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A FOCUS ON HEALING
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## Jewish Chaplain



### *My love is down the street*

BY LEON H. OLENICK

Ruth was an 80-year-old woman. Her hair was white like the spotless newly fallen snow that was covering the ground outside the hospital. Her room in the hospital was decorated with pictures of her family. I saw her husband of 60 years standing tall, holding her hand and smiling when they were young lovers. Her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren looked happy and were dressed in beautiful clothing. Cards from family and friends were taped to the wall. The childish pictures that were made of crayon by her great-grandchildren held a prominent position amidst the décor. The many decorations told me she was a long-time resident of this once gloomy room.

Ruth was very aware. As I approached her, she greeted me with a warm smile that engulfed her 85-pound body and conveyed an inner peace. Her aura was that of a matriarch who had witnessed a great deal of life.

Ruth entered the hospital about four weeks earlier for hip replacement. This was a simple procedure and she would be released back home to her beloved Milton in about two weeks. After the surgery her body was attacked by a dreadful life-threatening infection. She was near death, however, with swift intervention by the medical team she was now recovering. She was restricted to the bed while the antibiotics healed her body.

I sat down by her bed and introduced myself. She took my hand and held it very tightly. "Can you help me?" she asked. Tears began to flow from her huge brown eyes. "My Milton is very ill. He was fine when I entered the hospital. He said he would be present to care for me when I returned home. Last week he stopped visiting. I knew something was not right. My family tried to hide his problem from me, however I found out that he had a stroke and is very ill. My children finally told me that the stroke was serious and he will not survive. I must see him. We have shared our bed for 60 years. We have laughed, loved, and argued for 60 years. I know life is short and can end anytime, however he cannot end his life without me holding his hand, and kissing him, and hearing me say I love you, one more time. He is in the hospital down the street and they say I am too ill to visit him."

Her tears intensified. "Please help me say goodbye to my love."

She then told me some stories of their life together and invited me into their life-long adventure. I told her I would inquire, however I could not promise anything. I did promise, however to visit Milton. I offered her a blessing and a prayer for healing, and took my leave.

After leaving the room I investigated the reality of the situation. I discovered that Milton was at a hospital about ten miles away. I called the hospital and spoke to the director of nursing. She told me that Milton was terminally ill and was on life support. She said decisions would have to be made by the

family. I asked the director of nursing at Ruth's hospital if it was possible for her to visit him. She said it was not possible due to cost. I was told that an R.N. would have to accompany Ruth and she would have to be transported by ambulance. This was very expensive. I called her family and they told me they could not afford to make Ruth's request happen.

I pondered. I thought of the importance of being with those we love prior to death. I thought of Jacob, summoning Joseph's sons, Menasha, and Efram, prior to his death in order to bless them. I also thought of her namesake, Ruth. She too insisted on being with the person she loved and completely changed her life to accomplish this. I knew in my heart that in order for her to have closure, and Milton to have peace they must be together.

I decided to make some phone calls and if necessary, to call in some favors. I called the ambulance company and told the director the situation. He told me that he thought it was definitely a priority and he would provide the transportation free of charge. I then spoke to some of the nurses. Most of the nurses at the hospital work 12-hour shifts and they are exhausted when completing their shift. They too, saw the importance of saying farewell to a loved one and volunteered to accompany Ruth after their shift. Now that all was in place, I had to receive the blessing of the hospital administration for insurance purposes, and have the family sign a waiver. This was also accomplished.

I underestimated my co-workers. I did not have to call in any favors. They were anxious to help.

We placed Ruth into the ambulance and proceeded to the hospital down the street. Upon arriving I prepared her so she would not be shocked to see Milton on life support. I proceeded to his bed and made sure he was presentable, and wheeled Ruth to his side. She took his hand and spoke very softly to him. I excused myself in order for her to have the privacy she needed to say the intimate thoughts from her heart. After about 30 minutes I reentered their space. She was holding his hand, tears flowing freely from her face and singing love songs to him. I had entered holy ground. I told her we would have to leave. I recited the Vidui (end of life confessional) for Milton and summoned the angels, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Rafael to escort his soul when it was time. I asked Shekhina to join them on this journey. As Ruth kissed him, their tears flowed together and they were one. We left his space. We returned to the hospital and the nurse and driver thanked me for inviting them to be part of this mitzvah.

Milton was taken off life support and died shortly thereafter. I officiated at the funeral service and told Milton's soul that Ruth was with him. I told his soul that as they stood under the wedding canopy together they were together now, once more.

Ruth was unable to attend the funeral service. After the service I went to the hospital, cut the black ribbon on her nightgown and we recited Kaddish. I explained that their souls are braided like a challah, and death cannot untangle the braids. Her tears soaked my shirt. I told her that each time she recites Kaddish, she is sending sparks to Milton's soul. I again offered her a Mishabayrach prayer for healing. I left her alone to mourn her love.

I learned a great deal from this experience. I learned about lovers and soul mates. I learned

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## Wiener's Wisdom



### *Healing*

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

Here we are again saying goodbye to yesterday. How do we do justice to memories? Someone we love has died. It is such a stark realization. No more smiles or laughter. No more touching or caressing. There is so much of no more. Now, however, is not the time to think about all that was missed. Now is the time for memory to replace existence. Now is the time for healing to begin so that the remembrances of our loved ones have meaning. That is how we do justice to memories.

We also remember because the quest for immortality will be realized. The soul that was breathed into our beloved has been returned and our part in the process of eternal reward can be found in our thoughts and actions.

The people we remember today do not have tomorrows but they are always with us. We are their tomorrows. But what happens when we are gone – who will continue to remember? The angels will continue to sing their names and God will always remember. The candles that we light year after year will remain burned in the stars that shine forever. That is God's promise of eternity for all of us.

Think of mothers and fathers and children who left us too soon or suffered too much. Think of them knowing that our thoughts can bring them back even for a fleeting moment. It is okay to cry and even smile as we remember.

Today, at this time, we concentrate on the memories of all who were dear to us and who no longer journey the path of life with us. Their memories should remind us that time is precious. And we should share every moment with someone we care about or needs us to lend a helping hand. Then we will truly do honor to the memories that are part of our feelings – right now – right here – at this solemn time we dedicate to remembering.

*And if I go while you are still here –  
know that I live on,  
vibrating still to a different measure behind  
a thin veil you cannot see through.*

*You will not see me, so you must have faith.*

*I wait the time when we can soar together again,  
both aware of each other.*

*Until then, live your lives to the fullest.  
And when you need me, just whisper my name  
in your heart – I will be there.*

Let us now whisper the names of those we miss and know that they are always with us.

Rabbi Irwin Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation near Phoenix, Ariz. He welcomes comments at [ravyitz@cox.net](mailto:ravyitz@cox.net). ■



## Grief and mourning in long-term care

BY SHEILA SEGAL

(The following is Segal's contribution to the book, *Flourishing in the Later Years: Jewish Perspectives on Long-Term Pastoral Care* edited by Rabbi James Michaels and Cary Kozberg. The book is available from the publisher at [www.TheVictoriaPress.com](http://www.TheVictoriaPress.com).)

### Something sacred happens here

Nursing home chaplains who are grounded in the Jewish approach to death and mourning can help create a community in which losses are openly acknowledged, so that grief may be expressed and shared by residents, family members, and caregivers. To those who fear that being open about death will be too upsetting, we need to explain that avoidance is disrespectful of both the deceased and their survivors. Lack of public acknowledgement for our losses can also result in the emotional complications of "disenfranchised grief," grief that is neither validated nor expressed. This is a syndrome that can afflict many caregivers and residents, causing them to pull back from relationships, lose interest in activities, or become easily irritated.

*Martha, a nurse in a dementia special care unit, was feeling enormous stress and sadness after a month when several of her residents died. Martha was so enervated that she decided to take a 10-day break, essentially to give herself space to grieve. When another death occurred shortly after her return, the chaplain came to offer her personal condolences. Martha's appreciation was effusive: "Thank you so much for noticing that it hurts. It really helps to hear someone say that."*

It is natural and important for Jewish chaplains to validate the pain of loss. That is basic. In addition, we can help our coworkers find meaning in the pain if we foster a climate in which death is regarded as a sacred passage and care of the dying is valued as sacred work. Beginning with orientation of new staff, we need to speak about the emotional challenges of working in a place where death happens too frequently and emphasize that what they do during the last weeks or hours of life can really make a difference. As spiritual caregivers, we enhance the sanctity of this passage through the quality of presence and listening that we provide as well as through our offerings of psalms, prayers, and religious melodies. We show others how to create a peaceful, sacred space by doing little things such as turning off the TV, opening the shades to natural light, or introducing some relaxing music. We remind others that the dying person may hear until the very end, that their own words or songs will provide comfort, that there is still time to say whatever needs to be said.

We should explain to caregivers that at the time of death a window is opened to mark the beginning of the soul's return to God, a candle (albeit electric) is lit as a sign of God's watchful presence, and a simple white sheet is drawn over the deceased as a sign of holiness and respect. Sitting at the bedside, reading psalms or talking quietly with family and caregivers, we resist the tendency to spring into action, honoring the mystery of the process and the privilege granted to all who have participated.

### The need to know

*Milton, Dorothy, and Freda were wondering what*

*happened to their friend Ann, who lived in the same "household" of their nursing home. They had not seen her for several days. Because of her congestive heart failure, Ann had been hospitalized several times during the past two months and again the previous week. Freda said she thought Ann had returned from the hospital before the weekend, but she hadn't seen her. Milton said he heard she was still in the hospital. Dorothy thought she heard the nurse say that Ann wasn't coming back. After lunch Freda made her way to Ann's room, where her son was packing photographs into a brown carton. Ann had died two days earlier.*

Often there are residents who know that someone is dying – she doesn't come out of her room any more, the hospice nurse is on the scene, family members are there more often – and the chaplain should be an available, non-anxious presence to those who are aware. It should not surprise us if some residents wish to say goodbye to a dying friend, and it is helpful for the chaplain to think of who those residents might be and offer to facilitate a visit. The chaplain should, of course, be prepared to help the visitor process whatever emotions and thoughts are triggered. Though the visit may be "upsetting," most residents who visit a dying friend feel good about themselves for having been able to do this mitzvah. Some residents even share the vigil with family members.

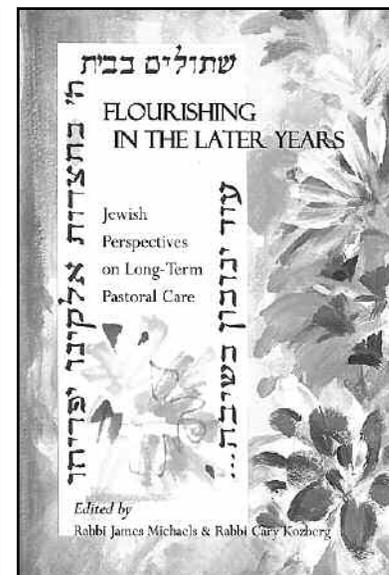
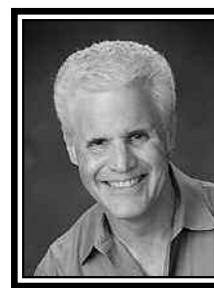
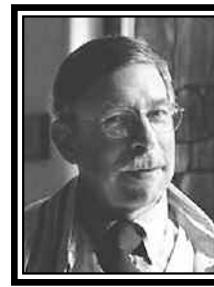
When a death actually occurs, it is important to convey the news clearly and promptly to the immediate community. Recognizing this need has led some nursing homes to develop standard protocols for announcing or posting death notices. In many Jewish homes, deaths are announced in the synagogue each week, but an announcement is not sufficient since many residents do not attend services and even those who are present might miss hearing the names. Weeks later, a resident from another floor or unit might be shocked to discover why she hasn't seen her friend for such a long time.

Nursing homes have a variety of formats for a print notice of the death of a resident. My facility, the Abramson Center in North Wales, Pa., has created one with a dignified border, a graphic of a memorial lamp, and a simple text with four components: the words "We Remember," the name of the deceased resident, the years of birth and death, and a photograph. The photograph is essential because so many nursing home residents have difficulty remembering names, even the names of people they see everyday. "We Remember" notices usually are posted within 24 hours of the death and sometimes within just a few hours, after loved ones have been informed.

In the aftermath of a death, chaplains check in with staff and residents, especially tablemates and close neighbors of the deceased. If the chaplain is not present when a death occurs, it is important to check in with caregivers and with other residents as soon as possible, sharing the news with those who don't yet know and with those who are not able to read the notice board. This check-in is an opportunity for listening attentively to their reactions, providing immediate acknowledgement that loss hurts, and exploring what this particular loss means to them, including what thoughts it raises about their own deaths.

### Sharing losses through memorial services

For most of us, the funeral or shiva (seven-day period of mourning) for a friend or loved one is an important opportunity to express and share our loss and grief, to give and receive comfort. But when nursing home residents die, their friends, neighbors, and caregivers rarely have the



Rabbi James Michaels (top) and Cary Kozberg.

opportunity to participate in these powerful traditions – and so it is important that we create another ritual to address those emotional needs.

At the Abramson Center a memorial service is scheduled within 30 days of a resident's death, usually around the conclusion of *sheloshim* (the 30-day period of mourning). The service may be in memory of one resident or a few residents, but the important thing is that it take place in the common area of the unit or household where the deceased lived, the place where their absence has been most keenly felt. It is also important to post notices of memorial services throughout the nursing home so that other residents and staff will have the opportunity to attend services for residents they knew.

These memorial services follow the informal model of shiva, when people come together to offer comfort to the mourners, to honor the legacy of the deceased, and to hold a prayer service for the recitation of the Mourners Kaddish. During memorial services in the nursing home, the mourners actually are the staff and residents, who comfort each other in the shared experience of loss. When family members attend these services, residents and staff appreciate the opportunity to reconnect with the official mourners and to perform the mitzvah of offering them comfort.

Switching off the television, arranging chairs and wheelchairs in a way that facilitates connection, and turning on a memorial light, the chaplain begins to create a sacred space for the memorial gathering. A *niggun*, a soulful wordless melody, opens the hearts of those who are gathered and helps them feel more connected to each other in the moment. A reading such as Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes reminds everyone that there is "a time to live and a time to die," and the chaplain can relate that statement to the experience of community:

"As people who live together 24/7, we share everything that life brings – the simchas and the sorrows. When a member of our community dies, we notice the absence, we acknowledge the loss, and we all feel more vulnerable. We come together today – residents, caregivers, and family members – to honor that person and to remember what was special about her."

After commenting briefly on the individual's life journey, the chaplain encourages others to share a memory or say what they will miss about the person. The reading of Psalm 23, a text that is familiar to so many staff members and residents regardless of their background, gives language to our yearning for God's presence as we gather "in the valley of the shadow of death." The recitation of the Mourners Kaddish at the end of the

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## Sister Miriam and healing: Reflections on the parsha

BY MELINDA RIBNER

In the Torah parasha *Beha'alotcha*, we read about the affliction and the healing of Miriam, our beloved ancient prophetess of the Jewish people. Throughout her life, Miriam was a strong advocate for women and their right for marital relations. Her advocacy is most well known in the incident with Zipporah in this portion. When Miriam becomes aware that Zipporah, the wife of Moses, was hurt that Moses no longer engaged in sexual relations with her, Miriam advocates for her. In a conversation with her brother Aaron, she criticizes Moses for abstaining from sexual relations on religious grounds, "Has God only spoken to Moses? Hasn't He spoken to us and we continue normal marriages?" (Numbers 12:1).

For criticizing Moses, Miriam was afflicted with *tzara'as*, a kind of skin affliction resembling leprosy. In those days, people were afflicted with *tzara'as* when they spoke badly about another person. Because punishment is said to be metered out in proportion to the sin, the common skin afflictions in the desert occurred with people who judged people superficially. Because they saw only the outside of a person, their outside was afflicted. From this episode with Miriam, the sages of Israel inserted in the daily and Shabbat prayer book a reminder of what happened to Miriam so as to encourage everyone to be mindful of their speech each day. We create our reality through our speech. If we speak negatively about anyone, we attract negativity to us.

*Loshon hara*, translated as "evil speech," is speaking negatively about self and others, even if it is true. It is forbidden under most circumstances unless it is needed to directly warn some one about business or love affairs. It is said that *loshon hara* destroys the speaker, the listener and the person spoken about. Sometimes, it is simply better to not talk about other people. It is also important to not speak negatively about yourself as well.

For the sin of *loshon hara*, Miriam was quarantined for a seven-day period outside of the camp. For these seven days, the people of Israel also did not move as they waited for Miriam to heal. One midrash (legend) says that her husband divorced her at the time she was quarantined and then remarried her after she was healed. The joy of the second wedding to Calev was said to have restored the youth and beauty of Miriam. Legends say that Miriam was now radiant as the sun at noon. Even though she was quite old and past childbearing age, she now bore children with Calev.

It is important to note that when Miriam died, no mourning on the part of the Jewish people was recorded as was with her brother Aaron. With her death, however, the source of water that had accompanied and nourished the Jewish people as they wandered in the desert mysteriously dried up. The rabbis commented that because the Jewish people did not shed tears over the loss of Miriam, the water dried up. It was only then that the people realized that it was due to the merit of Miriam that there was water in the desert. Like many women, Miriam's contribution was not appreciated until she was no longer living.

Throughout her life, Miriam was always connected to water. She stood by the water to

watch her brother. She danced through the Red Sea. And most importantly, the rock that magically produced water for the Jewish people through the desert was given in the merit of Miriam. The Lubavitcher Rebbe stated that learning about Miriam's well influences the entire week, bringing health spiritually and physically to a person. (Sichos 5th Tammuz Parsha Chukas Balak).

This is an excerpt from the chapter on Miriam in my upcoming book *Conversations with Biblical Women: Reclaiming the Path of the Feminine*. In this brief excerpt Miriam explains why she did what she did and how she grew from the illness she experienced. This book features an imaginary interview with each Biblical woman.

**Question:** What was the incident that caused you to be afflicted with *tzara'as*? Was this not an expression of a rebellion on your part against Moses?

**Miriam:** I was afflicted with *tzara'as* because I spoke badly about Moses to my brother Aaron. I did so because I was so deeply pained by Moses' abandonment of his marital responsibilities toward his wife Zipporah. She cried to me about this and my heart went out to her.

The path of Torah is not about celibacy but that of holy sexuality. Throughout my life I encouraged women to have sexual relations with their husbands, no matter how challenging our external circumstances were. Everything I know about sex is that it is holy. It is what God wants of us. It is through sexual relations that we bring blessings of peace and oneness into the world.

Why should any women be deprived of this experience, especially Zipporah who is a convert, alone, and separate from her biological family? These were some of my thoughts and feelings. I was simply conferring with my brother Aaron to see if he shared my perspective about this issue. I am, after all, Moses' older sister, and Aaron is his brother. I did not feel that there was anything wrong with my speaking to our brother about this matter. I found out differently.

**Question:** What happened to you during this time of being quarantined from the rest of the people? It is said that you came back more radiant than you had ever been.

**Miriam:** I learned so much during this time of healing as anyone does when they experience an affliction or illness. In my case, it was clear to me and to everyone that mine came directly from God. This affliction brought me closer to God than I was before. It was truly a gift. It peeled away layers that had kept me separate from God. As an older sister and as a leader of the women, I had always taken care of others before myself. Now during the precious time when I was quarantined it was only me and God. Freed of my responsibilities to others, I went deeper in my experience of God. The *Shechinah* took residence within my body in a way that She did not do before. I never expected that my words about Moses would cause this affliction, but I learned so much about who my brother Moses was, who God is and who I was, so I was deeply grateful.

At my request, my husband divorced me immediately as I left the camp so as to free me to be with myself without distractions and attachments. When I returned to the people, he remarried me. I was so happy, even happier than I had been when he married me the first time. Then I felt that Calev, who was such a righteous man, married me because I was alone and he had compassion upon me. Now with the *Shechinah* shining and guiding me so fully, a greater and holier love and passion was awakened from my beloved Calev and this made me even happier than I had ever been before. From our joy, we birthed children, even in

my old age. I had wanted children for so long, and after this tribulation and deeper prayer on my part, miracles occurred for me.

**Question:** Do you have any guidance to others who are healing from an illness and affliction?

**Miriam:** God is your healer. This illness or affliction has come to help you in the way that your soul wants. Peel away the fear, the anger, the judgments that have separated yourself from others, from God and who you really are. Use this time of illness and affliction you have been given to grow spiritually. It is not random that you are challenged in this way. Examine your deeds carefully. I was fortunate that I knew what caused my illness. It is not always so clear for many. Always, remember that God is your healer. The *Shechinah* is with you always, but particularly when you are ill. It is very helpful when you are sick, that you give charity to others.

I offer all those who are suffering physically, emotionally, and spiritually my deepest blessings and love. May you heal quickly. And if it is not the will of the *Shechinah* that you fully recover physically, may you be blessed with Her love and peace. Always remember that this physical world is not the only world. The next world, the world to come, is filled with great joy for those who have drawn close to the *Shechinah* when they were physically embodied. Please make every moment count in your life while you live in a physical world. Your physical life is short, and you never know when it will end. Remember that you cannot take your material possessions with you when you leave this physical world. You can however take your good deeds and your love of *Shechinah*. So during this brief time on the earthly plane, do good deeds to others. Be kind. Open and give your heart away each day. Love God. Love yourself. Love others. And dance, always remember to dance and celebrate the gifts of life that you have been given. I love you. Sister Miriam.

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## OLENICK

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that regardless of age, love prevails. Most of all, I learned about people being present for others – the nurses who were so tired, the ambulance driver who was not receiving any compensation for his time and effort. They all thanked me for involving them. They had become part of this special couple's soul print.

Torah speaks about *tzedakah* and how important it is to give. Some of us give by writing a check and this is fine, however the deeper giving is the gift of physically performing acts of loving kindness that improves the quality of a person's life and brings holy sparks down into the world.

*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. ■*

# Heal us

BY RABBI LEAH BERKOWITZ

One of the central prayers of the Jewish liturgy is the one found in the Amidah, the silent prayer that states: "Heal us, O God and we shall be healed; Save us, O God and we shall be saved, for you are our glory. Grant perfect healing for all of our afflictions. For you are the faithful and merciful God of healing. Praised are You, Lord, healer of His people Israel."

While Judaism always believed in the role of the doctor and healer who helped us when we were ill in order to get better, it always affirmed that the ultimate healing came from God. Indeed, all healers are the agents that allow the channels of healing that flow from the Divine to manifest in our lives. Thus, do we continue this tradition in daily prayer. Here are several important points to remember in regard to prayers for healing.

**1. We not only pray for ourselves but pray for others.** This act of praying for the healing of others is found liturgically in the above prayer that inserts the following words: "May it be your will, Lord our God, and God of our ancestors, to send perfect healing of body and of soul, to \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of person) along with all others who are stricken." We are told that this prayer is a fulfillment of the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" for we pray for others in addition to praying for ourselves. The most natural thing is to pray for our own needs; but the supernatural thing is to pray for the needs of others. And not only others whom we know – but all those who are sick, even those whom we don't know. What a profound act of love and ethical living!

**2. We pray for the healing of the body and the soul.** Judaism understands that there can be sickness of the soul that can be as terrible and damaging as sickness of the body. Because we are not materialists who just believe in the physical realm alone, we affirm that the spiritual parts of ourselves can be in need of healing. And this kind of healing requires the healing through the spirit. There is a marvelous passage in the Talmud that conveys this thought: "If someone has a headache, let them engage in Torah study (study of spiritual wisdom)... if someone has a sore throat, let them study Torah...if someone has a stomach ache, let them study Torah...if a person feels pain in their bones, let them study Torah, for it is a tonic for the bones...if you feel pain over all of your body, let them study Torah, for the Bible says, 'it is a healing for the whole body.' Come and see that the attributes of God are unlike those of human beings. When a human being administers a medicine to his friends, it may be beneficial to one organ but harmful to another; not so with God. God gave spiritual wisdom to the People of Israel and it is a life-giving remedy for the entire body, as it says in Proverbs, 'it (Torah/spiritual wisdom) is a healing for his whole body.'"

Thus, does this passage teach us that there is often a spiritual basis for our sickness, and hence a spiritual remedy and cure as well. We are body and spirit, and so we always wish a person a healing of body and soul. This is why prayers for healing and spiritual work can confront and remove our afflictions in many cases.

**3. When we are sick we turn to God.** To turn to God when we are not well, is one of the most profound things that we can do. For first we know that we are not alone but that God is at our side, no matter what it is that we face. Secondly we know that we can call upon God to send to us the healing that we need. If we have cleared the spiritual blockages that often stop healing, then we can open up the channels that allow the

healing to occur. Not every malady or illness will always result in a cure – but there can always be a healing, a deeper coming together of our divided selves, so that we can achieve the wholeness that makes our humanity evident to ourselves and others. God made us in God's image and that image and likeness, no matter what our physical condition or situation is always perfect, at our entering this world. Life with its strains and stresses often obscures to us our created beingness of the God image. But through the process of healing, we can return to who we were created to be. Sickness is neither the intent nor punishment from God. God wants only our good and our best. It is we who more often than not, fail to follow the laws of health that God has built into the natural order.

Do what you can to deal with the physical causes of your illness or distress. But after that and even during that, appeal to God to send the flow of healing to you, however that may be. Indeed, praise God each day, as the healer, and together with God, you, too, will achieve the healing that you need in your life.

*Rabbi Leah Berkowitz, a noted spiritual teacher, works with American Jewish Heritage Organization especially reaching out to unaffiliated Jews and deepening the commitment of affiliated Jews. Her father, Rabbi William Berkowitz, z"l, frequently appeared in the P-O with interviews of prominent personalities. ■*

## SEGAL

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"service" provides an opportunity for residents to mention other personal losses as well as to affirm their links with the past and hopes for the future. Returning to the last line of the Kaddish, the residents sing the familiar melody for *Oseh Shalom*, feeling uplifted and connected. There is a sense of peace and a heightened feeling of compassion that comes with our holding each other in acceptance of the truth.

What emerges is a warm sense of the individual and a heightened awareness of how people touch the lives of others. Hearing reflections by other residents demonstrates that what we do in the last years, months, weeks, or days of our lives can make a difference. "She smiled at me every morning and I'll miss that." For residents, the memorial service focuses anticipation of their own death through the comforting thought that "When my time comes, they will do this for me."

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**Comforting the mourner, visiting the sick, and deeds of lovingkindness bring good to the world.**

~ Avot deRabbi Natan, 30



# Our spirit can be youthful, no matter our age

BY RABBI ARNOLD BIENSTOCK

On May 7 and 8, 2009, I had the honor of serving on the Conference Committee on the Ministry to the Aging, which has been held annually for the past 16 years in Columbus, Ind. Some of the major providers of health services in the State of Indiana – Baptist Homes of Indiana, Clarian Health, St. Vincent Health and Hospitals, and Franklin United Methodist Communities – are the cosponsors of the conference. The organizers of the conference have always appreciated my presence as the Jewish voice on aging. Our conference intentionally focuses on the spiritual aspects of aging.

The Spirituality of Aging movement emphasizes that aging not only presents physiological and emotional challenges, but also confronts us with religious ones as well. The movement has been inspired by the writings of the great Jewish psychologist, Viktor Frankl, who wrote the classic monograph, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl's point was that individuals who have a transcendent purpose to their lives will have discovered the will to survive. Survival, for Frankl, is not just a physical struggle; it is as much a spiritual one as well. Frankl wrote his thesis with regard to the Holocaust.

He believed that the Jews who survived the Holocaust were those individuals who still retained some higher purpose in their life – whether it was religious faith or some other conviction. He felt that those individuals who lost the sense of meaning in their lives could not survive. The Spirituality of Aging movement has applied Frankl's concepts to the process of aging. The people who age well are those who retain a sense of purpose and value to their lives – even if they are in a state of physical decline. The United Methodist Church has made an inspiring video about seniors who have found a transcendent purpose as they age – whether it is an elderly man who delivers food to the homebound, a congregation that tutors a group of school children, or a woman who visits the hospitalized. When an individual has purpose and meaning to their lives, then the person has the will to continue.

The Catholic priest in Columbus, Ind., Father Davis, shared the remarkable story of an elderly couple whose home was entirely engulfed by the floodwaters that ravaged Columbus. The couple had to be evacuated by boat from their home. The stress of dealing with the destruction of their home was overwhelming. However, this couple managed to cope with the devastation of the flood. They were surrounded by countless volunteers who helped them deal with the reconstruction of their home. The victim lost his sense of victimization as he actually participated in the reconstruction of his home. The couple was included throughout the intricate process of rebuilding and refurbishing their home. The wife had significant health issues and ironically passed away one day before the open house to celebrate their return to "a normal life." The priest shared with us the resiliency of the human spirit that can cope with the most difficult of challenges.

I have been honored to be an advisor to this annual conference on aging in Indiana, which has taught me that our spirit can be eternally youthful, no matter what our chronological age.

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