thus, participation in an all-night *tikkun* becomes a way of telling *Adonai* that we are ready this time, if only we can stay awake and pay attention. But what are we waiting for?

Tikkun is a word that can have many meanings at *Shavu'ot*. It is the instituted order of study on the night of *Shavu'ot*, and it is also the adornment of the *Shekhinah* (the indwelling presence of God) in all her bridal jewels. But *tikkun* also means repair or restoration, and so *Shavu'ot* offers us the opportunity to repair and restore the union between heaven and earth, between our bodies and our spirits. It is a time when we can become aware of what we are and make ourselves whole. It can be a time of healing, for both the world and for ourselves.

Note: My thanks to Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky of Congregation Ansche Chesed for this lesson in Hebrew etymology.

In the Bible, Shavu'ot has two names which point to its agricultural origins: Hag HaKatzir, the Feast of the Harvest and Yom HaBikkurim, the Day of the First Fruits. The celebrations included bringing harvest offerings to the Temple.

As one might expect with a Holiday that was connected both to the Temple and to the land, the nature of Shavu'ot shifted with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the ongoing dispersion of the Jews. Shavu'ot became increasingly associated with the Revelation at Sinai which took place during the month of Sivan. The focus of the holiday turned from agriculture to Torah culture (the portable "land" of the Jews), from the Temple to the synagogue, from the nation to the community.

Some see Shavu'ot as ritually impoverished—lacking, for example, the aesthetically rich observances of the Sukkah or the Seder. But the Giving/Receiving of the Torah is such a major, ongoing, defining event for Jews and Judaism that Shavu'ot's very simplicity has encouraged new rituals to develop. Both the simple, straight-forward traditional observances and the newer insights and innovations have great potential for those seeking spiritual healing and growth.

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Healing through the *Tikkun Leyl Shavu'ot* Seven Suggestions

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Jewish mystical traditions tell us that the skies open during the night of *Shavu'ot*, reflecting the momentous Revelation at Mt. Sinai. Responding to this, Jews for centuries have used the night of *Shavu'ot* to receive Torah, by opening their hearts and their minds to its teachings in a study session called a *Tikkun* (literally, "repair"). To maximize the healing potential of this extraordinary opportunity, here are seven ideas:

• **To link the *Tikkun* to healing, focus on texts that deal with illness and healing drawn from the three major sections of the Jewish Bible:**

From the Five Books of Moses: The story of Miriam's skin disease, Numbers 12:1-16

From the Prophets: The story of King Hezekiah's approaching death: II Kings 20:1-11 and/or Isaiah 38:1-22

From the Writings: Psalm 103:3 and Psalm 147:3

Explore whatever ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary commentaries you can, and add your own voices to the ongoing "peeling of the Torah onion." Some recommended commentaries will be on our website www.ncjh.org

• **The material in this edition of *The Outstretched Arm* with its themes of how Torah heals and approaches to connecting to Revelation can be useful for this special night of study.**

• **The Biblical Book of Psalms**—ten of which were designated by Reb Nahman of Bratslav in his special *Tikkun* ("remedy") for healing (16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 137, 150)—has always served deep spiritual, emotional, psychological, even mystical purposes for Jews. Studying, chanting, or meditating on them can be a significant source of strength, comfort and/or perspective. (If the Psalms are foreign to you, see "One Approach to Experiencing a Psalm" and the "Books about the Psalms in English" bibliography, on our NCJH website).

• **Utilizing Jewish music and learning/chanting** such as the NCJH's "18 Songs of Healing from the Book of Psalms" can bolster ones' personal healing. A list of these songs and citations are available on our website. *R'fuah Sh'leimah: 48 Songs of Healing and Wholeness*, provides musical notation; it can be purchased through www.s2k.org/publications. Consider involving musicians.

• **Another "natural" for the *Tikkun* on *Shavu'ot* is the Book of Ruth** (see pages 8-9). Study the relatively brief text, giving special attention to the healing journeys/roles of Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Oved and the community of women in Bethlehem. One valuable source for interpretation is *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim A Sacred Story*, edited by Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (NY: Ballantine Books/Random House, 1994)

• **Some Jews follow the night-long study session** by ritually immersing themselves on the morning of *Shavu'ot*, recalling the three days of preparations observed by the Israelites in the desert prior to the Revelation at Sinai.

• **If ritual immersion is not feasible or advisable**, a symbolic ritual handwashing, accompanied by the following kavannah/intention can be a powerful experience:

"*Erhatz b'ni-kayon kappai, va-a-sov'vah et mizba-ha-kha, Adonai!*"

"I wash my hands in purity, and encircle Your altar, Adonai!

(Psalm 26:6)

• If all-night study sessions are out of the question, consider assembling a small group for an intimate sunrise service of study and celebration. **Greet the day with words of Torah!**

Text as Shelter from the Storm

BY RABBI SHELDON MARDER, *Chaplain of the Jewish Home in San Francisco, CA;* SeRaF

"Text as Shelter from the Storm" is an excerpt from the chapter entitled "God Is in the Text: Using Sacred Text and Teaching in Jewish Pastoral Care," which will appear with complete citations in the volume *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources (2nd Edition)*, Edited by Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman, *Jewish Lights*, 2005 (forthcoming).

Since the days of the earliest rabbis, Jews have experienced study of Torah as the central axis around which all else pivots. This idea emerges in diverse ways. In matters of illness and health, we find *midrashic* "prescriptions" in which Torah is deemed the cure-all par excellence (see, for example, *Eruvin* 54a on page 6-7).

Out of context, this *midrash* might seem very odd. First of all, most of us probably find it hard to imagine a literal belief in the Torah's ability to cure illness. Second, the well known story of Rabbis Yochanan and Eleazar in *Berachot* 5b confirms what we know from personal experience: healing most often resides not in words, but in the touch of a hand.

Just as powerful, however, is the tradition that places text and teacher at the center of the healing relationship. One passage from a series of short texts about the disease *ra'atan* is a good example:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would associate with those who suffered from *ra'atan* and engage in Torah study with them, saying: The verse in Proverbs (5:19) describes the Torah as "a loving deer and a graceful gazelle," the latter expression —*ya'alat chen*—having the additional connotation in Hebrew of "arousing grace." If the Torah bestows grace upon those who learn it, will it not protect them from danger as well? (Steinsaltz Talmud)

Unlike the other rabbis mentioned in *Ketubot* 77b, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi visited people afflicted with the dreaded illness *ra'atan*, possibly a skin disease whose symptoms included trembling and extreme physical impairment. While his colleagues were preoccupied with finding ways to avoid *ra'atan*, Yehoshua ben Levi immersed himself in studying Torah among the people who suffered from it, and engaged in the most ennobling act of all: he taught them Torah. Somehow, of all the sages, Yehoshua alone felt safe and protected from infection. But how? Perhaps because of his relation to Torah; perhaps because of his mitzvah of teaching the sick. Despite our radically different under-



standing of infectious diseases, it is clear that Yehoshua must have been motivated by one belief that we can share with him: the belief, articulated by Moshe Halbertal in *People of the Book*, that "God is present in the sacred text and studying it is thus tantamount to meeting God."

The idea that Torah cures or protects has been a persistent one. For example, "after the birth of any child," writes Abraham Idelsohn, "the room in which the mother lay used to be hung with placards inscribed with Psalm 121 and with cabalistic formulae against evil spirits." From Idelsohn's language, we might imagine that he is describing an exotic, medieval custom; but I have discovered surprising evidence of this practice in my own family, circa 1910, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Torah as protection found new spiritual expression in the creative voice of 19th century Hasidic commentary. Explicating Numbers 35:6 ("The towns that you assign to the Levites shall comprise the six cities of refuge...to which you shall add forty-two towns"), Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Opatov wrote that the six cities correspond to the six words, "*Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad*"; and the forty-two towns correspond to the passage that concludes "and upon your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9). Heschel thus teaches that these forty-eight biblical words constitute a "place" of refuge: no matter one's sins, a person of faith finds shelter and protection in these words by loving God and accepting "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven."

Can these kinds of beliefs mean something to us today, or are they relics of the pre-modern mind? Listen to the words of a modern writer, the Holocaust diarist Etty Hillesum: "Sometimes I want to flee with everything I possess into a few words, seek refuge in them. But there are still no words to shelter me...I am in search of a haven, yet I must first build it for myself, stone by stone. Everyone seeks a home, a refuge. And I am always in search of a few words." (An

continued on page 9

The Before and the After

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Jewish Healing Program, JFCS.

Living in the mid-west, nothing fascinates me more than twilight on a summer's eve. Beginning her descent sometimes as late as 10:00 PM, the sun's colors seduce watchful eyes through a menagerie of dusks and then without warning, into a sea of blackness. It is nearly impossible to discern when twilight has turned to night, when Before has become After.

I have often wondered at the thoughts of the Israelites in their Before: preparing for Exodus, witnessing the dry bed at the Red Sea, entering the Promised Land. Of course, in my job as a healing program professional, I see Jews while they experience their After: following a diagnosis, in the middle of treatment, during *shiva*. In all of this, I ask myself, at what point does Before become After? At what point does transition give way to transformation?

The *Omer* period, after Pesach and before *Shavu'ot*, provides us with a time to look forward, to see the potential in what's to come. Counting upwards to *Shavu'ot* provides room for us to gather momentum, to move beyond the Before and After, and to reach toward potential, toward Yet. In embracing the Giving of the Torah, we accept the words of our ancestors as guidance for our progeny; as the link between those generations, we embrace the Before and After as a continuum.

While Passover fades and *Shavu'ot* comes in sight, may you find strength in the seamless story of the Jewish people, where Before and After emerge as one. *Hadesh yameinu qekedem*, GOD, Renew our days as they once were, so that we may know Your everlasting strength and understand our place in Your creation.

The Eternal, the Community and Torah

The difficult journey of the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt through the wilderness to the foot of Mt. Sinai is reenacted every year. We mark this passage symbolically by counting the 49 days of the *Omer*, beginning on the 2nd day of Passover and conclude with the celebration of *Shavu'ot* on the 50th day. The dramatic transformation from a chaotic tribe of slaves, to a people acting as a community and nation, takes place as the Israelites cross over the Sea of Reeds. At this historic event the first way God defines and communicates God's nature to the Jewish people is significant. God says, "For I the Eternal am your Healer." *Ki Ani Adonai Rofehcha* (Exodus 15:26) *

As the Israelites continue on their journey through the wilderness, after receiving Torah at Mt. Sinai, Miriam the Prophet becomes ill. Her brother Moses cries out to God on her behalf, "Please God heal her/*El Na Refah Na La* (Numbers 12:10,13). As Miriam slowly recovers the community waits for her. They do not abandon her in her hour of need.

We turn to the Eternal for healing, and we turn to our community for healing. For over a decade the National Jewish Healing Movement has helped nurture and support ever-widening circles of community. As one of the many Jewish Healing programs in North America, we have defined our mission, in Boston, as helping to ensure that people in the Jewish community feel connected when facing isolation, illness, or loss. "It is not good for people to be alone." (Genesis 2:18)

During this season of the Festival of *Shavu'ot* we look to the Eternal, to community, and to the Torah, the Tree of Life, for rich sources of healing, wholeness, and support.

Appreciation to Rabbi Meir Sendor for this teaching.

MARJORIE U. SOKOLL, BSW, MED, is the Founder and Director of Jewish Healing Connections of Greater Boston's JF&CS; SeRaF*.

P'TACH LIBI BETORATECHA *Opening the Heart to Torah*

RABBI AMY EILBERG

Co-Director of the Yedidya Center for Jewish Spiritual Direction; Co-founder of the Jewish Healing Movement

Three times every day, traditional Jews pray the words, "*P'tach libi beToratecha*," "Open my heart to Your Torah," at the sacred moment at the end of the silent *Amidah* (standing) prayer. What might help our hearts to open to the rich nourishment and healing power of Torah this year?

The classical commentators on the Torah were fascinated by the fact that the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, in the midst of the wilderness, in the middle of our people's long, perilous journey from slavery to freedom. The Torah, according to this line of thinking, could not have been revealed in the city, in the midst of the people's ordinary routine, in the busy fullness of life-as-usual. Rather, Torah could only be revealed in a radically open, empty and unfamiliar place. For only here could we recognize our powerlessness, surrender to our fear, confusion and dependency, and let our hearts fall open. The Torah was given to us when we needed God the most, when we had no choice but to trust. Only in such a place could we open our hearts to Torah.

This year, as we once again approach *Shavu'ot*, our Festival of Revelation, imagine that you are in a wilderness: a place without signposts, where nothing is familiar and your ability to control your life is revealed as illusory. In this place, open yourself to the wisdom that can only come from Beyond, from the One. Allow yourself to be guided, trusting that you will be given exactly what you need, one step after another. Imagine that everyone you know, everyone in the world, is in the same state of radical trust and readiness to receive Divine Wisdom as you are at this moment. Now open your eyes and see that the earth itself is trembling, anticipating the gift of Revelation. Let your heart open, to receive the Torah that you most need this *Shavu'ot*.



*A Breath of The One:
The Revelation of Torah Through Song*
- Excerpts from an essay by Debbie Friedman, songwriter and singer

The Torah sings to us through many voices. Here are a few of them:

1. First is the text, which conveys its own lyrical melody even before being given the trope in which it can be chanted aloud.
2. Second is the trope, the ancient melody of that chant, amplifying the stories told in the text by accentuating and punctuating.
3. Third is music written, not in the context of a Torah service, but using the text as source material that is interpreted on many levels and then integrated so as to enhance the richness of our daily lives. It is through this "voice" that Torah becomes a true Eitz Chayim (Tree of Life); we can utilize in our everyday thinking and being... if we are fully present and conscious.
4. The fourth song of Torah is found in the white of the parchment on which the text is written. To hear this music, we must become white and clear like the parchment of the very first Torah, making space to receive the song of revelation.

Within the Torah, between each letter, word, sentence and paragraph, white space awaits our encounter with The Divine Creator of that space. This encounter is beyond sound, vision and sensation. It is the moment when we can no longer differentiate between ourselves and the text. This moment of reciprocity with the Divine creates an experience of openness, and we become one with the text, and all that is connected with it.

Ultimately, revelation is like music that has been composed and written on paper; unknown, unheard, untouched until someone chooses to see it, breathe life into it and give it voice. Only then is it heard.

The central Jewish work of Tikkun (healing) is an effort to bring about a more hopeful world. Our breath and our song help us heal. Beyond our comprehension, G-d gives us one more breath, moment after moment. Now, how will we choose to use it?

Reaching the Center

Some people say words of Torah
to reach the seventh heaven,
while I think:

Words of Torah must be spoken
to reach the center of the listener.

RABBI MENAHEM MEDNEL OF KOTSK

Receiving Torah:

Three Things to Do

EXCERPTED FROM TORAH REFLECTIONS

6-7 SIVAN 5764/2004

How do we relate to Sinai when we are all out of sorts with illness, tragedies or disappointments? The timeless wisdom of revelation can easily be overlooked in times of trouble. Why does a God who revealed Him/Her self over three millennia ago often seem so far away to us just when we need God? Before we can touch the majesty of divine revelation, perhaps we need to give of our first fruits by giving to others with deeds of lovingkindness or harvesting our blessings with gratitude, or occupying ourselves in sacred study. For the Torah was given to the Israelite people as a holy community and we need relationship to make it live. Kindness to others, thankfulness for what we have, and lifelong learning, are keys to experiencing Sinai today.

However you choose to celebrate this festival of *Shavu'ot*, be it as a celebration of your own first fruits of volunteering, harvests of thanksgiving, or Torah study, may you enjoy a healing run up to that ever new sacred experience of Sinai!

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*For more information on how to receive
Weekly Healing Oriented Torah Commentary
Series, contact The Bay Area Jewish
Healing Center at jewishhealing@ioaging.org
or call (415) 750-4197 or visit
www.jewishhealingcenter.org*

**We asked several Jewish healers,
“In your experience, how does
Torah heal?”**

**STANDING AT SINAI:
RECEIVING HEALING
COMMANDMENTS**

PEGGY SAKOW, NCJH Division
Board Representative; Website Librarian

When the *mitzvot* (commandments) were given our people said, “We will do and we will hear (understand).” This is a call to action to answer God’s bidding. The Israelites, now a community of free people, are given a code to live by. Among many other obligations, community members cannot ignore the needs and troubles of others. We were given a sense of duty at Mount Sinai-commandedness. Underlying the duties we have towards one another is the powerful knowledge that we are all “made in the image of God”, and thus, serving one another is serving God.

Jewish healing is serving God by helping those in illness or loss recover and return to the community whenever possible, or in helping a member of our human family in his/her return to the Source of Life. It is more than a kindness to perform works of healing; it is a commandment. We are equally commanded to take care of ourselves for we are “in the image of our Creator”. We are commanded to seek healing of mind and body.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

The Healing Torah, Eruvin 54a

R. Joshua b. Levi stated:

If a man is on a journey and has no company
let him occupy himself with the study of the Torah,
since it is said in Scripture:

“For they shall be a chaplet of grace...” (Proverbs 1:9)

If he feels pains in his head,
let him engage in the study of the Torah, since it is said:
“For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto your head...” (Ibid.)

If he feels pains in his throat,
let him engage in the study of the Torah, since it is said:
“...and chains about your neck.” (Ibid)

If he feels pains in his bowels,
let him engage in the study of the Torah, since it is said:
“It shall be a healing to your navel...” (Proverbs 3:8)

If he feels pain in his bones,
let him engage in the study of the Torah, since it is said:
“...and marrow to your bones...” (Ibid)

If he feels pain in all his body,
let him engage in the study of the Torah, since it is said:
“...and healing to all his flesh.” (Proverbs 4:22)

R. Judah son of R. Hiyya remarked:

Come and see how the measure/dispensation of mortals
is not like that of the Holy Blessed One.

In the dispensation of mortals,
when a man administers a drug to a fellow,
it may be beneficial to one limb but injurious to another;
but with the Holy Blessed One, it is not so.

He gave a Torah to Israel
and it is a drug of life for all his body, as it is said:
“...and healing to all his flesh.” (Ibid.)

ADDRESSING THE SYMPTOMS AND GETTING TO THE CORE

We find a distinction drawn between two categories of healing—one via an emissary, the other directly from God. The distinction isn’t between a miraculous versus non miraculous cure, but rather between one that is superficial versus one that is total.

Let me explain—Even people who are in good physical health, as seen from the perspective of our tradition, need to be “cured.” Maimonides, among others, compared the character defects we all suffer from to illness and their resolution to medicine. Sometimes we address these issues with treatment of symptoms, but not through changing ourselves in ways that would address the underlying cause. This approach resembles healing via an emissary, for the emissary is authorized, spiritually speaking, to heal only with the “outside” of the person.

But with study, prayer and inner work we may be privileged to have God heal us directly, a healing that gets to the core of what ails us...

Let’s hope and pray we may harness divine healing to bring about “full” recovery ...from the outside and inside.

RABBI MEIR FUND, Congregation Sheves Achim, Brooklyn, NY and a leading teacher of Torah and Kabbalah.

NEVER ALONE

For those of us trained in the Yeshiva community and who maintain deep ties to that community, the study of Torah is often seen as a rich intellectual endeavor. But the Torah has another, spiritual, healing quality. The study of the Torah reminds us that we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

Rav Solovetichik z"l once spoke of how when he give a *shiur* (lecture), all the rabbis of old were present in the classroom participating in the discussion. When we study the classic texts with their ancient and modern commentaries, trying to understand God's word, we know that we are not alone but part of a link that transcends the present.

It is no accident that the Hebrew word in the Talmud's text for "company" is *levaya*, which is also the Hebrew word for funeral, when we accompany the deceased on his or her last journey. We all face difficulties in life - pain and stress surrounding issues of illness, job, family and ultimately our own mortality. We often face loneliness. The wisdom of the Sages reminds us that if we study Torah, we are not alone. We face the pain and the crucial questions knowing that we are part of something greater than ourselves. And that is healing.

RABBI JOSEPH S. OZAROWSKI, DMIN.,
Director, Chicago Rabbinical Council (and
longtime contributor to *The Outstretched Arm*)

עירובין נד:א

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי:

המהלך בדרך ואין עמו לוייה -

יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר (משלי א') כי לזית חן הם.

חש בראשו - יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר כי לזית חן הם לראשך.

חש בגרונו - יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר וענקים לגרגרתך.

חש במעיו - יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר רפאות תהי לשרך.

חש בעצמותיו - יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר ושקוי לעצמותיך.

חש בכל גופו - יעסוק בתורה, שנאמר ולכל בשרו מרפא.

אמר רב יהודה ברבי חייא:

בא וראה, שלא כמדת הקדוש ברוך הוא מדת בשר ודם.

מדת בשר ודם, אדם נותן סם לחבירו - לזה יפה ולזה קשה.

אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא אינו כן,

נתן תורה לישראל - סם חיים לכל גופו, שנאמר ולכל בשרו מרפא.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

How does Torah study relate to Jewish healing? Judaism describes the study of Torah, in its broadest form, as studying the Five Books of Moses and other Jewish writings. I broaden the definition to include learning information about one's illness and how others have coped with illness and loss. This type of study might include a book on diabetes treatment, or a biography of a cancer survivor. Few of these books are, perhaps, 'sacred' texts, but they are still helpful in the struggle with illness or loss.

It is important to have a framework for understanding illness or loss and its impact on us. Rabbi Nancy Flam writes: "If we can find or develop a framework within which to understand our suffering, then sometimes the suffering itself becomes more bearable."

This is not to say that Judaism has one answer to this question. Rabbi Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* is most often misquoted as "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People", in an overpowering wish that there be one explanation. How much easier to cope with the pain and suffering that often accompanies illness and loss if we felt there was a reason for the experience. Unfortunately, although many wise scholars have shared their beliefs about the reasons for suffering, there is no one explanation. The value of study is the process of seeking and (hopefully) discovering reasons that are most meaningful to you.

I do not want to minimize the other values of study: learning for its own sake, because it leads to good deeds, or as a distraction from your experiences. However, when struggling with illness and loss, the greatest value of study may well be to create a framework for each individual's own understanding - their own narrative of meaning.

THE GIFT OF THE WELLSPRING

The image of Torah as this bottomless transcendent gift and obligation that is being given to me, and to us, is profoundly healing and restorative to my soul. It is a wellspring that I can tap at any time. I am supposed to wrestle with its text with my head and heart. What a beautiful way to study! I can experience the re-enactment of this gift-giving every Shabbat when the Torah is taken out of the ark and journeys throughout the synagogue/minyan community. It is this understanding that was missing in my Jewish education. Perhaps my openness to and need for this "big connection" is related to my several years' journey at the edge of death. It is healing to be part of the seamless story of the Jewish people.

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Founder and Coordinator, Jewish Healing Network of Chicago, JF&CS



THE BOOK OF RUTH: *Loss, Hessed and Healing*

Ashkenazi Jews read the Book of Ruth on *Shavu'ot* for a number of reasons: because the book's events take place at harvest time, because Ruth's "conversion" to Judaism mirrors our ongoing acceptance of the Torah since Sinai; and because of the book's concluding genealogy which leads from Ruth to King David, who, tradition says, was born and died on *Shavu'ot*.

A major theme of the book is the intense love and devotion between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, a love which deepens as they support one another in the days and years after the deaths of Naomi's sons. The three major figures in the Book—Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz—all exhibit great *hessed* (lovingkindness), which entails doing more for another person than the law actually requires, sensitively providing for his/her unique needs. Through the study of Ruth's classic and modern commentaries, we can derive insights about the nature of friendship (some trace Ruth's name to *re"ut*, which means friendship) and appreciate the help loved ones provide in coping with suffering and tragedy.

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, LMSW; SERAF*

Ruth and Naomi's relationship is also a metaphor that allows us to explore the dynamic relationship between *Israel* (the Jewish people) and God. We are all Naomi in her deepest despair. Having lost everything, Naomi cannot find anything to hope for. She sees herself as bitter, empty. Ruth accompanies her in her despair, commits herself to being a part of Naomi's life, no matter what. Ruth says: "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you dwell, I will dwell." Ruth is the symbol for God, standing with us, bringing us hope, strength and assurance even in our worst moments. Naomi provides Ruth with an opportunity to give love and support, and Ruth provides for Naomi's needs, showing her that hope is the only antidote for despair. Both women give, and in so doing, both women receive. *

EXCERPTED FROM

TORAH COMMENTARY FOR *SHAVU'OT* 5765

RABBI RAFAEL GOLDSTEIN, SERAF*

What is SeRaF?

SeRaF (Senior Resource Faculty), is a National Center for Jewish Healing Project designed to support the development of leadership in the Jewish healing movement and assist in the development of resource material for the field.

The NCJH has been pleased to partner with the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health, HUC-JIR, on this project, with the generous support of The Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Visit our Website

Visit www.ncjh.org for information on conferences, locations of Jewish healing centers, and downloadable resources to sustain the spirit in challenging times.

TIME OF RECEIVING

*Why do we say on Shavu'ot,
"the time of the giving of our Torah,"
and not,
"the time of the receiving of our Torah?"
Because the giving was at Mount Sinai,
while the receiving of the Torah is constant;
Every time and every moment that a person studies Torah-
is the time of its receiving.*

RABBI MENAHEM MENDEL OF KOTSK (1787 - 1859)

Wheatliness in its Ebb and Tide: A Mixed Metaphor for Shavu'ot

RABBI WILLIAM CUTTER, PH.D., Director, Kalsman Institute of Judaism and Health, HUC-JIR; SeRaF

The Book of Ruth begins in great loss, in preparation for *Tikkun* (fixing, harmonizing, strengthening.) The story captures the shape of so many experiences of both deprivation and healing, of longing for what is lost and of the gratifying rise to the challenge.

The story of Ruth and Naomi elevates *Tikkun*—into one of our great national themes.

A poem by Yehuda Amichai brings me back to the meaning of relationship in loss, of *Tikkun* that recalls midnights of reading about the gains and losses, about the rich harvest, and the hunger that mocks that harvest; of the promising giving of the law, and the law's own need of *Tikkun*.

Ruth the Moabite knew all about wheat and wheat fields,
About eyes big with love
And golden stubble after the harvest.
And Naomi, who said, "I went out full
And the Lord hath brought me home again empty."
She knew all about the physics of the empty and the full,
About her sons who died, about the stifled cry
Of a womb emptying like an accordion
Which makes music out of the full and the empty.

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ

FROM OPEN, CLOSED, OPEN: POEMS: ED. DRENKA WILLEN;

trans. by Hannah Bloch and Hannah Kronfeld, (Harcourt, New York) 2000.

The story reminds us again of the ebb and flow of our great waters, of the distinctions between the wavy peaks and the flat-seeming ground: of the fullness and the emptiness that moves through our lives. Why can't we live a life without that emptiness? Only a poet knows, and his knowledge comes through metaphors of indirection. An accordion indeed! Yehuda Amichai wrote his short reflection just before the great emptiness he created in the world when he left us. We are filled only by his words. As when we are struck by surprising weakness, or an ebbing that comes more leisurely with age, we find consolation only in the music or the words that come—accordion like—from the emptiness that paves the way for fullness. May your harvest this year be robust, and if it is your fate to experience a final emptiness somewhere in your lives, may the next year be renewed again in the fullness of *Shavu'ot*.

Text as Shelter from the Storm

continued from page 3

Interrupted Life).

Worlds apart theologically, Hillesum and Heschel are joined in spirit by the idea that words and text possess real substance and thus can provide a home or haven, a "city of refuge," as it were. In their own distinct ways, they are spiritual descendants of Yehoshua ben Levi, whose faith in the Torah's ability to shelter those who study it enabled him to comfort the isolated sick of his time.

Text as shelter strikes me as a quintessentially Jewish idea. Samuel Heilman describes the kind of protection that 20th century European Jews found in the fellowship of Torah study:

In the *khavruse* [fellowship study group]...one can escape feelings of isolation and share instead familiarity, fellowship, and community...In the face of persecution and derision, in the midst of pogrom and holocaust, the *khavruse* offered the Jew [according to Lucy Dawidowicz] "shelter from the storm outside, warmth and love instead of rejection and hostility, simultaneously strengthening self-esteem" (*The People of the Book*).

Here we see *khavruse* as an instrument of "pastoral care" on a communal level. In a similar way, historian Simon Rawidowicz observed that learning "kept the heart and mind of the Jew alive, free, open" in historical periods of narrowness, hostility, persecution and isolation. Through text study and teaching we too can offer "shelter from the storm...warmth and love" to those individuals whose well being is threatened by personal enemies: illness, stress, difficult relationships and grief.

The National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH) helps communities better meet the spiritual needs of Jews living with illness and loss. Working closely with a network of Jewish healing centers and programs, both nationally and internationally, we develop Jewish healing resources and leadership and we offer consultation, publications, training and referrals to community resources.

JBFCs is a 501"c" 3 organization.

All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services is one of the nation's leading voluntary mental health and social service agencies, touching the lives of more than 65,000 people each year.

Yes, I want to support NCJH's work by contributing to support the publication of *The Outstretched Arm*, continued development of creative Jewish healing resources and leadership.

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LETTER FROM THE COORDINATOR

Jewish healing programming continues to thrive and expand all around the U.S. and Canada. Some communities have recently enjoyed the expansion of their depth and breadth of programming—including the Bay Area, CA; New York and Westchester County, NY; Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA.; Boston and MetroWest, MA; Milwaukee, WI; Denver, CO. and Harrisburg, PA. In addition to the 30-some communities with established Jewish healing programs, several communities are actively immersed in the early planning stages—among them, Greenwich, CT; Western MA and Toledo, OH. (For a comprehensive update go to www.ncjh.org/centers.html)

Remarkably, indigenous efforts are now growing, as well, in South America and Israel. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, Comunidade Shalom is hosting the first-ever local conference on Jewish healing. Thanks to the SeRaF project, the support of UJA-Federation of New York's Caring Commission and Spirituality Task Force and the Kalsman Center on Judaism and Health of HUC-JIR, scores of Israelis have joined us in an open exploration of how to develop Jewish spiritual care and healing programming that are right for that context. Through in-person meetings in Jerusalem and in New York, video/ telephone conferences, and active email traffic, a substantive exchange of needs and approaches is underway.

As the Jewish healing movement grows, an important focus

is the development of an inspired cadre of leaders. Towards this end, out of the NCJH SeRaF (Senior Resource Faculty) Project, 17 new resource materials have emerged, access to which will be available on the NCJH website this July. We have been privileged and pleased to partner in the SeRaF project with the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health of HUC-JIR, with the generous support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Finally, the NCJH website with its growing number of click and print resources, the facilitated list-serve conversations and teleconference calls continue to be critical vehicles to support leadership, and enhance programmatic cross-fertilization for those across the continent—and now the globe—who are engaged in the creative process of making Jewish spiritual resources available to those who are suffering and those who care for them.

Your local Jewish healing program and the NCJH need your financial support. Join us in this great mitzvah of Hessed/Lovingkindness!

SUSAN ROSENTHAL, LMSW
Coordinator,
National Center for Jewish Healing
SeRaF*

JEWISH HEALING RESOURCES—A Sampling

See www.ncjh.org or www.jhhrn.org for a complete listing of available resources.

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.

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.

MiSheberakh Card. An artfully designed card 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, small enough to fit in your pocket.

Evening and Morning: A Circle of Prayer. A beautiful *bikkur holim* card, 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. Includes introductions, original Hebrew, moving translations and selected transliterations.

Guide Me Along the Way: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Surgery. by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW with Rabbi Aaron M. Lever. A 60-page Jewish guidebook with poetry, prayers, folktales, personal narratives, practical advice, healing activities and meditations to help patients, family members, clergy and health care professionals through the surgery experience, from leaving home to the year anniversary of an operation.

Jewish Principles of Care for the Dying (The Outstretched Arm). A special edition of our newsletter *The Outstretched Arm* from the Winter of 2001. A collection of resources related to Jewish ways of looking at death and the dying process including articles on ethical wills and hospice care, Jewish teachings about death through the ages, the vidui prayer, and thoughts about the afterlife.

The Crisis of Divorce: From Darkness to Light (The Outstretched Arm). A special edition of our newsletter *The Outstretched Arm* from Fall, 2004. The Crisis of Divorce provides a brief overview of the common psycho-social-spiritual challenges for an individual and their family, friends and community going through divorce. Offers a taste of Jewish resources such as psalms, rituals, Jewish law, personal stories, helpful responses and a bibliography.

Publication	Quantity	Cost
<i>Healing of Soul, Healing of Body</i>		\$14.95 each
<i>With Healing on Its Wings</i>		\$11.95 each
<i>Mi Sheberakh Card</i>		\$1.50 each *10+ \$1.00 ea. *25+ \$.75 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>Guide Me Along the Way</i>		\$11.95 each *10+ \$10.00 ea.
<i>The Crisis of Divorce</i>		\$1.50 each
<i>Jewish Principles of Care...</i>		\$1.50 each

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A Jewish Connections Program of Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

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

In This Edition

Our tradition teaches that each of us was present at Mt. Sinai, collectively receiving the Torah, but also experiencing it from our own unique individual vantage point. Thus, we share a communal "imprint" of the Sinai experience, but also enrich each other with the spark of our own distinctive perspectives.

In this spirit, this *Outstretched Arm* offers a range of voices and understandings of *Shavu'ot*, Torah, illness, loss and healing. Included are articles on:

- *An overview of Shavu'ot*
- *Suggestions for Tikkun Leyl Shavu'ot*
- *Meditation on giving/receiving Torah*
- *Reflections on "How Torah Heals"*
- *Reflections on The Book of Ruth*
- *Updates from the NCJH*

We encourage you to use these articles to learn more about *Shavu'ot*, for personal reflection, as an offering to someone who is seeking healing, as a trigger for discussion and exploration in support groups and/or *havurot*. Share your experiences by writing us at info@ncjh.org.

The NCJH especially thanks those Jewish healers around the country who contributed to this edition of *The Outstretched Arm*.

We wish you and your community a joyous, meaningful and inspiring *Shavu'ot* holiday.

RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, LMSW, *Rabbinic Director*
SUSAN J. ROSENTHAL, LMSW, *Coordinator*
The National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH)

This year 2005/5765 Shavu'ot starts Sunday night, June 12th

As this publication contains a representation of God's name, please treat it with the proper care and respect.

The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

