

★ A FOCUS ON HEALING ★



Jewish Educator

BY AMY HIRSHBERG LEDERMAN

Witnessing death: A lesson in living

I sat beside her bed, watching her breathe. She looked so tiny, wrapped in mounds of bedcovers, her head softly resting on an oversized pillow. She no longer recognized me, or so I was told by her caregivers, but that didn't stop me from speaking continuously to her as I stroked her hairless head. It made me smile to think that just a few months earlier she had been vain enough to insist that we color her hair, so that no one would see her graying roots.

I placed a tape deck next to her bed and played all of her old favorites, trying to keep her connected to this world. Everyone who was part of the hospice team confirmed what I intuitively knew: that even in her unconscious state, she could hear the sounds around her and feel us as we stroked her arm or caressed her face. Sound and touch, two amazing senses, were what kept us tethered to each other now.

I loved my Aunt Gen, who was my 'sometimes mother', but more often my friend and confidante. It was hard to believe that in days, perhaps hours, I would no longer be able to pick up the phone and call her for a quick chat, a bit of advice, or a family recipe my kids had come to love.

I had never witnessed death up close before and to be honest, I was terribly afraid. There were so many unknowns that I didn't want to even think about, let alone witness. How does death look? How does it sound? What if she is in pain? How can I help her be at peace after all of the months she fought so valiantly as a warrior against cancer?

Slowly, hour by hour, something began to happen to me. The more time I spent with Gen, quietly watching the changes in her body as her life ebbed away, the more I grew comfortable with my fears. And with the process of dying itself. I watched her like a new mother watches a sleeping infant - with wonder, amazement and awe. I studied her every change - a slight loss of color in her right hand, a pause or hiccup in her breathing, a fluttering

behind her eyelids - each time realizing that this is what death looks like. I didn't realize then what I know now - that I was lucky to be able to view her death as a natural process. Like waves in an outgoing tide, her life force was drawn away from us as her body relinquished resistance and her soul found its way home.

Towards the end, I would get annoyed when visitors came and acted like they knew what to do. "Turn up the music," a friend would counsel. "Try to make her eat," another would coach. Each person meant well, but only those of us who surrounded her daily could see that she no longer wanted to be drawn into the chaos of life. She had transitioned into a place of existence that no longer beckoned to us. What was hardest on me was the realization that inevitably, we would all be left without her.

My thoughts during those final days were sharper and more focused than I would have expected. All of the errands that I had left undone and the work that was piling up on my desk seemed irrelevant now. What mattered most was being close, not just to Gen but to those of us who loved and cared for her. Being, not doing, was the only thing that seemed to make sense in that time and space. And in those long hours of being, I experienced an intimacy with family, within myself and with God that I had never known before.

There is clarity of purpose that emerges when someone we love is dying. It helps us focus on what is truly important in our life and let go of things that no longer serve us. It makes us aware of the impermanence of our days and that there is no time better than the present to say the things we need to say to those we love. It forces us to recognize that we, too, will die and inspires us to make every day count.

Soon after Gen died, I felt an urgency to set things right with a family member whom I had not been able to talk to in a while. Something had happened between us and we just couldn't break through our discomfort. Gen's death not only gave me permission, it acted as a mandate to speak what was in my heart. The conversation we had not only cleared things up between us but helped me see another gift that Gen had given me. That it is not death, our own or others, that we should fear, but a life not lived fully and honestly which is the greater loss.

Lederman is an award winning author, Jewish educator, public speaker and attorney who lives in Tucson. Visit her website at amyhirshberglederman.com. ★



Why Faith Matters

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The act of caring

My father's father died when my father was 11. His mother was a widow at 34, and he - an only child - bore much of his grief alone. In accordance with traditional practice of saying *Kaddish* for one year, he began to walk very early to synagogue each morning to say prayers in his father's memory.

At the end of his first week, he noticed that the ritual director of the synagogue, Mr. Einstein, walked past his home just as he left to walk to synagogue. Mr. Einstein, already advanced in years explained, "Your home is on the way to the synagogue. I thought it might be fun to have some company. That way, I don't have to walk alone."

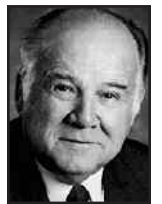
For a year my father and Mr. Einstein walked through the New England seasons, the humidity of summer and the snow of winter. They talked about life and loss and, for a while, my father was not so alone.

After my parents married and my oldest brother was born, my father called Mr. Einstein - now well into his 90s - and asked him if he would meet his new wife and son. Mr. Einstein agreed, but said that in view of his age my father would have to come to him.

My father writes: "The journey was long and complicated. His home, by car, was fully 20 minutes away. I drove in tears as I realized what he had done. He had walked for an hour to my home so that I would not have to be alone each morning. ...By the simplest of gestures, the act of caring, he took a frightened child and he led him with confidence and with faith back into life."

Voted #1 rabbi in America by Newsweek (2012) and named one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by The Jerusalem Post (2012), Rabbi David Wolpe is the senior rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles and author of several books including Why Faith Matters. This story was posted on his Facebook profile on June 14, 2012: www.facebook.com/RabbiWolpe.

(see Wolpe, page Focus 2)



Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe



Wiener's Wisdom

BY RABBI IRWIN WIENER, D.D.

"For you are with me..."

...Your staff is there to support me." These words written by King David during a very trying time in his life indicates his faith and devotion to the salvation offered by God in times of distress. He was fleeing for his life from the threats of King Saul. Feeling nothing but despair, he turns to God and eloquently describes his understanding of the blessings associated with the gift of life.

David finds the courage to turn his unfortunate despondency into a vision of collective redemption. He inspires himself and in turn all Israel with the remembrance of the goodness and mercy of God as the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. How can such a God abandon him? After all, he too is wandering aimlessly in the wilderness of hopelessness.

These thoughts come to mind whenever I read the 23rd Psalm whether during times of grief or times of sorrowful news. Unfortunately, life is filled with tragedies that often overshadow the wonderful moments of happiness. Memories somehow travel to unfortunate incidents and shade the glory of marvelous experiences. Further, we seem to dwell on the bad and relegate the good to the shadows of anguish.

People live and people die, but what happens in between can be daunting. Hearing news that illness has taken hold and has us trapped in a cycle of pain. The news is not so good and the outcome so predictable. Once there was vibrancy, gaiety, now pain, and misery as we wait for the final curtain to come down on our lives and our hopes and dreams.

Where is God? Why is this happening? Where are the days filled with laughter and celebration? We search for answers and realize that there are none. There is illness and sometimes recovery. Such is not the case now. The news is all bad – no hope – just the realization of finality.

People will constantly ask me these very questions and I search for answers that will comfort and console. I cannot show frustration nor can I give up. I see pain on the faces of those afflicted and those standing close with no ability to heal or respond to the anticipated emptiness.

God is there to provide a certain balance in life. On the one hand, He extends His hand to lift the spirit, as the other hand understands the affliction. It is hard to describe this to

WOLPE

(continued from Focus 1)

David's father, Rabbi Gerald I. Wolpe (1927-2009), was known for his compassionate leadership of Philadelphia's Har Zion Temple from 1969-'99, and for his many contributions to bioethics, caregiving, and medical education. ✪



someone who is going through the ordeal. It is even harder to comprehend the belief that God affords us the opportunity to receive comfort even while He cannot prevent the drama from unfolding.

The Prophet Isaiah reminds us that God will comfort us giving us the ability to cope. We tend to forget the goodness and kindness that we encountered as we moved through the journey of life. We become so engrossed in our distress that we cannot recall the beauty of the steps we took as we moved from episode to contentment.

No words can suffice to bring solace to the prospect of death and no actions taken by others will give us the ability to forget the anger and frustration. It is up to us to return to the center of life through reliance on ourselves, our family, our friends, and our appreciation of God who is there to take our hand as we are guided on the path of release – the release of all our burdens.

I look at the sick and infirmed and I realize that my function is to hold a hand, or kiss a brow, or listen to their cries for help. I cannot cure the aching body but I can deepen their understanding of reaching out to receive an extended hand in friendship and understanding.

Where is God? God is everywhere we want Him to be and even places where we would least expect. In the Book of Kings, we read that God is not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in fire, but in a still small voice. That voice is ours reaching out to walk with God in our hour of need because He will hear and He does see and He does comfort.

Spinoza, the father of Reform Judaism taught that *eternity* is the very core of God. There is no end. There is continuation of life. There is immortality. There is life after death. There is grace and there is forgiveness. God made all things both good and not so good and it is up to us to glean the good from among all that there is so that we can enjoy life and expect connection at death.

Watching people go through the pangs of torment can be unnerving but I remember the final words of the Psalm 23, "AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER."

Rabbi Irwin Wiener is spiritual leader of the Sun Lakes Jewish Congregation. Comments to rvyitz@cox.net. His new book, *Living with Faith*, will be published in January, 2013. ✪



Wellness & Healing

BY MELINDA RIBNER

10 suggestions to promote wellness and healing

1. Do not worry. Worry does not help the person who is sick, rather it makes a person contract, and not be available for healing. Cultivate faith in G-d's ability to heal you and others. There is some hidden good in everything that is happening. Find the good.

2. Choose to live in the present. Do not waste energy thinking too much about what was or what will be. We have only the present moment. When we are aware and present in the moment, we are open to the Divine Presence. Celebrate the gift of life in each moment as fully as you can. Take deep calming breaths throughout the day.

3. Do something each day to promote healing for yourself and others. Be good to yourself. Be good to others.

4. Count your blessings each day. Being grateful opens the heart so one can receive healing. Today was a day when I _____. Write in your journal what you received and learned each day.

5. Eliminate feelings of guilt and shame. Guilt is the feeling that you did something wrong. Shame is the feeling that you are inadequate. Healing is blocked by feelings of shame and guilt. You are a beautiful being, created in the image of the divine. Affirm that about yourself. If you feel regret or guilt over something you have done, forgive yourself and forgive others. Punishing yourself is not helpful. Affirm to do better in the future. Ask for forgiveness and make amends if you hurt someone.

6. Meditate and repeat affirmations for five minutes or more each day; "Blessed is God the true Healer", "God is healing me right now". Visualize yourself surrounded by God's light and love each day. Speak lovingly to the body part that is hurting. Give that body part special love and attention.

7. Pray for healing each day. You need God's help to heal. You may even have gotten ill just so you would reach the point of calling out to God in a sincere way. Pray for the healing of others as well. Make a prayer list of people who need healing, need livelihood, a soul mate, and so forth. When you stand in prayer with a list of needs of others, it is more powerful than

(see Ribner, page Focus 3)



Musings from Shiloh

By BATYA MEDAD

Who said it's hard to eat healthy?

Too many people use the "it's too hard" or "too much work" excuse to make healthy food. I got 15 kilo (30 lbs) off over three years ago by switching to eating lots of cooked vegetables and almost no carbohydrates. The weight has stayed off. And a year and a half ago my husband was told to lose weight, too. He lost even more than I did and has kept it off. I don't call it a diet; I call what we did a "change in how we eat."



I cook and we eat lots of vegetables. I even take them to work. And I found that most restaurants will gladly substitute salads and vegetables for the rice or potatoes on their set menus. They want our business (\$) and if they must make some accommodations, they're happy to do it.

You can do so much with all sorts of vegetables when baking them. These baked vegetables are very impressive when entertaining or bringing as "house gifts" when you're invited out. My friends expect vegetables from me. When I bring trays of baked vegetables I know that I'll have something to eat.

The trick is to experiment to see what cooks the easiest and what you like. I always dribble a bit of oil on top. You can add whatever seasonings you like. I don't add salt. Baked vegetables don't lose their flavor. I bake them in a conventional oven. They aren't waterlogged.

Batya Medad is a veteran American olah, immigrant in Israel. She and her husband made aliyah in 1970 and have been in Shiloh since 1981. She has two active blogs, <http://shilohmusings.blogspot.com> and <http://me-ander.blogspot.com>, besides having established the Kosher Cooking Carnival; details on me-ander. You can contact her at shilohmuse@yahoo.com. ✨

RIBNER

(continued from Focus 2)

when you make requests just for yourself. You receive more spiritually. Even if you yourself are sick, pray for others.

8. Do meditations with God's name – *Yud, Hay, and Vav* and *Hay*. Place the divine name in your body. (See book *New Age Judaism* or my CD, *Arousal from Below* for meditation guidance. If you do not know the letters of the Divine Name, and even if you do, visualize yourself in a Jewish star filled with divine light.

9. Nourish yourself physically by eating natural food, drinking pure water, exercising, and spending time in the sun each day. Eliminate negative eating, drinking or other destructive behaviors to the body. Seek alternative approaches like acupuncture, spiritual energy healing to support healing. Your body wants to heal.

10. Make an effort to reach out to others to uplift them. Say kind words to others. Do not speak *loshen hara*, speak badly about others. Hug as many people as you can each day. We all need more hugging. Give charity. It opens the gates for healing. Even if you are poor, it will be helpful to give charity.

May we each heal on a personal level. May the whole world heal and be brought to a greater wellbeing and wholeness.

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Maimonides Prayer for the Physician



BXALTED G-d — Before I begin the holy work of healing the creations of your hands, I place my entreaty before the throne of your glory that you grant strength of spirit and fortitude to faithfully execute my work. Let not desire for wealth or benefit blind me from seeing truth. Deem me worthy of seeing in the sufferer who seeks my advice - a person - neither rich nor poor. Friend or foe, good man or bad, of a man in distress, show me only the man.

If doctors wiser than me seek to help me understand, grant me the desire to learn from them, for the knowledge of healing is boundless. But when fools deride me, give me fortitude! Let my love for my profession strengthen my resolve to withstand the derision even of men of high station. Illuminate the way for me, for any lapse in my knowledge can bring illness and death upon your creations. I beseech you, merciful and gracious G-d, strengthen me in body and soul, and instill within me a perfect spirit.

ל עליון קודם שאני מתחיל בעבודתך הקדושה. לרפא את צירי כפיד אני מפיל את תחיתתי לפני כסא כבודך, שנתן לי אומץ רוח ויחזק רב לעשות את עבודתך באמונה. ומה שאני פה לצבור הון או טוב לא תעוור את עיני מראות נכוחה. וזכני להביט על סובל הבא לשאול בעצתי כעל אדם בלי הבדל בין עשיר ועני. ידיד ושונא, איש טוב ורע. את האדם בצר לו. הראני רק את האדם אם רופאים נבונים מני רוצים ללמדני בניה, תן לי הרצון ללמוד מהם, כי תורת הרפואה אין ערוך לה, אבל כאשר נסילים יבזוני, אחלי! אהבתי להקצוע החזק את רוחי חבלי. להחשב עם זקנות המלעגים ובעודם, רק האמת תהיה נר להגילי. כי כל ויתור במקצועי יכול להביא כליון ומחלה ליציר כפיד. אנא: רחום ורחון חזקני וארצני בגופי ובנפשי, ורוח שלם תקע בקרבי:

תפלת הרופא



Book Excerpt

By ROBYN MICHELE LEVY

Ladies in Waning

These days, everyone is worried about me, even strangers – particularly impatient strangers at the grocery store, waiting in line behind me at the express checkout counter. Sometimes they are so worried that their eyeballs roll right out of their sockets as I slowly fumble through my purse to pay the clerk.

I'm worried too. Unsettling thoughts of drooling, diapers, and wheelchairs loom large. And so does death (hopefully before diapers). But these fears seem rather futile to fret about now, considering I'm just in the early stage of Parkinson's. This means I can focus



my anxiety on concerns I face every day. For starters, there is my deteriorating walk, which I am very self-conscious about – particularly at the dog park. Let off leash,

Nellie runs like the wind, as far away from me as possible. Then she conducts “canine crop circle” research, eventually marking the perfect celestial spot with a down-to-earth turd. Which I must find and dispose of, in front of everyone. I lumber awkwardly across the grass, dodging dogs chasing tennis balls and squeaky toys, my left leg dragging behind, my crooked left arm frozen at my side, torso tilting too far forward, right arm swinging back and forth, back and forth, like a doggie poop divining rod, searching ... until I strike gold.

My many other concerns are not as public. I'm having difficulty flossing my teeth, folding the laundry, chopping vegetables, vacuuming the floors, putting on my shoes, doing up zippers, typing on the keyboard. Little things only Bergen and Naomi notice when we're at home. And while they don't say it out loud, I know they both worry about me a lot. Most of the time, I appreciate all this concern from everybody. But sometimes I find it difficult being the center of apprehension and long to escape the scrutiny.

That's where Nellie comes in handy. As far as I can tell, my dog hasn't the foggiest idea that I have a degenerative

brain disease – or that I have a brain to degenerate. In her eyes, I'm just this omnipresent creature she adores, who fills her food bowl, takes her for walks, picks up her poop, scratches her belly, and reluctantly removes sticks protruding from her bum – the very sticks I am always telling her not to eat. And while she isn't the brightest dog in town, her ignorance often brings me bliss – rare moments when I forget that I have Parkinson's and that people worry about me.

Warning: Habits may be habit forming. Habits may also be hilarious. Sometimes they can be both. Such as the habit I have of marching around inside my house, like a soldier in basic training. Every day. Rain or shine. Hup, two, three, four. Back and forth between the kitchen and the living room – with gusto. According to my physiotherapist, this marching drill should help my rigid left arm swing back and forth and my limping left leg lift up and down, in smooth rhythmic motions that would make a sergeant major proud. That's what it should do. But I march to the beat of a disabled drummer. And no matter how hard I try, I lurch to the right like a spastic soldier – perky but jerky. I'd make a sergeant major cry.

The first time Naomi saw me marching, she laughed and then squealed, “I arrived just in time for the show!” I was flattered – teenagers are notoriously hard to impress.

“Welcome to *Cirque d'Oy Vey*,” I said, putting more schlep into my step.

Luckily for her, I was at the beginning of my workout routine, cobbled together from physio, Pilates, and yoga exercises I'd learned over the years. There was plenty still to come. Leg kicks and figure eights. Arm flexing. Knee tapping. Stretches and lunges. Postural poses. And the showstopper: tripping over Nellie while walking backwards.

Naomi was entertained. She even got into the act by coaxing my left arm into positions it can no longer find on its own. She still occasionally does this, without hesitation or awkwardness and without the slightest indication that I embarrass her – even in front of her friends. I find this remarkable because I consider my body an embarrassment of glitches, which I'd do anything to fix.

Unfortunately, fixing things isn't my forte; I'm better at breaking things. Casualties include the garburator, the clothes dryer, the dishwasher, and, of course, the computer. I'm lucky that Bergen can fix almost anything – he's a handyman with a workshop full of tools and spare parts and an eclectic collection of you-never-know-when-this-might-come-in-handly junk. Which somehow always comes in handy for something,

somewhere, sometime.

I'm secretly hoping someday he'll emerge from his workshop with “The Lazarus” – a custom-built contraption that resurrects dead dopamine brain cells and cures Parkinson's. Of course, I'll bravely volunteer to be the first guinea pig to test it out. And I'll try not to flinch, even if he attaches a modified Ham radio with guitar-pick electrodes to my head. I realize there's bound to be some kinks to work out in the beginning, so I'll brace myself for possible side effects – nausea, chills, headache, double vision, multiple orgasms – I can handle almost anything if it leads to a fix.

Meanwhile, I'm collecting facts – searching the web, borrowing library books, learning the lingo. Apparently, so is Naomi. When I go to tuck her into bed tonight, I have to choke back my tears. Probably every kid in the world is reading the latest Harry Potter book, but not my daughter. She is flipping through the pages of an illustrated neurology textbook.

“Are you sure you want to read that stuff before bed?” I ask.

“Yeah. Look at these brains. This one is healthy. This other one has Parkinson's. And did you know that smoking may somehow protect the brain from getting Parkinson's disease?”

“I wish I'd known that years ago – I'd have started smoking.”

Naomi asks, “Do you want to cuddle?”

“Of course I do. Move over,” I say, squeezing in beside her. I wrap my arms around my girl while she leans her head on my shoulder. We hear Nellie jingling her way into the room and jumping up onto the bed. I'm in her spot, she whimpers. My head is on her pillow, she woofs.

“Don't go,” Naomi whispers. “Stay.”

So I stay, forcing Nellie to cancel her pillow reservations and curl up at Naomi's feet. The three of us close our eyes, but only the dog falls fast asleep. Together, Naomi and I luxuriate in this shared end-of-day stillness. Neither of us can remember the last time we cuddled like this, but our bodies remember. Tentatively, our legs entwine and our arms overlap – reviving the affection I thought we'd lost, collateral damage from the Bad Old Days. Naomi yawns, pulls the covers close, and rests her head on my shoulder. We are tired, but we continue talking about brains and dogs, while invisible threads of trust begin mending our tattered love.

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