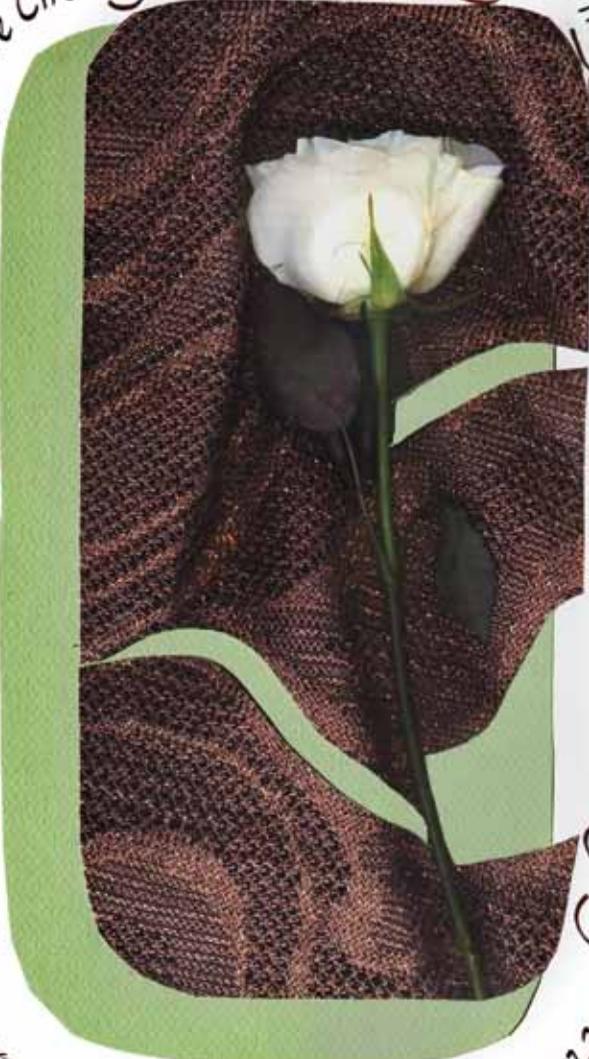


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*u draw strength from everywhere. May*

*May you gather strength from those who love you, from those who listen to you and understand you. May you draw strength from everywhere. May the circle of healing surround you.*



*May you have a complete healing of your body and spirit  
And may this healing come soon*

*Mi Sheberach*  
a focus  
on healing



## A FOCUS ON HEALING



## Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Rosh Hodesh:  
Finding strength  
one month at  
a time

I listened to the phone message from Cindy and knew that something was wrong. I could hear it in her voice, even through the static on my answering machine. I called her back immediately and my worst fears were confirmed: Cindy had breast cancer.

We didn't speak often because Cindy needed to conserve her energy for the never-ending doctor's appointments, surgeries and chemo sessions that took over her life. I marveled that she was determined to continue working through it all, even though it took every bit of strength she had. But over the months of treatment, something special happened to Cindy that changed her life, almost as much as having cancer did.

As is frequently the case with cancer patients, Cindy's life totally revolved around her cancer. Every decision, appointment, and choice, even the food she ate, related to her illness. How would she tolerate the next chemo session? Would she be too tired to attend her daughter's school play? Should she shave her head or wait for her hair to fall out? Would she ever feel normal again? So many questions with so few satisfactory answers turned her life into an emotional roller coaster. And even when she was told by her doctor that she would start to feel better again in eight months, the thought did little to cheer her.

During this time, Cindy tried to go to synagogue every Saturday because it was something she had done P.C. (Pre-Cancer) that now gave her a sense of normalcy, which she so desperately needed. And it was there, sitting amongst friends at Shabbat morning services, that she discovered the true meaning and power of the Rosh Hodesh prayer for the new moon.

*Rosh Hodesh*, which in Hebrew means "head of the month," became a holiday of great significance in ancient times, before the Jewish lunar calendar was established. The new moon's sighting by at least two witnesses and the declaration by the *beit din*, the rabbinic court in Jerusalem, signified the date upon which all other holidays were fixed. The sighting was communicated to Jewish settlements throughout Israel and the Diaspora by setting fires on the hilltops of Jerusalem, starting a chain reaction from one community to the next.

Sacrifices were offered, incense was burned, special prayers were chanted, festive meals were eaten, and the *shofar* was blown.

Today we celebrate Rosh Hodesh once a month in synagogue, when we recite special blessings and prayers, beginning with: "May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, to renew our lives in the coming month and bring us well-being and blessing."

Cindy had recited that prayer by rote many times before but had never really considered its meaning. Those words became a touchstone for her and helped bring an order to the chaotic life that her cancer had created. They became a measuring rod for her progress: She just had to get through her treatments one month at a time until she had a chance to ask for another month of renewed health and blessings.

Living with cancer made Cindy more reflective, aware and grateful of what it means to be alive. The Rosh Hodesh prayer gave her a time in which to speak to God and acknowledge this appreciation with these words: "Eternal God, Source of life, as a new month approaches, we are reminded of the passing of the seasons, of the preciousness of time, and of the limits of our earthly journey."

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And now, many years later, she looks back at that difficult period of her life with renewed appreciation – for her body's strength, for the support of her friends and community and for the comfort and hope that the Rosh Hodesh prayer gave her each month. It's closing words are ones she strives to live by through "a life marked by true piety and the dread of sin; a life free from shame and reproach... a life filled with the love of Torah and reverence for God...."

Rosh Hodesh is more than a holiday. It is a monthly opportunity for spiritual renewal, a chance to look at our lives, one month at a time, and recognize that we have the continuing power to start over. It is also a time to realize that no matter how difficult our struggles may be, or how hard life is at this point in time, we only need to make it to another month, when we can ask again for renewed strength and blessings.

Adapting technology  
to enhance religious  
services

BY RABBI JAMES R. MICHAELS

The notion of technological innovation to enhance Jewish worship services might seem a contradiction in terms to the casual observer. A Jewish religious service has a traditional format, is based on printed texts from the prayer book or from the Torah, and calls for recitation (either chanted or read) by those who are adept in synagogue skills. In the world of Jewish aging services, however, technology is often employed to make the traditional *davenen* (praying) and more liberal services more accessible and enjoyable to residents.

The most wide-spread use of technology is the creation of large-print prayer books. Almost every Jewish nursing home now has prayer books created expressly to suit the needs of its residents. Easily produced and inexpensive, this use of technology allows residents to use prayer books that are both light weight and accessible to the vision impaired.

Rabbi Sandra Katz, D. Min. chaplain at the Jewish Home of Rochester, NY, has created an entire series of large-print worship services for weekdays, Shabbat, holidays and Days of Awe, as well as song sheets, Shabbat dinner booklets, and a Passover *Haggadah*. Rabbi Katz says her custom-made prayer books serve the needs of people with vision impairment. During the worship experience, people with arthritic hands may have difficulty turning pages, so Rabbi Katz paginates the document carefully. With strategic placement of page breaks, residents are freed from turning pages in the middle of a paragraph.

Another use of this same technique is the creation of Torah reading texts for each week. Rather than require residents to hold large *Humashim* (texts of the Torah with appropriate prophetic readings) with small print, they can hold a few stapled pages in their hands to follow the reading in either Hebrew or English.

Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow, director of Religious and Chaplaincy Services at Hebrew Senior Life in Boston, uses computer presentations to enhance memorial services. Photos of those who

are being memorialized are projected on one wall of the synagogue. She also is exploring the use of PowerPoint to project the words of the Prayer Book or Torah reading on a screen in large print for those who cannot hold the prayer book, or for whom the letters are too small.

Another innovation used with increasing frequency is closed-circuit television. People in assisted living or skilled nursing facilities might want to participate in services, but may want or need to remain in their rooms. Televising services via closed-circuit TV allows them to feel they're in services; it can be accomplished with relative ease and little expense. Most facilities utilize cable television with an in-house channel. All that is needed is a camera in the synagogue with a microphone to transmit audio. Although originally intended simply as a convenience, the use of television has brought unexpected benefits.

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In the skilled nursing buildings of the Charles E. Smith Life Communities in Rockville, MD, we have used closed-circuit television for several years. Since our Passover *seders* are in the same hall as religious services, they too are televised. Because of space limitations or dietary needs, not all residents are able to attend. Many are given individual *seder* plates and brought to the day rooms or their own rooms where they can participate in the rituals along with the leader whom they see on the TV screen.

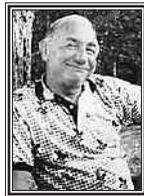
One Pesach, the presence of an intestinal virus required all residents in one building to remain on their units. In past years, that would have meant that the *seders* would be canceled. Having the capacity to televise the *seders*, however, allowed residents to enjoy what they otherwise would have missed. The leader sat – alone – in the hall and spoke directly to the camera. He said it felt strange to do so, but the residents who watched said they enjoyed the *seder* as if they had been with him.

As long-term care evolves, technology will probably play an increased role in serving seniors' religious needs. Many experts are predicting that seniors and their families will opt for home-based care over institutions. Assuming they will be limited in their mobility, this will mean many more people in long-term

(see Michaels, page Focus 2)

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*Amy Hirshberg Lederman (www.amyhirshberglederman.com) is an award-winning, nationally syndicated columnist, author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney. Her new book One God, Many Paths: Finding Meaning and Inspiration in Jewish Teachings won the 2009 Arizona Book Publishing Association's Best Book Award on religion. ✪*



## Spoonful of Humor

BY TED ROBERTS

### Asher Yotsar

My friend looked sick. He was as pale as the pillow his head rested upon. He spoke little and refused to focus on my analysis of the Michigan State/Notre Dame game on the TV on the opposite wall. Another indication of unwellness was the tube in his arm and blinking apparati borrowed from a 1940's Frankenstein movie surrounding his bed. To further validate my suspicions, this scene took place in a hospital room!

He had endured an operation – there were complications involving whatever physiologists call the human trash disposal system.

He had been through this before and I had told him of the prayer, *Asher Yotsar*. I had told him of a time when I had been damned like the Grand Coulee blocks the Arizona River and how I had recited the prayer – a traditional one used daily by more observant Jews than me – to thank our creator for the deft engineering of the system that rids us of liquid waste. (“Blessed are you Hashem who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.”)

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**“Blessed are you Hashem who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.”**

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*Voila.* The free flowing brook pushed aside boulders, rubble, debris and found its way to the sea.

We began our goodbyes, whereupon my friend, who had marveled at my earlier healing, turned his head as we stood in the hospital room doorway. “Ted,” he said. “Say that prayer for me – the one with the funny name, you know.” He said it again as we lingered in the doorway. We who have wives that can’t resist individual goodbye kisses and speeches to everyone in the room are used to lingering in goodbye doorways. So, five minutes later I’m leaning against the wall wondering if my warmhearted wife will kiss the nurse, too. My friend, with some effort, turns in the bed to look directly into my eyes.

“Don’t forget the prayer,” he says.

I went home and immediately ran upstairs and pulled out the prayer poster. It is garish, primitive, almost cartoonish, but Isaiah was a lousy dresser, and Abraham probably would have flunked out of yeshiva, and Sinai has none of the snow-covered elegance of Mt. Fujiyama. Appearances are only appearances and in the reality show of the world that’s veiled to us, they mean nothing.

Two weeks pass. My friend is home and probably appreciating for the first time

the astonishing miracle we call the human body. That long-lasting oil of Chanukah and the splitting of the Reed Sea is kid stuff compared to this. It shouldn’t work – too many failure possibilities. Reliability engineers marvel. Regarded as a machine, you wouldn’t bet a nickel on ten minutes of trouble-free operation. We observe the statistical miracle of life and thank the Creator for His gift.

So, we pray in gratitude. We tell Him over and over of our praise and then we ask that He favor us with health and prosperity. Like the cute little kid next door who wandered in our open door last week when the wife was baking. “Oh Mrs. Roberts, what pretty, pretty drapes. Can I have a cookie?” Not subtle, but remarkably effective on a proud baker. First praise then the payoff.

But let me not denigrate prayer. It is one of the languages that the Jew uses – that all faiths use – to communicate with G-d. Deeds, ritual, ceremony, and prayer all work together. At one time – in Temple Times – sacrifice was also one of the dialects of reverence.

Things change. Maybe we should add music to the list – or to put it more generally – artistic creation. I’m sure Chagall would agree with me. And so would Gerard Manley Hopkins, the great Christian poet. Who can doubt that King David’s music and lyrics to the accompaniment of his lute were the essence of prayer? There are those who could argue that his artistry, even if the theme was worldly and maybe even a trifle crude, was a form of prayer.

Some of us are better at prayer than others. A great story, “The Juggler of Notre Dame” by Anatole France, tells about a medieval juggler who is too ignorant to pray; very much like the Chasidic tale of the peasant who whistles in shul. (You don’t believe G-d reads his meaning? – asks the amazed storyteller.) Or in some versions the peasant simply recites the Aleph-Bet (G-d can’t put the letters together and deduce words?)

Anyhow, the juggler, sheltered in a monastery during the holiday that Christians call Christmas, looks around to see the talented monks devising beauty in all forms to revere the holiday and the founder of their faith. But he has no skills for illustrated bibles, stain glass windows, art or sculpture. And he knows no prayers. What to do, a simple juggler? He gives the only art G-d gave him. Guess what that is? It’s a great story with a Chasidic flavor. They got it from us – G-d wants the riches of the heart, says the Chasid, no matter the poverty of the mind.

*Ted Roberts, a Rockower Award winner, is a syndicated Jewish columnist who looks at Jewish life with rare wit and insight. When he’s not writing, Ted worships at Etz Chayim Synagogue in Huntsville, Ala., where for 25 years he has served as bar mitzvah teacher. His inspiration is his patient wife, Shirley. Visit his Web site: [www.wonderwordworks.com](http://www.wonderwordworks.com). His collected works The Scribbler on The Roof can be bought at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or [lulu.com/content/127641](http://lulu.com/content/127641). ★*



## Jews by Choice

BY MARY HOFMANN

### Healing on the slow plan

When you face a catastrophic disease and survive, you realize life as you imagined it was an illusion all along and that, at best, you (and, in fact, all of us) are on a continuum of the chronic ...when we’re lucky enough to age, all kinds of physical challenges crop up on an increasingly regular basis. I think I really became a full-fledged grown-up when I realized that healing never actually means “all better.” It means making the most of living with the limitations we’re dealt.

And why should this be a surprise? The word itself is a verb form, implying an ongoing process, not the conclusion to a crisis. And so, yes, I’m healing on the slow plan... constantly working in a less than Olympic fashion, to stay as healthy as I can for as long as I can, and I’ve developed a way that works for me.

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**...constantly working in a less than Olympic fashion, to stay as healthy as I can for as long as I can...**

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The two words that come to mind seem diametrically opposite and Jewishly questionable, but they work, and there you have it. The two words are *yoga* and *Curves*.

I started doing yoga in 1999, when I was grimly getting through that first year of being a survivor of an advanced cancer. A friend talked me into going to a class at the college, and I loathed the experience but realized that the problem was the setting not the activity. So I went out and bought some videotapes...tapes that sounded as low key as I felt. One was “Yoga for Weight Loss” and the others were “A.M. Yoga” and “P.M. Yoga,” and I bought them because they looked like something even someone as sick and out of shape as I was could manage. It wasn’t the promise of weight loss that drew me, but the fact that the cover pictured four women simultaneously stretching at very different levels...and I decided even I could do the stretches the least flexible among them was doing.

What I discovered immediately was that a sense of calm descended on my otherwise turbulent and terrified mind while I listened and watched and followed along as well as I could. So I kept on...sometimes a few times a week, sometimes daily. I cared less about the stretches than the peacefulness, but of

course the flexibility came when I stopped worrying about it. I bought more advanced tapes...and they still, by and large, sit in their boxes while I’ve purchased the DVD versions of my old classics. “Don’t you want to challenge yourself?” a type A friend asked when I offered her the advanced workouts. “These won’t even work up a serious sweat!” But I’m not going for gold. I’ve found my level...I’m staying on the slow plan where I stretch ever further in a quiet sort of way and have stuck with it for ten years, during which I’ve found many Jews who follow this originally Hindu practice and who often add “shal” to their “om.” Works for me.

And Curves? I’m actually embarrassed to be a member when I know that it’s a profoundly Christian company that underwrites causes I would never support, but again I have to settle for what works. I’ve joined so many workout organizations and gyms, none of which have lasted more than weeks. Where’s the moderation? Where’s the healing and health rather than the drive to be buff?

I joined Curves early in 2003 and still go (shall I say) religiously. As opposed to almost luxuriously unhurried yoga, it’s a quick 30-minute sprint and you’re done. I play no games; I join no competitions (I am the carrier of a noncompetitive gene, apparently, that cannot extend beyond competition with self); I wear no t-shirts. But I show up, day after day and do my 30 minutes, after which I feel bouncier, healthier, more able to face whatever the day brings.

So there it is. My healing process – which also includes munching through the box of organic veggies delivered to us (see Hofmann, page Focus 4)

### MICHAELS

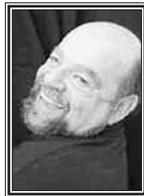
(continued from page Focus 1)

care will be unable to go to services, even at nearby synagogues.

The Internet, however, could facilitate televising services to the home-bound. The technology already exists to transmit streaming video via an individual web site. A small investment of capital would allow services from a designated facility (e.g., a nursing home or a local synagogue) to be transmitted to computers anywhere. People with Internet capacity in their homes could then receive and watch, either in real time, or at their leisure.

In sum, technology is opening up new opportunities for enhanced worship in long-term care facilities. Its use it will empower chaplains and other care-givers to deliver improved access to those who want to participate.

*Rabbi James R. Michaels is the director of Pastoral Care at the Charles E. Smith Life Communities in Rockville, MD. He is co-editor, along with Rabbi Cary Kozberg, of Flourishing in the Later Years: Jewish Perspectives on Long-Term Pastoral Care, published by The Victoria Press. ★*



## Funsmith

BY BERNIE DEKOVEN

### Cancer schmancer

*Dear Funsmith, I was wondering if you had any experience in using games and laughter to help cancer survivors.*

Abby Gezundt

Dear Abby,

There are a lot of claims out there about the healing effects of laughter and humor and play. The best I can add comes from my personal experience with cancer survivors.

A few years ago I was given an opportunity to conduct workshops in the Los Angeles Area Wellness Community (see [www.wellnesscommunity.org/index.html](http://www.wellnesscommunity.org/index.html)).

Wellness communities are organizations that provide free services for cancer patients and their families: support groups, classes in yoga and nutrition, and so forth. Primarily because of Norman Cousins and his book *The Anatomy of an Illness*, the wellness communities have a deep foundation in a belief in the healing power of laughter. Though a lot of legitimate controversy exists about whether or not laughter actually heals anything, everyone recognizes laughter as a healthy alternative to feeling depressed and victimized by illness.

I wanted to see how receptive they would be to a broader notion of fun – not just laughter, but just fun. I generally start with a “fun survey” – asking participants to list everything they do for fun. Everything. From watching TV to partying to playing with cats.

My findings: This conversation alone is healing. Or wholing. People start smiling and even laughing when they hear each other’s confessions. People find themselves acknowledging whole parts of their daily lives that are somehow vital to them. Because they are not experiences that necessarily produce laughter, they have not been identified as having anything to do with wellness. And yet, after a 15 minute brainstorm, they suddenly perceive how important fun is to them, how lifegiving, how valid.

And then of course we play games and talk more about fun and play more games. It feels VERY good doing this work with cancer survivors. And the process of playing a game (any game – especially games that make people laugh), and then talking about the fun of the game, and then extending it to everyday fun – well, it’s wonderfully natural, logical, insight-producing, fun.

I have no evidence that this actually helped them overcome the trauma of surviving cancer. But I have a definite feeling that it is helping them embrace life.

DeKoven of Indianapolis, Ind. calls himself a “funsmith” because it’s the easiest way he can define the last 40-plus years of



## Excruciating pain and oceans of love

BY RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW

Sept. 29, 2009

During these past weeks, since my car crash, I have had two profound experiences I want to share with you: 1. Brief lightning flashes of excruciating pain, 2. Long days and weeks of love renewed and deepened.

When I had my surgery for resetting my broken leg, one of the elements – which no one mentioned ahead of time – was that under general anesthetic, to prevent my body’s contaminating the operation process with unplanned urination, the surgical staff installed a urinary catheter.

This means – I am simply being clear here – the insertions of a small, stiff rubber pipe into the urethra, that tiny tube that opens for men at the tip of the penis. The tube reached back through my body toward the bladder, and of course channeled all urine in an orderly way into a bag that can be emptied.

In most cases, the catheter can be removed shortly after the operation, and the body resumes normal urination. But in my case, the remaining effects of anesthetic – and who knows what other aspects of my own body – prevented my urination from resuming.

But this can’t be allowed to go on very long – more than eight hours or so, in fact – because the body would be poisoned by its own waste products. So the catheter had to be reinserted. This time with a local topical anesthetic gel, but without general anesthetic or any nerve-block like it.

So for about half a minute, I lived inside a lightning flash of unutterable pain.

In describing this since – especially to men – I have seen them scroonch up, in what some have said was the “archetypal” fear of castration. But make no mistake – what I experienced was no “archetypal fear” but sheer physical pain – the worst of my life.

It didn’t end there. The catheter that the urology residents at my hospital used was a short-lived kind. (There could have been another choice – a “Foley catheter” that can remain in the body, causing little or no pain after its painful insertion, for at least another week.) My body did not respond the way it was supposed

*his career. In brief, he helps people make things more fun: work, school, games (of course), marriage, parenthood, exercise, healing, toys, recovery, retirement, life, etc. He does this by helping people look at things from a fun perspective, which usually turns out to be something people under stress would never think of. And he happens to know a lot about this particular perspective. Which is what he hopes you will conclude from reading more about him on <http://deepfun.com/about.html>. ✨*

to. Once again, they had to reinsert a catheter. Once again, that lightning flash of excruciating pain.

Once again – this I did not and do not understand – the catheter they used was a short-lived kind, not a Foley. Once again, my body did not respond the way it was supposed to. Once again, they told me a reinsertion would be necessary.

This time I challenged them to hear my lived and living experience, instead of simply proceeding on the basis of their medical knowledge. I did not challenge the importance of their knowledge or the necessity of my having a catheter that would save my life from the waste products my own body generates. I simply said they needed to hear what was also at stake for me in the moments of insertion.

Some of them heard me deeply and fully. But not all. Even then, one M.D. when I said this had been the worst pain of my life, asked me, unbelieving, “Worse than your broken leg?” I answered, more calmly than I felt, “Absolutely. Far, far worse.”

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**For an hour we chanted,  
as I looked deep into  
her loving and beloved  
face, knowing utterly  
that those two hazel-  
green eyes were the  
eyes of a loving God,  
seen face to face.**

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So now they agreed it should be a Foley that might give my body more time to recover its usual ability to urinate. And I talked in depth with my daughter Shoshana – who is a physician – and with Phyllis, my wife. Shoshana suggested that Phyllis draw on her experience and ability as meditator/chanter. Together we decided that Phyllis would sit with me to prepare for the insertion by chanting a chant of Rabbi Shefa Gold’s – set to a passage of consolation from Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs – “*Zeh dodi, zeh re’i* – This is my Beloved, This is my Friend.”

And here the story takes an important turn toward its other side – the side of love, the side of God. Since the car crash and the birth shortly afterward of a daughter to Phyllis’ daughter Morissa, Phyllis had been reshaping her work life to enable her to meet in love the family needs. We had begun to spend more time together, really together, not just side by side in the same room, than we had in decades. Phyllis had been reading aloud to me two amazing “children’s” books by Blue Balliet that Shoshana had given us after reading them with her own nine-year-old daughter Yonit. We had been getting to know and love each other

at a new level through the enchanted, enchanting medium of these books.

Now for half an hour we chanted together this chant of love, for the half-minute of terrible pain we held each other’s hands and looked into each other’s eyes. Phyllis said she could feel in her own body the shock I felt in mine. And for me the pain was terrible, but slightly less so than it had been before. “Utterable,” you might say, rather than “unutterable.”

I got my first chance to teach at least some of the meaning of this story. The medical school associated with the hospital where I had been going through all this asked some patients, including me, to be interviewed by four first-year students about our experiences. I told them I had agreed in honor of Shoshana Waskow and her husband Michael Slater, whose journey a generation ago through medical school I had watched with great excitement. And, in tears, I told them the story of my pain and the different ways different doctors had responded. I explained that I hoped that as they themselves became physicians, they would never forget the importance of integrating patients’ experience with medical knowledge.

Even there, the story doesn’t stop. Even a week on the Foley catheter turned out not to be enough time for my body to recover – information that could only be reached by withdrawing the Foley and waiting to see. So once more there would need to be a reinsertion. Once more we prepared to chant.

Phyllis said she did not want to use the same chant this time, out of concern that I would so combine my terror and pain with it as to hate the chant itself. Instead she used another chant of Shefa’s “*Elohaim nishama sheh’natatah bi, tehorah hi*: My God, the breath you have placed within me is pure.”

For an hour we chanted, as I looked deep into her loving and beloved face, knowing utterly that those two hazel-green eyes were the eyes of a loving God, seen face to face. Turning upside-down the Torah passage so as to say, “if you look upon My face, you shall live.”

And this time, the Rehab Center where I now am found a nurse gentler and more skillful at reinserting the catheter than the advanced hospital urology resident M.D.s had been.

So I not only survived but feel less driven by the terror that had haunted me. Tonight, before she left for home, I asked Phyllis to marry me anew. She said yes. And it’s not just her. I find myself watching with awe and love the flood of suffering and compassion that I see all around me in this center. In my family and close friends. And in all of you who have taken the trouble to call and write and help.

But that’s another story.

With blessings for a year and a life of giving and receiving good.

Arthur Waskow, director, The Shalom Center [www.shalomctr.org](http://www.shalomctr.org); co-author, The (see Waskow, page Focus 4)



## Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

### To find meaning in death

At the moment of his death, the Ba'al Shem Tov said, "Now I know why I was created." The profoundness of this declaration gives us a glimpse into an intense understanding of life.

We know that we are born to die, but what we do with the in-between contains the sum total of our worth and significance. The in-between involves so much pain and healing, so much conflict and resolution, so much joy and sorrow. Sometimes we wonder about the value of life itself.

These thoughts and more were part of my experience as I witnessed a loved one melt into another world, another dimension. Losing someone we love and cherish is, to say the least, an episode in anguish and turmoil. Losing someone we love can also be inspirational even when our grief is beyond expression.

There lived a woman named Anita. She was a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother. And she was all those things and more in just 41 years. That is a lot of existence in so short a period of time. But she accomplished this with dignity and grace. And she ended her days in this same state of elegance that was the hallmark of her sojourn here on Earth.

My heart ached watching her suffer and go through endless ordeals in futile attempts to gain time and hopefully to find some magical cure. She travelled great distances in search of that elusive relief.

Her children, siblings and mother, all lived this nightmare with us. Some were able to cope and support; some were tortured by her suffering. I learned a great deal from this experience, not only as a husband, but also as a person of faith. I counseled many people over the years on how to cope with adversity and now, when faced with the same ordeal, found no consolation in my words.

I turned inward. I functioned as a parent and a cleric, but it was as though I were going through these exercises in a state of disconnection. All seemed lost to the point where I even doubted who I was and what I was doing. Despair and depression set in like it found a home to rest and be nurtured.

One day I found myself reaching for a book in my library. The book I touched and began to fondle was Psalms. I opened the page to the twenty-third Psalm as I did for so many others who looked to me for comfort and solace. This time, however, I studied each word and looked for meanings that were not apparent to me before.

I found one particular sentence, which reads: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." In my studies I learned what the

Psalms were trying to relate. He talks about walking through the valley of death, not to the valley of death. I read it over and over again and appreciated that even though we suffer tragic losses in our lives, we need to understand that passing through these terrible episodes gives us the ability to continuing living.

She was a noble woman; in fact she was ennobling because of her demeanor and fortitude. She fought the valiant fight and she lost. But she lost with dignity and for that I came to understand an even greater feeling of connection to my Creator. I knew in an instant after reading this Psalm that sometimes we lose someone we love, someone who has an immense impact on our lives, and it can make us weak, but having known that person can also make us stronger.

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Her legacy may not be written in books, but it is imbedded in how I live my life and how I treat others who look to me for understanding and compassion. Her legacy is written on a little stone in a cemetery that indicates there once was a woman named Anita who lived, loved, laughed, cried and died. Her reward will be that which only God can give, the gift of life everlasting. She deserves no less.

I finally realized that God, in His infinite mercy, reached out to bring her soul to His bosom in eternal gratitude for a life well spent that contained mercy and forgiveness. Those thoughts help me, to this very day, 28 years later; know that faith is dependent on knowing that there are things in life over which we have no control. But we have an obligation to live to the fullest and appreciate those who travel that road of life with us as well.

I understand what the Ba'al Shem Tov meant, because from Anita's death I learned the profound meaning of her life.

#### Life after death: A sequel to my story

Up until now I elaborated on a turbulent time in my life. It was the saddest of times and left me thinking that life had no meaning. I tried to describe the thoughts that ran through my mind as I endured the pain of losing someone who shared my life and my being. To those who have experienced such a nightmare, perhaps, explaining my feelings enabled them to understand that tragedy has a beginning and an end.

This chapter deals with the end, which became a new beginning.

In the mystical writings, we are taught that we are both male and female before birth and that at birth we split from this sexual combination and then spend the rest of our time here searching for that completion again through finding a mate that will eventually make us whole once more.

The sequel to my story confirms this in a very concrete way. I lost a love only to find love again, validating my belief in the fact that there is "life after death."

Grieving takes us to many dark corners, and each time we try to turn that corner and reach for the light, we seem to fall backward until we believe that there are only rough edges that tear at our soul. We try to make sense of our feelings but always, for some reason, return to the emptiness that envelops us.

Our ancestors knew, well before the advent of therapy, that time is the essential healer in reversing our feelings of despondency. It is for this reason the process of *shiva* was created; the ability to reflect and remember and reminisce and even fantasize about what was. It gives us the ability to reconcile the past with the present. And then when the time is finished, the time of regret and remorse and guilt, we begin to resume our lives, because that is the essence of completion. The end of this obscurity leads us back to everyday living. We never forget because memory takes hold and is the formula for immortality.

There is woman named Sandra. Her name means "protector of men," and that is exactly what she is. She found me at the most difficult time of my life, a time when life had no meaning. Her beauty and wisdom carried me through the darkest night into a glowing radiance. The brightness of her smile and the gentleness of her touch allowed me to reach that glowing spark of renewal.

The Talmud teaches us that God has endowed women with a special sense of wisdom that men lack. I believe the lesson is rather simple: There is a compassion that generates goodness and tenderness that is found in women that ennobles us and gives us the ability to reach untold heights as human beings.

She came to me at, what was to me, life's ebb. She had the ability to give of herself so that newness became my mantle. Sandra knew that erasing the past was not the path to survival. Rather building on the past was the ingredient for success. The past was there forever, the future was built on its history. This was done, and continues to this very day, with sweetness and patience. She has inner warmth that radiates worth. When I met her my mind turned to poetry, and I remembered the words of the poet John Clare. In his poem "First Love" he writes:

*I ne'er was struck before that hour with love so sudden and so sweet,  
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower and stole my heart away complete.*

*My face turned pale as deadly pale. My legs refused to walk away, and when she looked, what could I ail?*

*My life and all seemed turned to clay.*

I could not believe that love had returned and took such hold as I began to rise from the ashes of my despondency. How many people, I wonder, have the opportunity to gain a new life? How many people go to sleep at night thinking all is right with their world only to encounter calamity? How many people search all their lives for completion and finally occurrences that would have made a difference? These questions and more should enable us to learn from each and every episode in the chapters of our lives. The Torah teaches us that love is as strong as death. This is true. When we lose someone we love, there is an ache that travels through us. When we find someone to love, when we find a Sandra to love, we also ache but in a different way. It is the ache of excitement and anticipation. It is the ache of restoration, the restoration of the gifts given to us by God. It is the ache of remembering yesterday as it gives us the ability to continue the journey of vitality.

Now I continue my life fully aware of all that was and with the confidence that tomorrow is another day that I can spend with my memories and with Sandra. Sandra makes me feel this way every hour of every day, and she surely taught me that there is "life after death."

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#### HOFMANN

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every week. I'm old enough now (64 in March) that I'm probably treading water, health wise, but I feel good most of the time, I can keep up with the kids and grandkids, and I'm enjoying life every day.

What more could I ask? I think most of us are so concerned about reaching some kind of pinnacle – of physical perfection, of wealth, of happiness – that life has passed us by before we realize that living, as well as healing, is what we do every day, not what we become.

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#### WASKOW

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Tent of Abraham; author of *Godwrestling – Round 2, Down-to-Earth Judaism, and a dozen other books on Jewish thought and practice, as well as books on U.S. public policy. The Shalom Center voices a new prophetic agenda in Jewish, multireligious, and American life. To receive the weekly online Shalom Report, visit [www.shalomctr.org/subscribe](http://www.shalomctr.org/subscribe). ✨*