



# A FOCUS ON HEALING



## Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### It's never too late

For everything there is a season, a time for every experience under Heaven (Ecclesiastes 3). It's true. There is a time for everything we do. And this includes expressing love to ourselves, to each other, and to God. The American author and psychotherapist, Virginia Satir wrote: "We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth." Hugging is, of course, one way to show our affection for one another.

I read that hugging is healthy. It helps the body's immune system, it keeps you healthier, it cures depression, it reduces stress, it induces sleep, it's invigorating, it's rejuvenating, it has no unpleasant side effects, and hugging is nothing less than a miracle drug. I don't know the author, but what I do know is that this is certainly a simple remedy for a complex world.

When we greet someone we know or haven't seen for a while, we immediately reach out to hug. When we take leave and begin our journey away from someone we visited, we turn and hug just before we go on our way. Hugging is a personal and impersonal way to extend ourselves. It is not as intimate as kissing, but it delivers a clear message of fondness. And even when we participate in a funeral or some such disaster in our lives we immediately begin or end with a hug.

For example: The month of March presents us with opportunities to hug and more than that the chance to commit to even stronger displays of affection. Our country is unique in that it has designated days of every month for commemorating events in our lives and some are even bizarre. For example: March 20 is called "Proposal Day." I guess it makes sense given that it follows February 14th which, as we all know, is Valentine's Day."

The purpose given for the dedication of a day devoted to "Proposals" is that it is for those in love to show that they really care and that the love of their life makes a difference in how life is lived. Let's see if that makes sense. We need a certain day to remind us that we are in love and that we should do something about it. Perhaps it does make sense. Sometimes we need to be motivated to take action relating to matters of the heart. We need that extra push to lead us in the right path so that our existence does have meaning. And what greater meaning is there than to love and be loved? And what better expression of our love than hugging?

In fact the essay I read went even further in suggesting that the special place in societies need for connection contains no sweeteners, no pesticides, no preservatives, no artificial ingredients and is 100 percent wholesome. It continues by reminding us that hugging is practically perfect. No movable parts, no batteries to wear out, no periodic check-ups, low energy consumption... and fully returnable.

What a way to say "I love you" without words. It is just a simple gesture; a reaching out to touch someone. So, yes, there is a season for everything. There is a season for admiration, for devotion, for "proposals," and for tenderness and attachment.

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a day for survival.  
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day for growth."**

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I also read another very interesting essay titled "An Interview with God." The author is also unknown, but I believe it could have been written by any of us here today. And here is the interview:

"Come in." God said. "So you would like to interview me?"

"If you have the time," I replied.

God smiled and said: "My time is eternity and is enough to do everything. What question do you have in mind to ask me?"

"What surprises you most about humankind?"

God answered: "That they get bored of being children, are in a rush to grow up, and then long to be children again. That they lose their health to make money and then lose their money to restore health. That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present, such that they live neither for the present nor the future. That they live as if they will never die, and they die as if they had never lived."

God took my hand and we were silent for a while, and then I asked: "As a parent, what are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?"

God replied with a smile: "To learn that they cannot make anyone love them. What they can do is let themselves be loved. To learn that what is most valuable is not what they have in their lives, but who they have in their lives. To learn that it is not good to compare themselves to others. All will be judged individually on their own merits, not as a group. To learn that the rich person is not the one who has the most, but one who needs the least. To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open

## No ordinary days

BY RABBI SANDY EISENBERG SASSO



There is a story of a grandmother who tells her young grandchild what her own childhood was like: "We used to skate outside on a pond. I had a swing made from a tire; it hung from a tree in our front yard. We picked wild raspberries in the woods." The boy was wide-eyed, taking this all in. Finally he said, "Grandma, I sure wish I'd gotten to know you sooner!"

Recently I held our newest grandson in my arms and thought back to my own childhood. What would I want this brand new baby to know of me? So many years had passed, so much had been forgotten. Then looking into his eyes, I began to remember.

*profound wounds in persons we love, and that it takes many years to heal them. To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness. To learn that there are persons who love them dearly, but simply do not know how to express or show their feelings. To learn that a true friend is someone who knows everything about them, and likes them anyway. To learn that it is not always enough that they are forgiven by others, but that they have to forgive themselves."*

*I sat there a while enjoying the moment. I thanked God for the time and all that God has done for me and my family, and God replied: "Anytime. I am here 24 hours a day. All you have to do is ask for me and I'll answer."*

The story made me think about today – about hugging each other and sharing thoughts and wishes. It helped me understand that there is a time for everything – a time to live as well as a time to die – a time to heal after a time for illness has passed – a time to reach out to not only touch someone, but to reach in and touch ourselves.

That is why we are here. That is why we come back week after week to our church or synagogue – to touch God and in turn realize that we must be thankful for every moment, for every person we come in contact with and for every episode in the many chapters left in our lives.

And to paraphrase something a colleague once wrote: Try it sometimes – just hug and be hugged and then, perhaps, we will be able to climb Heaven's steps into Heaven's womb and be born again and finally realize why we were created. It's not too late. It's never too late.

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I used to run after fireflies in my backyard on warm summer nights. I made bouquets from dandelions, picked buttercups and held them under my chin. I put the winged seeds of the maple tree on my nose. I kept a piece of coal in a red cardboard box in my attic waiting for it to turn into a diamond. I planted tomatoes and harvested them and made picnics under a weeping willow tree. And even though I could not carry a tune, I sang with abandon. I looked for the first star in the night sky and wished upon it.

I want my grandchildren to know me before someone informed me that I couldn't sing, before I learned that dandelions were weeds or knew that coal won't miraculously morph into diamonds. I want him to know the person who didn't think walking around with maple wings on her nose was embarrassing or that chasing fireflies was a waste of time. I want to show him how to hold a buttercup under his chin to see if he likes butter and to teach him how sweet freshly harvested tomatoes are. I want to see him look up in the sky at night and find its first light and make a wish upon it.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, "the world won't perish for lack of information but for lack of appreciation." We have access to more information than we will ever need. We are too often in a rush, easily sidetracked by myriad responsibilities, too frequently distracted by something ringing or buzzing, by technology's advances.

What we yearn for is what Heschel called "radical amazement" and Mary Oliver described as "appreciation swelling into astonishment." We need to slow down, to see the world anew, fresh with the surprise of first sight and pure delight. We need to get back in touch with what once made us stand in awe and brought us joy and reclaim that for our children.

When I was a student of Hebrew in college, I translated a poem by Leah Goldberg. It began – "Teach me, my God a blessing and a prayer – over the secret of the ripened fruit, the withered leaf... teach me so that one day will not be like another, so that there will not be an ordinary day."

I was in my early twenties, and after four years of Hebrew, I knew how to turn the Hebrew poetry into English words. But it has taken me many more years to translate those words into life. I didn't require a dictionary; all I needed was to see the world again through the eyes of a child.

Rabbi Sasso, with her husband Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso, have been co-rabbis of Congregation Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis, Ind. for more than 30 years and are the first rabbinic couple. This is reprinted with permission from the Indianapolis Star June 1, 2010. ★



## Jewish Chaplain

BY LEON OLENICK

### Chuppa over the nursing home

My mother lived the final year of her life in a nursing home in Miami. Her body had failed her, however, her mind was clear. She had a great personality, could always make anyone laugh, and always wanted to be helpful, no matter how frail she became.

The home is located in a very poor neighborhood known as Little Haiti. After driving through the neighborhood seeing little shacks and makeshift houses, visitors arrive at the gate to the Jewish Home for the Aged. When you travel past the gate, you reach a magnificently landscaped pristine facility. Everything is manicured. Beyond some of the many buildings is the courtyard, where trees and flowers are always in bloom, and comfy benches greet you. Music is playing softly and the atmosphere automatically relaxes you.

My mother called me and said that she must speak with me right away – she wanted me to visit her immediately. She had something important to ask me. I quickly arrived and she said that she wanted to introduce me to some of her best friends. She took my hand and escorted me through the hallways. She first introduced me to her friend, Ruth who was a woman past 90 years old. She wore fresh make-up and was elegant in her appearance. Her features revealed how beautiful she must have been as a younger woman. She was still beautiful. Standing next to her stood Henry, who was also well past 90 years. He had a head full of thick white hair. He was wearing shorts with high socks pulled to his knees. His wrinkled face told the story of surviving a hard, long life. His straight shoulders revealed an imposing dignity. Mom took my hand and introduced me as her son, the rabbi.

She proceeded to tell them that I would be happy to marry them. I stood somewhat shocked and rigid and very surprised. I was cordial to Ruth and Henry. They told me that they were in love and wanted to get married. They both said they haven't felt a love like this since their late spouses died. They looked me in the eye and said, "We are old and are probably going to die soon. We want to join our souls." Henry took my arm, pulling me aside and assured me it was not only for the sex. He said "The sex will be good, but I really love her." I told them I would do some checking with their families and the administrative staff and that I would get back to them by the end of the week. I

kissed my mother good-bye and started toward the administrator's office. I had to pass through the heavenly courtyard. I looked up and said "*Rebobo Shel Olom* (Master of the Universe), give me the wisdom to deal with this love story with blessings and in peace."

I spoke to the administrator who was aware of the situation. He said, shaking his head, "I can't see anything wrong with it, but you'd better check with the families." I spoke to both families. They also thought it would be all right. I insisted that everyone sign off on maintaining family finances status quo, and also suggested we raise a *chuppa* but not go through the state legalities. I figured God blessing the wedding was more important than the governor of Florida knowing about this. It took about two weeks to have all the legal papers signed with many faxes going back and forth. The date was finally set. The children from both sides would fly to Miami from their homes up north. I requested no press as I did not want a circus – I wanted a holy space. I was really not into planning all the delicious details, but my wife Jackie joined forces with Mom. She created a *ketuba* for them to sign and ordered flowers and decorations. The big day finally arrived.

The families had arrived and were present for the signing of the *ketuba*. The courtyard was decorated with streamers and glitz. There was a beautiful *chuppa*, supported by decorated poles. It was a perfect winter day in Florida. The sun was shining, and it was 70 degrees outside. The path the bride and groom would walk to the *chuppa* was covered with a red carpet. A band played soft music. Henry appeared in his white tux with his shirt opened at the collar. He was escorted by his son and daughter. He said he did not need his walker, and it waited for him under the *chuppa*.

My mother was next. She was the flower girl. She proudly strutted down the isle sprinkling rose pedals on the red carpet. Ruth then appeared. She wore a white dress and white shoes. She had a beautiful orchid on her shoulder. Her hair was perfectly coiffed. Her sons escorted her to the *chuppa*. When they approached the *chuppa*, they were kissed by their children.

As I motioned them to join me, I glanced around the courtyard. The entire courtyard garden was lined with residents and staff. Residents and staff on the second and third floor that could not make it down to the courtyard hung over the railing. A peace that I had never experienced at a nursing home or assisted-living facility existed. These people were not only present to witness the wedding, they were there for hope. Hope for the past, future, and present. Their statement, "We may be old, but we are able!"

Henry and Ruth exchanged rings, and their children recited the *sheva bruchot* (wedding blessings). Although this *kallah* and *chatan* were elderly, the energy

### Of acquaintances, friends, crises and silver linings

BY LISA LANDAU RUDNER

"Are relationships created by chance or by design?" was the question posed at our friends' Shabbat table on *Erev Rosh Hashana*.

There must be Divine intent. There must. Otherwise, how do we explain the intricate matrix of relationships and experiences that become our lives? Sheer randomness would likely have taken us to vastly different points. Judaism, a faith of paradox to be sure, stresses the notion of free will, though with a looming hint of *besheret*, destiny, always loitering about.

And so it was that three families were brought together, all under ordinary social circumstances, to find themselves in need of one another, a Divine convergence of lives that may lead to the healing and well being of others.

Our daughter, Jordan, suffered for years with ulcerative colitis, an autoimmune disorder similar to Crohn's. She endured treatment that offered little relief, and severely diminished her quality of life. At the point her gastroenterologist in Dallas pressed for radical surgery, we searched the universe for a physician who specialized in pediatric ulcerative colitis for a second opinion.

Dr. Keith Benkov, medical director of The Children's IBD (inflammatory bowel disease) Center at Mt. Sinai in New York, offered more than a second opinion; Dr. Benkov gave Jordan her life back. He spared her colon, healed her body,



we all experienced at that holy *chuppa* on that holy afternoon connected us back to our matriarchs and patriarchs and revealed to all witnessing this wedding that love is ageless. We all danced around them when the sixth blessing was recited. The nursing home staff provided lunch. One staff member told my wife, "We pushed two beds together for them tonight."

As I drove away from the nursing home, I knew I learned the lesson that love is timeless, and we have to live each moment and treasure each day. Thanks Mom for including me in this great blessing.

Leon H. Olenick is a rabbi and board certified chaplain. He offers spiritual and pastoral care to his patients, families and caregivers spanning a multicultural and religious sphere. He currently is employed by VITAS Innovative Hospice in South Florida. The stories are taken from a book of short stories that is in progress, Encounters with the Last Dance. His intention in sharing his real-life stories is to help people who are facing difficult health, caregiving and end of life issues. The stories are true, only the names have been changed. ✨

renewed her joyful spirit and restored our family.

Just over two years later we learned our friends, Elaine Chaplik's (of Indianapolis) and Trevor Pearlman's son, Ryan, suffered from what was ultimately diagnosed as Crohn's Disease. Like us, they discovered that not all pediatric gastroenterologists specialize in inflammatory bowel disease. And like us, they took Ryan to Dr. Benkov in New York. And Dr. Benkov returned Ryan to his active teenage life of football and summer camp and school and good health.

It became clear to Ryan and his parents there are too many children suffering with Crohn's and colitis who are misdiagnosed and/or improperly treated, as well as those who may be without adequate resources to seek medical attention out of state if necessary. At that point Ryan, Elaine and Trevor established *Champions of Discovery*, a charity to fund research, educational support and patient services for any child suffering with IBD. "Ultimately we'd like improved, more available treatment for all kids in need, and hopefully one day a cure for these debilitating illnesses," said Trevor.

After raising nearly \$200,000 for *Champions of Discovery* in 2008 through an intensive personal letter writing campaign by Ryan and his parents, and as one of the few designated ING New York City Marathon charities, *Champions of Discovery* has once again been honored as an official ING NYC Marathon charity. The Marathon, a 26.2 mile race that promotes distance running, health and fitness, was held on Nov. 1, 2009. With a team of nine runners, *Champions of Discovery* set their fundraising goal for the marathon at \$100,000.

Among the team's runners was Alex Katz, 28, a first-time marathon runner who befriended Elaine and Trevor when they were taken by Alex's vocal ensemble, Kol Zimra, and hired the group for Ryan's bar mitzvah. It was only later that Alex and the Pearlmans realized they had a significant connection between them, Dr. Benkov.

After being mugged and severely beaten at age 13 while walking with friends to a neighbor's house in his hometown, Memphis, Tenn., Alex's intestinal injuries required the expertise of Keith Benkov in New York.

Years later after founding Kol Zimra, getting married, graduating from law school, fathering four children, and living in New York, briefly in Dallas and now in Los Angeles, Alex decided to start running. "Seven or eight miles a day," Alex said. Elaine then offered Alex the opportunity to run in the New York City Marathon for the charity her family founded to aid Dr. Benkov in his research. Alex said, "It was a good challenge at the right time."

Were we meant to go through the fire first, only to find the one physician on whom we could rely to heal our child?

(see Rudner, page Focus on Healing 4)

# Yom Kippur Yizkor – 5770

BY RABBI ARNOLD L. BIENSTOCK



Last Yom Kippur, I shared with you that my dog Mozart had been diagnosed with cancer. Although my dog was 12 years old and had lived a full life, the news still was

difficult. His blood counts were way off. We know that it doesn't matter how long someone has lived, loss is always difficult.

I remember a neighbor of mine in Toledo who lived across the street from my home. Both she and her mother were Holocaust survivors. They managed to escape to Cuba together. She was deeply bereaved when her mother died at the age of 101. She said to me, "Rabbi, people tell me not to be so sad since after all, my mother lived such a long life. However, maybe I miss her even more because she has always been here for me."

On the other hand, I recently met an individual who recently moved to Indianapolis. One of the first things that he told me was that he had lost a young child – of the age of three. He pulled out a photograph and showed me his son's grave. It doesn't matter whether we lose a child or a great-grandparent. Loss leaves us with a hole in our hearts. Our hearts may be mended – but we are changed forever.

When we begin the cancer journey – and I am sure the journey is similar with most profound illnesses – we embark upon that roller coaster of emotions, the ups and downs, the highs and the lows, that will mark our trip. We search for that seat belt that will keep us in our seat. We look for the positive signs that give us hope – for after all, all of us must live with hope – it keeps us going.

It was the belief in the coming of the Messiah that gave Jews hope as they suffered in the ghettos of Europe, the shtetlach of Czarist Russia, and the Jewish quarters of Casablanca and Damascus. The title of Israel's national anthem – *HaTikvah* – means "The Hope." It was the hope for the renewal of Jewish life in the Land of Israel that gave birth to the State of Israel – some 2,000 years later. In our personal journeys, we too uplift that hope that renews us. I remember taking my dog in for his annual physical last October. His blood work wasn't as bad as it was during the summer. Maybe things weren't as difficult as they appeared. I took my dog home from the vet with a sense of hope.

All of us look for those signs of hope when we embark on the journey of profound illness. We are told – the surgeon got out almost the entire tumor; the stroke did not effect higher cognitive functioning, or the heart attack did not do that much damage. We cling on to

each and every single word of the doctor with a sense of optimism. Maybe things aren't that bad. Perhaps the final outcome won't be so horrible. Maybe we and our families will live with this challenge for a long time.

Sometimes, we attempt to bargain with G-d. I remember one of my bar mitzvah students – from almost 30 years ago – when I was in New Hampshire. Today, he would be about 40 years old. However, when he was starting to study his haftorah, he developed a huge bump on his arm. His physician suspected it might be malignant. I remember his saying to me, "Rabbi, I prayed to G-d. Let it not be cancer. If it is not cancer, I promise I will never eat a lobster again." Now, giving up lobster in northern New England is really a big deal. Well, thank G-d, the lump turned out to be some weird nonmalignant growth that is associated with puberty. The young man said to me, "Rabbi, thank G-d, I am going to be fine. Now about that promise about the lobster...do I have to keep it?"

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It is not only young bar mitzvah boys who would bargain with God at a difficult time. One of the most incredibly insightful *Midrashim* is about the death of Moses. G-d tells Moses that he will die at the age of 120 on Mt. Nebo. He will only be able to gaze at the Promised Land; he will not be able to enter it. Moses, too, bargains with G-d to alter his destiny. Moses begs with all the elements of the natural world to plead for his life. He asks to be transformed into a bird or an animal if this will save him. However, not even Moses, the great prophet and teacher of Israel, can escape the power of the *Malach HaMavet*, the Angel of Death. Moses dies when a kiss from the Angel of Death is placed upon his lips.

My dog continued to live throughout the winter months – although he started to slow down significantly. He would walk much more slowly. He would eat less from his bowl. He would sleep more. However, his way of life did not seem that drastically different – after all, he was a senior dog to begin with. When we discuss the challenges of death, people often ponder, "What is the more difficult loss – a sudden, traumatic, unexpected death – or a loss after an extended period of illness?" The answer is that every loss brings grief and mourning in its own unique way. It is usually understood that the result of an unexpected death is heavy mourning,

while individuals mourn extensively during their period of care giving.

Most of us are fairly sheltered from sudden, traumatic death – but it is more common than we would acknowledge. Through my work in interfaith relations, I met the acquaintance of a young man who works for a Christian organization in Indianapolis. Of course, at my stage of the game, everyone under 50 is young – but I am sure this person is 30ish. We began to talk with one another, and I shared with him that I was widowed with four daughters. My jaw dropped when he responded, "I am a widower as well." Most of us don't think of a 30-year-old as a widower. He explained to me that his wife was killed in a bizarre police chase. The police were chasing after another car and accidentally banged into his wife's car, killing her.

The tragedy of a sudden loss often leaves the bereaved with many questions that will take years to answer. Or perhaps, the answers will never be found at all. The New Year began on a sad note for Israel when Assaf Ramon, a young Israeli pilot, died as his F16 fighter jet crashed into the hills of Hebron. Of course, all of us remember that Mr. Ramon's father, Ilan Ramon, died tragically in 2003 in the Columbia Space Shuttle crash. The father was Israel's first astronaut and the only member of the Columbia Space Shuttle who was not an American citizen. Let us think of Rona Ramon, a young widow who now is mourning the death of her 21-year-old son. It has been said that the traditional words of consolation are, "May G-d comfort you among your fellow mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." We, as humans, cannot possibly offer true comfort at the time of a tragic loss.

However, when the bereaved individual finds that inner peace of faith and hope, then G-d surely is their source of comfort. For those of us who can find that shalom, that peace, of the spirit – our tradition truly offers consolation. That comfort is found in the observance of shiva and shloshim. That comfort is found in the recitation of the *Kaddish* at services throughout the year. That comfort is found during the *Yizkor* service.

This past March, my dog Mozart began to cough, a deep, heavy chest cough. The veterinarian said to me, "It can either be bronchitis or pneumonia – or something more serious. An x-ray will show what is going on." Sure enough, the x-ray showed that there were three huge tumors in his lungs. The cancer had spread dramatically.

What do we do when the end draws near for someone we love? Several years ago, my deceased wife Ilene's doctor gave me the best advice. "Enjoy the time that you have left." It is very difficult to do, but it is the appropriate recommendation. Our sages reached the same wise conclusion thousands of years ago. Rabbi Eliezer taught, "Repent one day before your death." The sages

questioned, "How do we know which day is the day before our death?" The rabbi answered, "Live each and every single day in repentance." Make every day significant. Make every day count.

One of the most important words in our tradition is *chayim* – "life." At this time of year, we greet one another with the wish that we might be inscribed in *Sefer HaChayim* – "the Book of Life." Our tradition cherishes the beauty of life and the enjoyment of life. Our rabbis teach us that we will have to give a sin-offering for the pleasures of life that we were supposed to partake of – but did not. Life was meant to be lived to the fullest as long as those pleasures do not violate the Torah.

As always, we can never predict when death will occur. That is in G-d's hands, not ours. I had a very busy weekend on June 20. There was a bar mitzvah in the synagogue on that Shabbat and I had been invited to a wedding that evening as well. My birthday is June 17, and Father's Day usually occurs on the next Sunday. My schedule was rather full, when my daughter Mazal revealed that my oldest, Levana was flying in for the weekend to surprise me. Well, it would be an extremely busy weekend. I would just have to fit everything in.

When I returned home from synagogue on that Shabbat, my daughter Meira suggested that we take Mozart for a walk in Holliday Park. Mozart walked slowly, but evenly, as we made our entry. We stopped for awhile and talked at the famous Ruins of Holliday Park. Mozart was sitting quietly below our feet. Then we made our way home. Right before Meira and I entered our house, Mozart stopped and keeled over. He was on the ground for only two or three minutes – although it seemed an eternity. And then, his breathing stopped. He was dead.

Death is expected, yet it is unexpected. We never know when it will occur. I felt comforted that Mozart died after taking a Shabbat walk. Judaism teaches us that the righteous shall die on the Sabbath. The following day, Sunday, Father's Day, my four daughters joined together and buried Mozart in the backyard. I thought it was very special.

None of us know when our loved ones will pass from this earth. We must learn to appreciate the time we share with them. Time is a precious gift. It teaches us that we must live in the moment and cherish what we have. Judaism treasures time as a sacred, holy element. We recite *shecheyanu* – a blessing of the special times in our lives. We must be thankful for the time we have to love, to share, and to nurture. Even our beloved teacher, Moshe Rabbenu, could not delay the arrival of his death. All of us live in the valley of the shadow of death. However, we must remember that G-d is always with us – in life and in death.

Rabbi Bienstock was recently called to the pulpit of Beth Israel Congregation in Salisbury, Md. ★

# Psychotherapy and Prayer

BY DR. JEFFREY LAST



In an earlier article (see [www.jewishpostopinion.com/pdf/NAT\\_1-27-10.pdf](http://www.jewishpostopinion.com/pdf/NAT_1-27-10.pdf)), *Breaking Free From Our Own Harsh Judgments*, we began to look at ways in which the

central prayer of the Jewish service, the *Shmoneh Esrei*, reflects basic emotional themes with which we all deal. We made reference to the basic structure of the *Shmoneh Esrei* as it addresses God with blessings of praise, request and gratitude via 19 blessings. There we discussed the importance of infusing our judgments of our self and others with compassion.

Let's look at another one of the request blessings, *Ingathering of the Exiles*. In the section of requests in the *Shmoneh Esrei*, it states: "Sound a great shofar for our freedom, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You, God, who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel."

In this blessing we ask God to sound a great shofar and gather the scattered exiles to the Land of Israel. The focus here is on the future when the shofar of freedom will sound and Jews from all over the world will come home together. At that point in history we will no longer be dependent on hostile or foreign powers for our safety. At the same time, there will be a heightened awareness of God among people throughout the world.

On a personal, psychological level, this blessing can refer to gathering "exiled" ideas and feelings into the mainstream of our personality. When we deny or split off these aspects of ourselves, we indeed limit our freedom to act in accordance with our true nature. When we can become aware of the different aspects of our personality, particularly what presently may feel to be our "darker side," we then become freer to recognize options when faced with a challenge. Our actions become more self-directed and less reactive or defensive.

## Practical Application

This issue was very apparent with one of my patients, Ricky (not his real name). He was a 12-year-old boy who was making everyone's life very difficult. He picked on his older sister continually, he was disruptive in his seventh grade classroom, he stole from his father's house (his parents were divorced when he was seven and father remarried a year later), and he continually whined to his mother. His father told me "he needs to grow up, accept more responsibility and not be such a mama's boy." His mother said he needed to be understood and have more confidence to stand up to his

demanding father. When I saw him, all he could talk about were his "stupid" teachers and his latest conquest on his video game. He claimed his life was "fine." Forget about the fact he had no friends, ate excessively, chewed his fingernails to the quick and it took him over an hour to fall asleep each night.

Whenever I would get close to identifying his feelings of anger about the divorce, his confusion over the mixed messages from his parents, his jealousy toward his sister, or his own sense of weakness, Ricky became quite irritated and rolled his eyes. He insisted everything would be "fine" if people would just leave him alone, including me. He was trying to keep me at a distance the way he kept away others in his life. However, the essential distancing was from his own feelings of anger, sadness and jealousy. If he could create enough drama between himself and others, then he could effectively avoid how he really experienced his life.

Ricky injected a good deal of drama into our sessions. He would refuse to come into the office on a number of occasions; he had no problem sticking out his tongue at me and, on occasion, would simply ignore me. At times he would dramatically fall on the floor to demonstrate the "ridiculousness" of any statement I made that even approximated how he was feeling. Yet I was persistent in focusing on Ricky's fear of saying what was in his heart. I remained "curious" about his apparent need to keep me, and everyone else, at such a distance. I wondered aloud how he dealt with his loneliness. At first he thought this notion was "absolutely wacky." That didn't last too long. His tears betrayed him.

Coming to see me as an ally and not an agent of either parent was crucial in earning his trust. This was very hard, as each of his parents was so persistent in trying to recruit me to do battle against his or her former spouse. Yet as I consistently demonstrated my concern for Ricky, while pointing out his overreaction to my concern, he started to tentatively open up. Slowly Ricky "gathered in" his exiled sadness, jealousy and anger. He was eventually able to bring those feelings into the session and, more importantly, into his own awareness outside our sessions. His unstated anticipation of becoming overwhelmed by discussing his feelings did not materialize, and he gained more control and choice over his behavior. He felt less like an isolated person wandering in exile.

## Making It Real

In everyday life we often lose sight of our more genuine feelings due to the smokescreens we put up within ourselves. Maybe I had a rough day at the office. My boss gave me a hard time because I was late on an assignment, or maybe he was just being too picky about the quality of my work. In any case, I felt angry and unappreciated. I was also worried that

# We carry both sets of divine tablets

BY RABBI SHELDON ZIMMERMAN



A passage in the Talmud (B.T. *Berachot* 8b) teaches us much about our brokenness and capacity for healing and wellness. When asked about the correct way to treat an aged scholar who had forgotten so much of his learning, Rabbi Joshua replied that such a scholar is to be treated with



my job might be in jeopardy. Driving home I was particularly irritated by the traffic. My entry at home was greeted by the announcement of my teenager that she had gotten into a fender bender. "Dad, it was not my fault." I blow. I let her have it for being so irresponsible with the car. I push away my wife's attempts to help as "intrusive." "What's eating you?!" my wife shot back. I'm fried. My stomach is in a knot, and my neck is killing me. I tell them I need to go for a walk. They are thrilled with my suggestion.

I try to get a sense of all that is going on. I take some deep breaths. Okay, there is much more to this than the car or the traffic. I go back to the events earlier at the office and give myself some space to look at that. Yeah, I was pretty scared. I felt kind of small when the boss gave me a hard time. I knew that was a really old feeling for me. As I thought about it some more, I knew my job really was secure. My stomach and neck were beginning to return to normal.

I got in touch with what was eating me. Connecting with the feelings of fear and vulnerability that I had denied gave me a sense of being more grounded. I no longer had to divert myself from these feelings by zapping others. It was very helpful giving myself the space and time to look at what was really going on with me. It was also helpful to listen to my wife's challenge to see what was eating me. Open-minded introspection and really listening to those close to us can be very helpful in situations like this.

I went back home, apologized and asked my wife for a hug. It's not easy pushing away the smokescreen, but it is well worth it.

This is one example of using the *Shmoneh Esrei* for personal growth. Those interested in a fuller discussion of this may download my eBook, *Psychotherapy and Prayer, Insights into Personal Growth thought the Shmoneh Esrei*, at [www.drjlast.com](http://www.drjlast.com).

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respect. *Luchot v'shivrei luchot munachot ba-aron* – the complete second unbroken set of tablets, as well as the broken fragments of the first set, were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. The first set of tablets (with the Ten Commandments) shattered by Moses resided with the second unbroken set. Even brokenness and fragments retain holiness and warrant respect and reverence.

Brokenness does not disappear. We carry both sets with us forever. Then, as the personification of the aron (Ark of the Covenant), we carry the new set as well. Only in this way can healing come from brokenness itself. The past is not lost or forgotten. The memory of the illness remains, perhaps even the illness itself. But in facing the illness, in the powers of healing within and without, in the transformation that we participate in and that occurs as we go through the healing process, in all of this we enter a new path in our journey.

The Eternal One heals the broken-hearted, but we never lose the memory of what was. We may work harder to help others as well as ourselves. We may use what we gain through healing to bring new light, new care and greater love and empathic concern to others. Part of our ultimate healing may take place through extending ourselves to others who are broken and hurting. In wellness we remember what was and change what can be by our actions now. We carry both sets of the divine tablets with us always. Through our creative power and together with the Holy One, we help form that second set, and the healing and wellness that come with it.

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## RUDNER

(continued from page Focus on Healing 2)

Was our purpose to make the introduction of this doctor to our friends, whose vision and pledge are to make life easier for other children? Was it predestined that the voice that captured so many during their son's simcha would become another conduit for raising funds and awareness for the work of one doctor who so significantly changed forever the lives of three families, and who improves the wellbeing of children everyday?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Sometimes friendships are not merely arbitrary and social, but purposeful and important. And Divine.

To support the research of The Children's IBD Center, please go to [www.championsofdiscovery.com](http://www.championsofdiscovery.com) and donate today. ★