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The Power of Stories in the Rabbinic Tradition and How They May be Used for Healing with Terminally Ill People

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Ordination

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Referees, Professor Edward Goldman and Rabbi Julie Schwartz

Dedicated with Love to

Edward and Sara.

May Our Story Together Never End.

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Digest

This thesis explores the use of storytelling in pastoral care with terminally ill patients and offers a small sample of Jewish stories which are suitable for use in such a context. Jewish tradition offers a variety of stories which speak to critical issues surrounding illness and death. This thesis is intended to be used as a guide by caregivers who wish to understand why stories are so powerful and for those who wish to learn ways of selecting and using appropriate stories.

The first chapter is intended to help readers gain a better awareness and appreciation of stories. It begins with a brief, historical overview of ways that people have used stories in both Jewish and secular, therapeutic settings. The chapter offers two case studies of the use of stories and considers possible benefits and difficulties in using story therapy. It then offers theories as to why storytelling is useful for both adults and children.

Chapter two begins with an explanation of common concerns for dying people and continues with a description of ways that people come to terms with their upcoming deaths. It concludes with a discussion of what constitutes an appropriate death. This information familiarizes caregivers with the issues that confront terminally ill persons so that they may be sensitive to what the patient may be experiencing.

Once the reader understands what a dying person needs emotionally and spiritually, one can utilize chapter three. It offers a sample of *Talmudic, Midrashic*, and *Chasidic* stories that may be useful in pastoral care settings. The stories are organized by the themes which directly relate to the issues discussed in chapter two. This chapter also includes a brief analysis and a suggested application for each story.

Merely knowing the stories is not sufficient for assuring effective story therapy. A person must be familiar with ways of selecting appropriate stories and must know ways to tell the stories. Chapter four addresses these issues. It begins by discussing ways of selecting suitable stories and then discusses methods for telling them.

After reading this thesis, the reader should feel comfortable using story therapy with terminally ill people. Chapters one through four offer a comprehensive understanding of why stories are so powerful, what a dying person needs from stories, and ways to select and tell the stories offered.

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Chapter I
The Power of Stories

People say stories are what you use to put children to sleep;
I say they are what you use to wake people up
-Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Society and modern culture have, for many years, maligned stories to a great extent. Many people view stories as a technique for filling empty time and keeping children quiet. Other people consider stories to be just another way for children and adults to escape reality. In recent years, authorities such as Bruno Bettelheim and Robert Coles have taught the importance of stories for people of all ages and have articulated an insight which many have overlooked. They point out that in therapeutic as well as educational settings, stories profoundly influence people. Bettelheim and Coles teach that the telling of stories entertains and informs, thus stimulating a person's imagination and intellect while at the same time helping to clarify emotional issues. Although Bettelheim's research focused on children, and Coles worked primarily with adults, they both agree that at any age people benefit when they either listen to a story or tell their own story.

Although the emphasis placed on stories may be somewhat recent, both Jewish and secular cultures are greatly shaped by storytelling. These stories play a vital role within both cultures. Stories are a powerful way to convey values and insights from one person to another. The sacred stories with which children are raised help form their identities, whether these are religious or secular. American children grow up hearing the stories of pilgrims and of fighting for freedom. These stories help form their identities as Americans

and help instill within them certain understandings of what it means to be an American. Jews, in particular, are no different. Jewish children are taught about what it means to be Jewish through stories. Numerous aspects of Judaism including history, holidays and Biblical literacy are transmitted through storytelling. Jewish children learn about the central characters such as Sarah and Abraham through stories and they learn how the Jews left Egypt by hearing the story of the Exodus.

Stories continue to be central features within both the secular society and Jewish communities today. People use stories for a variety of purposes and in a variety of educational, therapeutic, and pastoral care settings, among others. They do this, often times, with no understanding of ways to use stories effectively or the reasons that storytelling impacts people so powerfully. In addition, Jews may use stories without understanding how deeply rooted the tradition is in Judaism. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to help people gain a better awareness and appreciation of stories. The chapter first provides a brief, historical overview of ways that stories have been traditionally understood within Judaism and three ways that Jews have used stories. Then it will focus on the ways modern culture uses stories in therapeutic and pastoral care settings. This section of the chapter will focus on two case studies of the use of stories and then consider the possible benefits and difficulties in using storytelling as a method of supporting people. A final discussion will present some theories concerning reasons that stories are so useful for both children and adults. Thus, those interested in using stories in pastoral care settings will gain at least a basic understanding of the history of the use of stories and ways that these can be helpful in their work.

The Tradition of Stories in Judaism

Jews have a rich tradition of using stories for both teaching and healing purposes. Jewish sacred literature is composed, at least partially, of stories. *Torah* and *Talmud* are mixtures of both law and lore and the *Torah* even begins with story. The tradition of storytellers (*maggidim*) dates back to ancient times.[1]

All too often, because literature dealing with pastoral care has come from Christian traditions, it seems foreign to Jews. Suggestions of what to do while with a patient may seem somehow "not Jewish." The need to provide these caregivers with a Jewish way of interacting with Jewish patients is crucial. The realization that storytelling has strong Jewish roots adds credibility to the activity for many Jews and offers a Jewish chaplain the feeling that he/she is using "authentically Jewish" means to help another person. A brief overview of ways that ancient Rabbis and later *Chasidic* teachers viewed stories leads one to understand the value of stories within Judaism.

The Rabbis of the early Middle Ages were well aware of the power of stories. The wide use of the *mashal* or parable is evidence of this. In *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, the Rabbis teach,

> "let not the mashal be lightly regarded, for by means of it a man can understand the words of Torah. If a king loses gold from his house or a precious pearl, does he not find it by means of a wick worth a penny? So the story should not be lightly esteemed in your eyes, since by means of the story a person arrives at the true meaning of the words of Torah."[2]

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[1] Yitzchak Buxbaum, *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994), p. 84.

[2] *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* I:1,8 quoted by Thomas Loucheim. *The Use of Metaphor in Rabbinical Counseling,* Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1987, p. 38.

In a broader context, *Torah* can be loosely understood to mean life. By using a *mashal*, the Rabbis were aware they could approach difficult issues in an indirect way. Sometimes, merely alluding to an issue instead of discussing it directly was all that was needed to compel people to think about it seriously. "Stories contain secrets, hidden wisdom," according to the Baal Shem Tov's great-grandson, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. "Their particular virtue, what makes them potent and effective, is that they are a form of indirect communication." Rabbi Nachman taught that stories do not need to be understood rationally.[3] Just as with art, appreciation does not depend solely on cognitive understanding. As Yitzhak Buxbaum writes, "when a person reads a novel or hears a folktale, if it works, it has an immediate effect in changing his *kishkes*, his insides."[4]

According to later *Chasidic* tradition, a major purpose of stories is to turn Jews' hearts and minds toward God. These *Chasidim* taught that this was accomplished by realizing the lesson(s) hidden within the story. The realization of the stories' hidden meanings inspires people and draws them closer to God. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav taught that "stories of the *Tzaddikim* (pious men) inspire a person, awakening his heart and setting it on fire, arousing him to turn to God with an intense and overpowering craving."[5] The *Chasidic* masters further this idea by teaching that stories "open hearts and minds and produce an expanded consciousness; they act as prayers."[6]

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[3] Buxbaum, *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism,* p. 160.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 10-11.

[6] Ibid., p. 185.

A second purpose of telling stories, according to these teachers, is to encourage people to imitate the *Tzaddikim* in their righteousness. They believed that the telling of stories of the ways that righteous people act gives others an example to live by and inspires them to better themselves. The Rabbis taught that the one who inspires a deed is even greater than the one who does it.[7] The Talmud gives the example of someone who collects charity and inspires others to give as being greater than a second person who gives charity but does nothing more. Therefore, if a story causes its readers to imitate its action or causes people to draw closer to God, then the storyteller has attained a lofty and traditionally Jewish goal.

The power of stories is not limited to inspiring people to imitate the *Tzaddikim* or turning people toward God. A third reason for using stories is equally important. For centuries, the Rabbis have recognized the healing power of stories. They taught that people suffering from physical disorders and those with spiritual illnesses are equally in need of hearing stories. A *Chasidic* author teaches that "just as it is a mitzvah to visit a person who is physically ill and comfort him with conversation, so it is a mitzvah to visit a person spiritually ill and comfort him with conversation and stories."[8] For either of these patients, *Chasidic* teachers explained that listening to holy stories can lead them to begin to heal from their sicknesses. These *Chasidim* believed that storytelling even had the power to cure people from physical afflictions. They explained this by teaching that storytelling, even more than Torah study, provides light and inspiration to people who are

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[7] *Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* 9a.

[8] Nifla'ot ha-tiferet Shlomo, Yaffa Sihatan, p. 11 (quoted in *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism*, p. 52).

in spiritual darkness. The Tzemach Tzedek (an eighteenth century *Chasidic* author) emphasized this notion by writing that "although a person might know all of *Chasidic* teaching, he must still tell stories, for during times of personal exile, of darkness and depression, it is the stories, even more than the teachings, that can inspire and renew him and illuminate his path, to lead him out of Egypt."[9] Serious illness can be a time of great depression for people. The support that stories offer to people at these troubling times follows that which the Rabbis taught centuries ago.

The Rabbis have long recognized the efficacy of stories and have encouraged their followers to use them. Storytelling offers inspiration to the person in need and it provides the helper an authentically Jewish medium to use in offering help. Jews have much to learn from the ways that the Rabbis made use of stories and can thus recognize that when storytelling is part of Jewish pastoral care, this is actually a sacred act of offering hope and comfort to those in need. Caregivers living in the late twentieth century need to understand ways that other practitioners use stories. The next section will highlight modern applications of storytelling within both therapeutic and pastoral care settings.

How Stories Have Been Used in Therapeutic and Pastoral Care Settings

Although there is not a great deal of literature discussing how contemporary therapists and chaplains use stories in their work, there is information concerning story

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[9] Buxbaum, *Storytelling and Spirituality,* p. 51.

centered therapy. There are both inpatient and outpatient settings throughout the country in which therapists and chaplains successfully use stories with their patients. Many of these chaplains have written about their experiences in such journals as the *Journal of Pastoral Care* and *Pastoral Psychology*. The traditional method is for caregivers to focus on listening to the patient's life history, trying to find meaning within the story. It, then, is the basis for discussion with the patient. In recent years, a different method of storytelling has appeared. It involves using stories which are not the patient's life history. This approach varies from situation to situation and it is important to note the possible benefits and difficulties inherent in each method.

Chaplain David Allison has created and implemented one distinct model for using stories as the basis for his pastoral care. He leads a pastoral care treatment group for adult psychiatric patients. It uses the medium of story to help patients explore themes such as illness, hospitalization, relationships, and struggle.[10] In his Meanings Group, participants join together weekly. After an initial check-in, a facilitator either reads or tells a story to the group. These stories differ each week and are chosen from a variety of sources. The facilitator selects a particular story for the possible meanings it offers. The Hebrew Bible, Christian Scripture, folk traditions, Zen, Sufism, and modern parables all provide possible sources for the stories.

Although not a professional storyteller, the facilitator makes sure to tell the story slowly enough for each of the participants to follow the content. After the facilitator presents the story to the group, he/she waits for the members to respond. Chaplain

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[10] David Allison, "Tell Us A Story: Using Stories in a Pastoral Care Treatment Group." A paper presented at the 46th Annual Convention of the College of Chaplains, Indianapolis, March 9, 1992.

Allison points out that it is important to allow the group this time to respond. "Too many questions or process comments by leaders will enable participants to stay removed from experiencing the story and its interpretation."[11]

Eventually, the group members become engaged with the story and members begin to interact with each other in discussing it. Participants may relate to different characters or to the same character for different reasons. Such discussion allows relationships to be fostered in two directions. First, the group can become a closer, more supportive community, providing its members with ongoing feedback and encouragement. Secondly, these discussions encourage participants to explore patterns between the story and their own lives. They can examine the relationship between their present circumstances and that which they hope for the future.

Leaders focus on various literary questions or ask the group members to consider what in the story is most helpful to them in their treatment or ways they related to the story. Thus, participants are encouraged to explore their understanding of the story's meanings and are often led away from trying to find the intended moral. Too often, group members become preoccupied with figuring out the presumed moral of the story. By avoiding this digression, group members have the time to question the ways that their lives mirror the story. They then have the opportunity to share their own stories in relationship to the story they just heard.[12]

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[11] Ibid., p. 16.

[12] Ibid.

The Meanings Group begins with an outside story and works inward. An advantage of Allison's approach is that it encourages participants to explore the ways that their own stories relate to the outside story. Themes present in the given story may cause the person to examine issues in his/her own life which s/he had previously not considered. At Allison's own admission, a distinct disadvantage of this approach is the chance that the chosen story will not be relevant to the group on any given day. The stories are selected in advance of the meeting and may not address the issues most pressing for the group members. Although the facilitator makes every effort to choose a story which will prompt reflection and discussion, he/she cannot guarantee success in every instance.

Dr. Richard Gardner presents a second and very different type of story based pastoral care. In his work with children, Gardner noticed that children enjoy both telling and listening to stories. He hypothesized that stories could be helpful in therapeutic settings and developed what he called the Mutual Storytelling Technique.[13] Working with children between five years of age and puberty, Dr. Gardner invites the child to tell a fictitious story. After listening to the story and analyzing it for psychodynamic meaning, Gardner or another therapist using this technique tell the child a similar story. The therapist's story includes the same characters in a similar situation but presents "adaptations and resolutions of the conflicts healthier than those exhibited in the child's story."[14] These stories are the basis for the therapeutic sessions.

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[13] Richard Gardner, *Therapeutic Communication with Children: The Mutual Storytelling Technique* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1977).

[14] Ibid., p. 18.

Gardner points out numerous benefits of the Mutual Storytelling Technique. He writes,

> The therapist, speaking in the child's own language has a better chance of "being heard" than if he or she were to provide direct confrontations and explanations. One could almost say that the therapist's communications bypass the child's conscious awareness and are received directly by the unconscious. The child is not burdened with alien psychoanalytic interpretations. Direct anxiety-provoking confrontations, so reminiscent of the child's experience with parents and teachers, are avoided. In addition, the introduction of humor and drama enhances the child's interest and pleasure and therefore his or her receptivity.[15]

The child benefits in additional ways. The telling of stories is ego-enhancing for the child.[16] It is enjoyable for the therapist as well which allows the child to feel as if he/she is able to please the therapist. As Gardner writes, "the Mutual Storytelling Technique is imaginative, constructive, and pleasure-giving. [It is] meaningful in both therapeutic and non-therapeutic relationships."[17]

There are two possible weaknesses to this approach worth mentioning. Both concern the great deal of skill demanded of the therapist. First, the therapist must be immediately able to set the child at ease enough so that he/she feels comfortable sharing a story. Many children come to therapy shy and are unwilling to share stories with a stranger. Because the entire session is based on the child's story, it is imperative that the child feel safe enough to share. Furthermore, as the child presents his/her story for the first time during the session, the therapist must be skilled in listening for the relevant

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 940.

[17] Ibid.

information and so able to retell it to the child immediately. Unlike other therapeutic methods where the therapist comes to the session prepared with a story and can guide the discussion, he/she has no idea what the story will be. Only therapists who are comfortable with spontaneous thinking are able to use this method successfully.

The Reverend Christopher Schooley has adapted Gardner's technique in his work with hospitalized children. In his hospital setting, there are both short term and long term patients. However long the stay, Schooley teaches that every hospitalization is a crisis for the child. "The pastor/chaplain who ministers to children in the hospital can utilize Mutual Storytelling to aid the child in examining his crisis. Out of the stories can come the hope to carry children on to the next event."[18] Similar to Gardner, Schooley listens to the child's story and searches for the relevant themes. Using the themes of the child's story, he tells a slightly altered story back to the child.

As Gardner noted in his work, an initial rapport with the child must be developed before the chaplain can expect to use Mutual Storytelling. With patients whose stay in the hospital is short, it is often difficult to develop this relationship allowing for enough time to use this technique successfully. Further complicating the time factor is the reality that children tend not to tell stories in the first or last stages of their hospital stay. At the beginning, Schooley explains, children's fear overwhelms them, thus inhibiting storytelling. Toward the end, stories decrease as well. Thoughts of returning to the outside world overshadow any pleasure gained from the Mutual Storytelling.[19] During the middle stages

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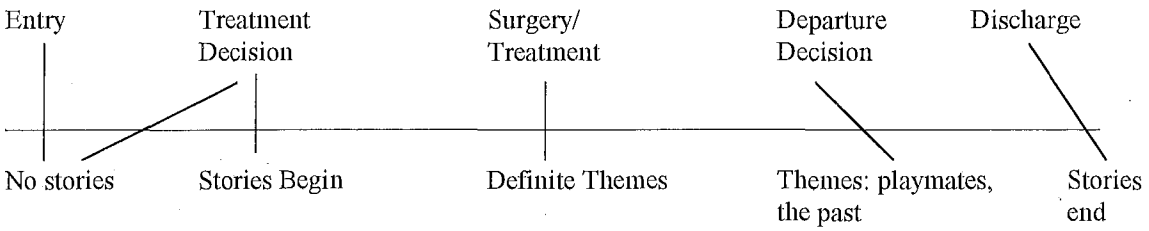
[18] Christopher Schooley, "Communicating with Hospitalized Children: The Mutual Storytelling Technique," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* Volume 38(2), June 1974, p. 104.

[19] Ibid., p. 108.

of the stay, themes of the child's story become apparent in association with each of the milestones of the hospitalization. For instance, Schooley notes, stories tend to begin just after the treatment decisions are made. Themes of struggles, broken rules, encounters with "bad guys," and snakes are prevalent in the stories at this time. As the stay progresses, themes within the stories change. By the time decisions are made about departure, stories have shifted to themes of family and playmates. As noted, stories end at the time the child is about to leave the hospital.[20] (See Figure A)

Fig. A:[21]

(Milestones of Medical Care)



(Storytelling Themes and Development)

Being aware of these stages allows the chaplain to understand better the child's silences and to be prepared for the common themes which will emerge.

Although there is much to keep in mind while using this technique, Mutual Storytelling is an effective method for use in pastoral care for a number of reasons.

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[20] Ibid., p. 104.

[21] Ibid.

Children love to create stories and they especially love to create tales with Biblical themes. Equally important is the recognition that crisis leads people to question the very meaning of life and struggle. This occurs no matter the age of the child. The chaplain is best able to use the motifs raised in the child's stories to explore issues with which the child is dealing. This is true whether the stories focus on theological issues or not.

The previous examples of a chaplain using stories in pastoral care and a therapist using them with children demonstrate the effectiveness of stories. However, it does little to explain why stories are so successful in helping people. That question remains. How does storytelling help patients so dramatically and what are some of the benefits it offers? Without a basic appreciation of what makes storytelling so powerful for listeners, storytellers are unable to maximize their efficacy in both choosing and presenting a story. The next section of this chapter will present some answers to these questions.

Reasons Why Storytelling Works

Metaphor and story are more influential than abstract reasoning or even the truth expressed in didactic language. There are numerous theories which explain the reasons for this. Therefore, this section of the chapter will focus on four theories which may explain the advantage of using stories.

To begin, listeners automatically internalize the stories they hear. People need to make the story their own for it to have an effect on them. Consciously or not, listeners try to figure out which character resembles them or which character they most resemble.

People struggle with the moral issues inherent in the story and note the ways that this plot relates to the plot of their own lives. These struggles often lead to tough self scrutiny. When listeners recognize themselves in a story, they begin to contemplate aspects of their lives which they previously did not examine. This is clearly noticeable in David Allison's Meaning Group. The relationship the patients create between their own lives and the narrative makes storytelling a powerful therapeutic tool and often leads to transformative experiences. The lessons learned from stories stay with people much longer than most individuals realize. As Daniel Taylor explains, "stories go somewhere to roost, somewhere deep inside our spirits. They settle there, beyond consciousness to grow, blend with other stories and experiences and work their influence from below."[22]

A second distinct advantage of storytelling is that it addresses the listener as a whole person, and not just the conscious mind. Storytelling acknowledges a listener's humanness by working with the listener as a thinking, feeling, spiritual being who processes information on many different levels. More simply put, a message is lost when it only addresses a person's conscious mind. Taylor explains in his book, *The Healing Power of Stories,* "no matter how much our heads know, if our hearts are not persuaded, we are not truly convinced, certainly not enough to act."[23] If stories do not address the heart and soul of the listener, then they are no different than lectures.

In addition to previously mentioned strengths, storytelling serves specific needs during a pastoral care visit. For many sick people, the feeling of loneliness can be

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[22] Daniel Taylor, *The Healing Power of Stories* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1996), p. 11.

[23] Ibid., p. 35.

overwhelming. As will be further discussed in chapter two, friends and family often have difficulty dealing with the emotional issues of their loved one's illness and/or impending death and may deal with this by separating themselves from the patient. This perceived loss of community can leave the patient feeling abandoned and alone. Using stories can help this situation. Storytelling helps give the sense of community where there may be none. At the very minimum, storytelling defines a community; it establishes a teller and listener.[24] It can be the bridge between a patient and an interested chaplain. This sense of connection can be healing for those in need.

A final reason concerning the power of storytelling and its particular relevance for use in pastoral care is that in telling a story, one can avoid imposing any agenda onto the patient.[25] Patients may derive their own meaning from the story. In fact, the meaning of a story depends solely on the patient's understanding of it. No one can be sure about the ways a listener will hear or react to a certain metaphor. There are many interpretations to a good story and its beauty lies in the ways that the listener takes it in and uses it as needed. There are no right or wrong interpretations. The ultimate concern is the meaning which the listener finds within the text and each person will find meaning that is unique to his/her identity and position in life. People take from stories that which they need and that which their unconscious minds are able to internalize. These outcomes will vary over time. The same story will be understood quite differently at different times even by the same person. Henry Close explains that using stories in pastoral care is like "planting a

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[24] Ibid., p. 114.

[25] Eliot Baskin, *The Use of Sacred Stories with Patients with AIDS*, Doctoral Dissertation, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, 1993, p. 19.

seed trusting that some will bear fruit or like presenting a psychological smorgasbord from which the patient can take whatever seems nurturing."[26] Furthermore, the issues are raised in a non-threatening manner which reduces a listener's resistance. Close acknowledges this when he writes, "a parable merely invites you to embrace its truth and is thus much less likely to stir up resistance."[27]

This variance in understanding over time is essential. The intent is not to give the patient resolution to his/her problems. Rather, people use stories, ironically, to broaden the listener's struggles. The goal is to expand a person's thought process and encourage him/her to consider new ways of dealing with his/her problem. Sometimes this is what people need most. The lessons people take from stories help facilitate new patterns of thoughts and behavior and are therapeutic to the extent that they help patients work through their conflicts and find their own solutions. In their experience in using stories with patients, Gene Combs and Jill Freedman note that "occasionally families or individuals do find complete solutions in interaction with a story we've told. More often they experience a shift in feeling, a new way to perceive their situation, or new ideas for what to do in a particular context."[28] Stories contain lessons and so telling stories gives the listener the encouragement and support necessary to try to understand those lessons. Although most problems are not solved simply by listening to stories, storytelling provides people with new ways to react to the conflict. In pastoral care, in particular, this

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[26] Henry Close, "Metaphor in Pastoral Care," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* Volume 38(4), 1984, p. 304.

[27] Ibid., p. 298.

[28] Gene Combs and Jill Freedman, *Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990), p. 164.

distinction is essential to understand. Clearly, hearing a story will not save a dying person from dying. It may, though, allow that person to understand his/her death in a way that allows for a peaceful death.

Conclusion

Although many people in today's society underestimate the efficacy of stories, storytelling is a powerful and effective way to communicate to another person. In educational, therapeutic, and pastoral care settings, stories continue to play a central role in people's lives. Storytelling can convey facts and it can do much more than that. Listening to stories helps shape who a person is. People of all ages gain insight into their lives and the challenges they face by listening to stories. Issues raised in stories are presented in a non-threatening manner and allow the listener to internalize lessons with the minimum amount of resistance. If done correctly, storytelling is especially powerful in pastoral care as it can help the patient come to terms with an illness and/or an upcoming death.

Jews living in a contemporary society have the added benefit of knowing that storytelling has been a central component of the Jewish heritage from the earliest of times. The act of telling stories is as authentically Jewish as studying *Torah* or *Talmud*. Jewish chaplains looking for a Jewish way to help a patient may find storytelling to be a wonderful option.

This chapter was the beginning in understanding ways to use storytelling in pastoral care. It offered a brief explanation of why storytelling is so powerful in pastoral

care and offered a closer look into two very distinct models of using stories in such care. In order to maximize success in this field, one also needs to understand that which people experience during illness and thus that which they need from stories. This will allow the person to choose the most relevant story for any given situation. Chapters two and three will be focused more closely on these issues.

Chapter II
The Psychodynamics of Dying

A Good Name is Better than Precious Ointment
and the Day of Death than the Day of One's Birth
-Ecclesiastes 7:1

Death is a natural process. People have always died and they will continue to die. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways that people react to this given fact.[29] Although society tends to deny death or portrays it as something to fear, not all people are disturbed by death. Many in fact are.

Whether a person fears death or accepts it, one fact is for certain. Everyone, at some time, will experience the act of dying. Although some people die quickly and unexpectedly in unforeseen accidents, the majority of people encounter death as a process. While it may be from disease or old age, it is more than a biological event. Death is a "crisis of meaning"[30] which causes many people to search for the purpose of their lives. These people often question not only the meaning of life but that of illness and death. They may even question the role of God in their lives.

In addition to these issues, dying people experience added concerns. Fears of the unknown and of death, isolation from others, loss of control, as well as various forms of denial are all common. Furthermore, they face the task of coming to terms with the

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[29] Eileen Tarnoff, "Death, Dying, and Grief: The Last Psychic Barrier," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* Winter 1979-1980, p. 181.

[30] David Barnard, "Illness as a Crisis of Meaning: Psycho-Spiritual Agendas in Health Care," *Pastoral Psychology* Volume 33(2), Winter 1984, p. 77.

upcoming death. Coping with the death allows the dying person to accomplish terminal tasks and achieve a sense of closure. This closure, in turn, allows for an appropriate death.

For those people working with the dying, it is critical to remember that the dying person is always a living person[31] and it is crucial to understand what a dying person may be experiencing. Although no two people are alike and although each will encounter his/her death in a unique manner, a caregiver is better able to support a person's dying if he/she has at least a basic familiarity with the dying process. This chapter is intended to provide this understanding. It begins with an explanation of common concerns for dying patients, continues with a description of how people come to terms with their upcoming death, and concludes with a discussion of what constitutes an appropriate death.

What a Dying Person May Experience

Dying people often experience concerns regarding the process of dying. This section of the chapter will highlight a few of these major issues. Each may be experienced at varying levels, and at various times.

First and foremost, fear is the primary emotion which terminally ill people feel. Not only do dying people fear the physical pain associated with their illness and treatment, but they fear all that is unknown. Because each individual experiences illness differently, a person has little or no idea how certain aspects of the treatment will affect him/her. The

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[31] Fredrick Reisz, "A Dying Person is a Living Person: A Pastoral Theology for Ministering to the Dying," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* Volume 46, Summer 1992, p.185.

level of pain as well as the duration of it are both unknown variables. This sense of not knowing often causes the patient great anxiety. C.A. Garfield, the author of *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* explains that people accept and deal with pain more effectively when they know that the amount of pain is finite.[32] This finitude cannot always be guaranteed when working with terminally ill people.

In addition to fear associated with pain and its duration, fear of not knowing that which lies ahead is a great source of anxiety for many people. These concerns include physical as well as spiritual issues and are crucial to explore with the person. Answers may not be reached but helping the person explore these questions will help the dying person lessen the fear associated with them. Although there are undoubtedly numerous other questions, the most commonly voiced concerns are as follows:

1. What changes will occur in my body?
2. What will be my emotional reactions?
3. What life experiences will I not be able to have?
4. What will happen to my life plans?
5. How will my family and friends respond to my dying?
6. What is my fate in the hereafter?
7. What will happen to my survivors?
8. What will happen to my body after death?[33]

As the illness progresses and death approaches, the person may become more accepting of the fact that he/she cannot foresee the future. As a result, many of these concerns diminish. It is important for caregivers to remember that the absence of these fears does not equal denial.

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[32] C.A. Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978), p. 150.

[33] J.C. Diggory and D.Z. Rothman, "Values Destroyed by Death," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* Volume 63, 1961, pp. 205-210.

A second experience many dying people have is a feeling of isolation from others. They often feel unacceptable to friends and family. The tendency of others to avoid sick people reinforces this feeling. The irony is that "just when a seriously ill patient needs understanding and support more than ever before, friends and relatives often isolate themselves from him/her because they cannot cope with the many problems connected with terminal illness."[34] These friends and family avoid facing their fear and discomfort with death, consciously or unconsciously, by avoiding the dying person. This is most unfortunate because it contributes to a sense of abandonment. This is true not only for the patient, but for the aged, as well.[35] Anyone facing death, no matter the age, reminds people of their own mortality and thus feels avoided and alone. In addition, this isolation from others can create for the dying person a condition called anaclitic depression. Garfield teaches that this type of depression is not due to loss or even the anticipation of death, but to separation. The feeling of being isolated from loved ones is more damaging to a dying person's mental health than the thought of the impending death.[36]

Whether or not family and friends do withdraw from the dying person's life, the dying person will confront issues of separation. In order for him/her not to be overcome with grief surrounding this, it is important to help the dying person engage in a sort of anticipatory grief work. This allows the person to come to terms gradually with his/her emotions surrounding the eventual loss of loved ones. It is ideal for both the person and

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[34] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 64.

[35] Irwin Blank, "Counseling the Aged and Their Families," (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1967), pp. 51-61.

[36] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 148.

his/her family to engage in this process together, but at the very least, it is important to help the dying person through this process. Failure to do so makes it difficult for the dying person to focus on anything but separating from loved ones.[37]

A third issue which dying persons confront is the loss of control. As the illness advances, and dependence on others increases, a dying person often senses a restriction of his/her freedom. The fear that personal freedom is being permanently taken away makes people feel unacceptable to others,[38] further complicating the isolation described earlier. Physically, a person may be less able to take care of him/herself. There may be an increasing regimentation to his/her daily schedule as certain procedures must be performed at certain times. Doctors' and nurses' schedules may take precedence over his/her own. Being in the hospital, in particular, causes people to feel like objects manipulated as others wish.[39] The fact that medical personnel may walk into a patient's room unannounced any time of the day and perform a myriad of procedures on that person contributes to the person's feeling that he/she has little control.

This loss of control is also sensed in the decreased ability to shape meaning for oneself and can raise questions about the meaning of one's life and all existence. In dying, a person's meaning making is increasingly done for him/her by others. Instead of the patient determining the purpose of his/her life and death, it is often times others who create the dying person's history and decide what to celebrate of his/her life.[40] Family and

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[37] Ibid., p. 149.

[38] Reisz, "A Dying Person is a Living Person: A Pastoral Theology for Ministering to the Dying," p.185.

[39] Ibid., p. 188.

[40] Ibid.

friends choose which aspects of their loved one's life are important to remember. This lost opportunity to shape meaning and this diminished sense of ability create anxiety and fear for the patient.

The fear of abandonment and the fear of losing control are associated primarily with relationships which the dying person has with other people. An equally important relationship is that which a dying person has with God. It is crucial to understand the ways that theological concerns are effected by terminal illness. Dying people question the role that God plays in their life. Underlying questions about God's existence then may lead to questions of how God could allow this illness to happen. The notion that this disease is the result of a malicious God is devastating for people, but more painful is the notion that this world is a random and meaningless place. In order to cope, many people believe that there is an order to this world and a reason for all that happens in it. This, too, presents the dying person with several problems. If there is an order to this world and a reason for everything, then what is God's reason for this illness? Does this illness signify a punishment from God? Does it mean that God is abandoning this person? As previously mentioned, the fear of abandonment by loved ones is very difficult for dying people. The fear of being abandoned by God is even more painful.

In order to deal with these fears and concerns, many people encounter some form of denial. Both caregivers and patients may use at least one of the various types of denial and will experience it at some point in the dying process. The first major type of denial is termed *existential denial* and deals with a person's fundamental approach to mortality. [41]

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[41] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 144.

A person experiencing this form of denial rejects the thought of death completely. Death simply does not exist, or at least it does not exist as a possibility for this person. The person's unconscious regards itself as immortal.[42] The second type of denial occurs when a person knows the facts of his/her illness and the inevitability of death but unconsciously represses what he/she knows. The person may intellectually recognize the severity of the situation but not be able to accept it emotionally. This form of *non-accepting denial* leads a person to suppress his/her emotional awareness of what is happening.[43] The final category of denial occurs when a person is simply unaware of the undesirable and is called *non-attention denial.*[44] In this scenario, the person focuses all of his/her attention away from the illness and any thoughts of death. This form of denial is more conscious than the others. The person actively redirects his/her focus away from any troubling thoughts associated with the illness. No matter the type of denial, it is crucial to remember that denial is a natural part of the dying process. Depending on the intensity and time frame of it, denial can either hurt or help the person experiencing it. Therefore, in order to know whether the denial is normal, caregivers should be familiar with an average time line commonly experienced by people.

Each phase of dying presents different degrees of denial and acceptance. For purposes of this explanation, the dying process can be divided into three phases. Phase one is the acute crisis stage when the person is first diagnosed with his/her illness. Phase two

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[42] Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *Collected Papers*, Volume 4 (London: Hogarth, 1915).

[43] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 144.

[44] Ibid.

is the chronic living-dying phase which is often the longest stage of the process. During this period, the patient must balance the responsibilities of living with the knowledge that he/she will die soon. The patient may undergo medical treatments during this time and may start to work through some of the issues surrounding his/her death. Phase three of the process occurs toward the end of the illness just before death and is often considered the active dying phase. Denial manifests itself differently in each of these three phases.[45]

For example, first order denial is found during stage one and early stage two of the dying process. It is usually simple to diagnose and is based upon how a patient perceives the facts of his/her illness. The sick person has few, if any, complaints and often shows unjustified optimism or indifference to the facts being given.[46] Although many people may persistently minimize their symptoms throughout the illness, first order denial is usually short lived. After the initial diagnosis is made and treatment begins, second order denial is common. This can be seen in the patient who accepts the facts of his/her illness and perhaps even the diagnosis, but cannot infer the implications of this information. Thus a person may minimize the illness.[47] The last order of denial coincides with the last phase of the dying process. This image surrounds the image of death itself. The person experiencing this form of denial cannot imagine personal death. Patients may fully accept their diagnosis but still resist the concept that this incurable illness will result in their death. Unlike the other two orders of denial, this third type is difficult to diagnose as people

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[45] Avery Weisman, *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality* (New York: Behavioral Publications, 1972), p. 99.

[46] Ibid., pp. 67-99.

[47] Ibid.

usually attribute it to be a sign of courage, hope, or faith.[48] No matter the type of denial, family and medical staff often support it in an effort to protect the patient. In doing so, they may dissuade the person from talking about the illness and his/her emotions. The irony is that in attempting to protect the patient, these caregivers may leave the person feeling alone.[49]

Coming to Terms with the Upcoming Death

Although denial is a normal part of the dying process, there comes a time when patients need to discuss their illness and upcoming death. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross reports that only two percent of dying people reject the opportunity to discuss their dying.[50] Most dying people, she writes, want to share their dying experiences with others. Contrary to common belief, denying people of this chance does not protect them. Whether the caregivers and medical teams are willing to acknowledge it, dying patients are keenly aware that time is running out.[51] When denial stops being beneficial for the patient, it is time for that person to begin to come to terms with his/her impending death. The coping techniques used are closely related to a person's age and developmental stage. As a person grows older, he/she will typically use more advanced coping mechanisms.

For instance, in early childhood, children use primitive coping mechanisms. This can, but does not necessarily, include delusional thought, perceptual distortions and/or

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 28.

[50] Ibid., p. 134.

[51] Weisman, *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality,* p. 93.

total denial of reality. In adolescence, intellectual coping styles become the dominant pattern.[52] In contrast, adults and older people cope by reflecting on their life memories. They question their past and present and seek to find meaning in them. They ask: was their life worthwhile and does it make sense now? Has their life been memorable and meaningful for themselves, family, friends and the world, in general? Is the world any better for them having lived? Some people struggle with these questions to the very end.[53]

Achieving an Appropriate Death

The ultimate goal for many dying people is to reach a stage of full acceptance. This is not always possible. In fact, some people do not ever realize this goal. C.A. Garfield teaches that "persons demonstrate a wide variety of emotions that ebb and flow throughout life as they respond to conflicts and crises." Therefore the process of dying is not linear. He suggests that the caregivers' task is to recognize the stress that the dying person is experiencing at any given time and respond to the point that the person is during his/her living-dying process. The caregivers must try to understand what the person is experiencing and how he/she is attempting to cope with their dying. Then, they can help guide the dying person to an appropriate death. What exactly is an appropriate death? Avery Weisman describes it as "a style of dying that is adaptive to a specific person. Thus the criteria for an appropriate death will be fulfilled in different ways for different people.

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[52] Garfield, *Psychosocial Care of the Dying Patient,* p. 161.

[53] Reisz, "A Dying Person is a Living Person: A Pastoral Theology for Ministering to the Dying," p. 185.

Each person's death is different but is appropriate for him/her."[54] In brief, an appropriate death is one that a person might choose for him/herself if he/she had the choice.

Avery Weisman outlines that which is necessary for an appropriate death. He includes five requirements. They are as follows:

1. The dying person should be relatively pain free.
2. Emotional and social impoverishment should be kept to a minimum.
3. Within the limits of disability, the dying person should operate on as high and effective level as possible.
4. The dying person should recognize and resolve residual conflicts and satisfy whatever remaining wishes are consistent with his/her ego ideal.
5. The dying person should be able to yield control to others he/she trusts. [55]

Although some of these requirements concentrate on that which the caregiver(s) must do for the patient, the majority of these requirements focus on the patient. Achieving an appropriate death is a task in which the dying person must take an active part. This task is multidimensional. It involves reconciling "what might have been" with the reality of "what is." The dying person may feel a sense of being cheated out of life chances and must come to terms with this feeling. Retaining self esteem and self respect throughout the dying process is also essential. As a person's abilities lessen and he/she is less able to make decisions, self esteem is often reduced. Successfully maintaining it is essential, though, for an appropriate death. Lastly, a person needs to have a sense of finishing unfinished business, whether it be emotional, financial, or psychological. The ability to derive meaning from life and hopefully from death is dependent on all of these aspects. This

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[54] Avery Weisman, "Misgivings and Misconceptions in the Psychiatric Care of the Terminal Patient," *Psychiatry* Volume 33, 1970, pp. 67-81.

[55] Avery Weisman, *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality* (New York: Behavioral Publications, 1972) p.40.

ability, in turn, makes it possible to have, in Weisman's terms, an appropriate death rather than an appropriated death. An appropriated death is one that others feel is suitable for the person. It places a great deal of pressure on the patient to die in the manner others feel is best. Often times this forces the person to die in a way with which he/she is not comfortable or to accept that which he/she is not ready to accept. The pressure to reach a stage of acceptance can cause the dying person to die an emotionally stressful death. Some people die in denial and this is appropriate for them. People cannot be expected to die in a manner grossly different than the manner in which they lived. If the person lived in denial, it is perfectly appropriate that he/she die in denial. What is important is that the person die a death befitting who he/she is. Helping someone die an appropriate death allows the person to die peacefully and can lend fulfillment to both the caregiver and the patient.

Conclusion

Dying is a complicated process that involves a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual attention. Whether or not a person is disturbed by the thought of death, his/her own upcoming death can raise many issues. Fear of pain and of the unknown, a feeling of isolation from others, and a sense of losing control are just three of the most commonly articulated concerns. People question what it will be like after death and what will happen to their bodies and souls. They often question whether there is a reason for their illnesses and what role God plays in their lives. In addition to these, dying people often experience some form of denial during their dying process. Understanding each of these issues allows caregivers to better appreciate what their loved one or patient is experiencing.

This understanding leads the caregivers to support the dying person through his/her process of dying. Loved ones and staff can then guide the patient in completing the tasks necessary for an appropriate death. Finishing unfinished business, deriving meaning from life and death and hopefully accepting the death are three such tasks. Whether the caregiver is a loved one, a chaplain, or a medical personnel, it is crucial for the well being of the patient that they be able to offer as much help and support as possible. One such way is to discuss these issues with the patient. Chapter three offers one way of approaching these sensitive issues in a caring manner.

Chapter III
Our Sacred Stories

God made humanity because God loves stories
-Chasidic Saying

As discussed in chapter one, Jews have continuously used stories for a variety of purposes and in a variety of settings. Among other reasons, the Rabbis often used stories to clarify abstract ideas or to confront difficult issues in a non-threatening manner. Many of the stories found in the *Talmud* and *Midrashim* (homiletical collections) serve these purposes. In later times, *Chasidic* teachers and others continued the tradition of storytelling and used stories to illustrate Jewish values.

Although numerous stories are available in these *Talmudic*, *Midrashic*, and *Chasidic* collections and although these stories discuss a wide variety of topics, some are more appropriate than others for pastoral care settings. In addition to the subject matter, stories must have several characteristics in order to be effective in pastoral care. They must stimulate a person's imagination and intellect while at the same time help clarify emotional issues. In order for this to occur, affective storytelling requires that the stories be open ended enough to allow the patient to take from it what he/she needs at the time. As explained earlier, people take different lessons from stories at different times.[56] This is certainly true with terminally ill people. As the illness progresses and a person's coping

[56] For a more in depth review of stories and their functions, please refer to chapter one.

mechanisms change, stories are often understood in distinct ways. Issues raised and confronted by hearing these stories may also shift as the person's circumstances change.

For the above reasons, many stories which might seem appropriate such as Biblical accounts of a certain character's death are not included in this chapter. Although these timeless stories are useful in many settings, Biblical tales without their accompanying *midrashic* commentary are often not effective tools for pastoral care.[57] Too often they suggest essentially one reason for the character's death, and do not allow the patient the freedom to take from the story what he/she needs at the time. This does not imply that all Biblical stories are useless. Many patients may find great comfort in comparing their situations to those of characters such as Job. If this is the case, these stories should be used. In addition to Biblical narratives, there is an abundance of stories such as those describing the Angel of Death which are not included in this chapter. They are not as applicable to the issues at hand as some of the selected stories. Readers should be aware that this chapter includes only a small sampling of stories and should feel free to use any stories found in other sources.

Selection of Stories

As discussed in chapter two, dying people encounter many emotions and must complete various tasks in order to experience an appropriate death. Some of the more common issues mentioned in the previous chapter are as follows:

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[57] Baskin, *The Use of Sacred Stories with Patients with AIDS*, p. 35.

1. Fear of what lies ahead
2. Questioning what it will be like after I die
3. Questioning what will happen to my body and soul
4. Fear of abandonment from others and recognizing the need for community
5. Questioning whether there is a reason for why things happen / a reason for my illness
6. Investigating the role God plays in my life
7. Questioning whether my life was meaningful for myself and others - what did I accomplish?
8. Reconciling what might have been with the reality of what is
9. Gaining a sense of finishing unfinished business, whether emotional, financial, or psychological, and preparing for death
10 Deriving meaning from life and from death
11. Being proud of who I am
12. Accepting death

Listening to stories that touch on these concerns can often help the dying person deal with these issues and help him/her find the strength to complete the necessary tasks. When the caregiver is aware of what the patient is experiencing, he/she is better able to select the most appropriate stories.

In order to help the caregiver select the most relevant story, the stories included in this chapter are organized according to which of the issues they most closely relate. Some stories in this chapter more closely discuss the issue at hand while others confront the subject in a less obvious way. Some may offer solace to the listener, while others serve to raise questions for the patient. Caregivers may choose to use stories to begin a session or they may leave the patient with a story to think about as preparation for the next session.

The amount of stories available for each of the issues is not evenly distributed. This is partly due to the limited nature of the search and partly because of what the storytellers have traditionally focused on. Stories dealing with God's role in the world are simply more numerous than stories discussing fear of abandonment from others. What is

important to note, though, is that for each of these issues, there are relevant stories available. It is also important to note that not all the "stories" included are in a traditional story format. Some are more or less narrative than others, and some are simply the teachings of certain Rabbis. All can be effectively used in pastoral care settings.

For each of the issues mentioned above, the relevant stories will be listed with a brief analysis. This analysis may include a proposal of how one may use the text. The analysis and application of each story are only suggestions. The storyteller should also feel free to change a character's gender in any of the stories. Because the Hebrew language in the stories uses the masculine as its neutral form of nouns, the translations reflect this. This does not mean that the story is exclusive to men. If the patient is more comfortable hearing about a woman rather than a man or a queen rather than a king, the storyteller should compensate for the Hebrew. Storytellers are encouraged to use these stories however they feel is most effective. The titles assigned to the *Talmudic* and *Midrashic* texts as well as the translations of these texts are the author's unless noted otherwise. The text and titles of the stories found in *Chasidic* anthologies have been kept as they are found.

Selected Stories:

Issue One:
Fear of Not Knowing What Lies Ahead

Taking a Hair From the Milk

Rava said to R[58]. Nachman: "Show yourself to me [in a dream after you die]." He showed himself to Rava. Rava asked him: "Did you suffer pain?" He replied: "As little as the taking of a hair from the milk. And were the Holy One to say to me: 'Go back to the world as you were,' I would not, for the dread of death is too great."

(Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 28a)

Analysis and Application:

The fear of dying is often times more painful than the actual event. This fear can be so overwhelming that it keeps people from enjoying the life they have. It is important to realize that death will happen when it does and worrying about it will only make the experience more painful. Telling this story may calm the patient's fears of the upcoming death and may allow the person to enjoy the time left.

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To Walk with One's Own Light

A young rabbi complained to the Rabbi of Rizhin: "During the hours I devote myself to my studies I feel life and light, but the moment I stop studying it is all gone. What shall I do?"

The Rabbi of Rizhin replied: "That is just as when a man walks through the woods on a dark night, and for the first time another joins him, lantern in hand, but at the crossroads they part, and the first must grope his way on alone. But if a man carries his own light with him, he need not be afraid of any darkness."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, pp. 62-63)

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[58] "R." should be read as "Rabbi."

Analysis and Application:

Like darkness, death is scary as a person must experience it alone. Although there may be a community supporting the person during the dying process, the actual death is a solitary act. A dying person does not have any previous experience from which to draw comfort so death becomes something to fear. The caregiver and patient may use this story to explore ways of bringing the person's own light with him/her. From what sources of light can the person draw? How will those sources help calm his/her fears?

Issue Two:
What Will It Be Like After I Die?

Not Like This World

A favorite saying of Rav was: "Not like this world is the world to come. In the world to come there is no eating or drinking, no procreation, no business, and no envy, no hatred and no competition. But those who tried to lead a good life are sitting with crowns on their heads, delighting in the radiance of the Divine Presence."

(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 17a)

Analysis and Application:

The world to come will be unlike this world on earth. People do not have to worry about mundane aspects of survival but rather can concentrate on drawing closer to God and appreciating God more. The righteous will be rewarded with God's presence. This story offers a positive and rewarding view of the afterlife and may give the patient comfort in knowing that all will be right after death.

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Without the Coming World

Once the spirit of the Baal Shem Tov was so oppressed that it seemed to him he would have no part in the coming world. Then he said to himself: "If I love God, what need have I of a coming world!"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 52)

Analysis and Application:

God will be present for a person whether in death or in everlasting life. Using this story, the caregiver can ask the patient how important it is that there be a coming world. What does it mean for the patient if there is a coming world and what would it mean if there were not?

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Rather Not

Rabbi Shmelke once said: "If I had the choice, I should rather not die. For in the coming world, there are no Days of Awe, and what can the soul of man do without the Days of Judgment?"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 192)

Analysis and Application:

Although Rabbi Shmelke views the lack of judgment negatively, it may imply something quite positive. In the world to come, there is no need for judgment. This is one aspect of the world to come. The caregiver can ask the patient what he/she thinks the world to come will be like and how that effects his/her dying process. Does he/she celebrate death in anticipation of the coming world or is the idea of death more difficult?

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The Wedding Feast

R. Yehudah HaNasi made a wedding feast for his son. He invited all the rabbis, but forgot to extend an invitation to Bar Kappara. The latter went and wrote above the door of the banquet hall, "After all your rejoicing is death, so what is the use of your

rejoicing?" Rabbi (R. Yehudah HaNasi) asked: "Who has done this to us?" They said: "It was Bar Kappara whom you forgot to invite. He was concerned about himself."

Rabbi then arranged another banquet to which he invited all the rabbis including Bar Kappara. At every course which was placed before them, Bar Kappara related three hundred fox-fables, which the guests enjoyed so much, that they let the food become cold and did not taste it. Rabbi asked the waiters: "Why do our courses go in and out without the guests partaking in them?" They answered: "Because of an old man who sits there and when a course is brought in, he relates three hundred fox-fables; and on that account the food becomes cold and they eat none of it." Rabbi went up to him and said: "Why do you act in this manner? Let the guests eat!" Bar Kappara replied: "So that you should not think that I came for your dinner, but because you did not invite me with my colleagues. Did not Solomon declare: 'What profit hath a man of all his labor seeing that one generation passes away and another generation comes?'"

When they had apologized to each other and become reconciled, Bar Kappara said to Rabbi: "If the Holy One Blessed be He has given you great wealth in this world which does not belong to you, how much more will God grant you in the World to Come which is wholly yours!"

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:3 paragraph 1)[59]

Analysis and Application:

The world to come will be paradise as God will shower the person with great wealth. Although a person should make the most of this world, he/she should recognize that the world to come will be more beneficial. This story can help begin a discussion of the patient's view toward the world to come and may allow the patient and caregiver to explore the positive aspects of what may happen after death.

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Issue Three:
What Will Happen to My Body and Soul?

Breath of Life

The Breath of Life has five names.[60] *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Yechidah, and Chayah. Nefesh* signifies the blood as it is said: "For the blood is the *nefesh* (life)."[61]

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[59] Not my own translation.

Ruach, that it goes up and comes down, as it is said: "Who knows the *ruach* of humans that go upward;"[62] *Neshamah*, this is the breath, as people say: "His breathing is good;" *Chayah* - that all the limbs are lifeless but she is alive in the body; *Yechidah* -that all the limbs are in pairs but she is alone in the body.

(Genesis Rabbah 14:9)

Analysis and Application:

This story demonstrates how special the Rabbis thought a person's soul is. The soul is the only living part of a body. If the Rabbis considered the soul this important, they must have thought that it had a special place after death. The caregiver may use this story and ask the patient what he/she thinks happens to the soul after death? How does this effect his/her attitude toward dying?

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Three Partners[63]

It is taught that when a child is formed in its mother's womb, there are three partners who participate in its creation - God, the child's father, and the child's mother. The father provides the white semen from which comes the white elements of the embryo - the brain, nails, the white of the eyes, the bones, and the tissues. The mother supplies the red element from which comes the blood, skin, flesh, hair, and the black of the eyes. And God, may His name be blessed, gives the child ten things. These are the spirit and the soul, beauty, eyesight, hearing, speech, the ability to raise his hands, the ability to walk, wisdom and understanding, counsel, knowledge, and strength.

When it comes time for him to die, God takes God's portion away and leaves what the father and mother contributed. They both cry. God says to them: "Why do you cry? Did I take anything of yours? I only took what was mine." They said to God: "Master of the Universe, all the time that Your portion was mixed with our portion, our portion was guarded from the maggot and the worm. Now that You have taken Your portion away from ours, our portion is given to the maggot and worm."

R. Yehudah HaNasi used to recite this parable: To what is this similar? To a king who owned a vineyard. He handed it over to a tenant. The king said to his servants: "Go

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[60] These five names may signify five characteristics of the soul as the Rabbis understood it.

[61] Deuteronomy 12:23.

[62] Ecclesiastes 3:21.

[63] The complete story is found in Appendix A.

and cut down the grapes of my vineyard, take away my portion, and leave the tenant's portion in its place." They immediately went and did as the king said. The tenant began to cry. The king said to him: "Have I taken anything of yours? I only took what was mine." The tenant replied: "My master, all the while that your portion was mixed with my portion, my portion was guarded from thievery. Now that You have taken Your portion away, my portion is open to theft."

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:10 paragraph 2)

Analysis and Application:

Each person has a bit of divinity within. When a child is conceived, God gives that child his/her soul and the attributes that make the child unique. When a person dies, that divinity within lives on. Although the body dies and is no more, a person's soul lives on with God. This concept can be extremely comforting to a person who wonders what happens after death. Knowing that God keeps the person's soul in God's company can reassure the person who fears that death is the ultimate end.

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A Man's Soul

R. Chisdah said that a man's soul mourns for him [after death] seven days as it is said: "And his soul mourns for him" and it is written: "And he mourned for his father seven days."[64]

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 152a)

Analysis and Application:

If a person's soul mourns seven days after death, the soul must remain an active being. The body may die and cease being, but the soul remains part of God's world. Similar to the previous story, hearing this teaching may comfort a person who fears that death is the ultimate negation of his/her being.

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[64] Genesis 50:10.

For Twelve Months

It is taught that for twelve months [after death], the body exists and its soul ascends and descends. After twelve months, the body is no more and its soul ascends but does not descend.

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 152b - 153a)

Analysis and Application:

For many people, the thought that death is the ultimate negation of being is offensive. This teaching counters that notion. Not only does the body exist twelve months after death, so too does the soul. In fact, after twelve months, the soul continues to live and dwell with God. It ascends to God and does not return to this world. Implied in this teaching is that the soul remains with God forever. The caregiver may choose to use this with a patient who fears the death of his/her soul.

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The Kernel and the Husk

When Rabbi Schmelke and his brother, Rabbi Phineas, returned home from the Maggid of Mezeritz, their father said: "Children, speak truly, what have you learned and received there?" They answered: "Only one thing. Until now, we have mortified our body, for we believed it was the kernel, whereas the soul, on the contrary, was only the husk. In Mezeritz, however, we discovered the opposite: the soul is the kernel; the body, however, is only the shell."

(Newman, Hasidic Anthology, p. 449)[65]

Analysis and Application:

This story speaks about the relationship between the body and soul. The Rabbis realized that it is the soul which is the essence of the person. Caregivers may ask the patient what he/she thinks the relationship is between the body and soul. Since the Rabbis

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[65] The original is found in *Priester der Liebe* by Chaim Bloch, Vienna, 1930, p.70.

thought the soul was so important, what does the patient think happens to the soul? How does this effect the person's attitude toward death and the (possible) afterlife?

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Man is Half Divine

Said the Chafets Chayyim: "A man should never forget that he is a semi-divine creature. His thoughts, his power of reason and his indwelling soul will return to Heaven, but his desires, his earthly pleasures and his body will remain behind."

(Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim, pp. 56-57)[66]

Analysis and Application:

Once again, the soul lives on after death. It is a divine being that returns to God. How does this effect the patient's theory and attitude of death? Is it comforting to believe that the soul is eternal? Why/Why not?

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Issue Four:
Fear of Abandonment / Need for Community

The Bird Nest

Once, the Baal Shem Tov stood in the House of Prayer and prayed for a very long time. All his disciples had finished praying, but he continued without paying any attention to them. They waited for him a good while, and then they went home. After several hours, when they had attended to their various duties, they returned to the House of Prayer and found him still deep in prayer. Later, he said to them: "By going away and leaving me alone, you dealt me a painful separation. I shall tell you a parable.

You know that there are birds of passage who fly to warm countries in the autumn. Well, the people in one of those lands once saw a glorious many-colored bird in the midst of a flock which was journeying through the sky. The eyes of man had never seen a bird so beautiful. He alighted on the top of the tallest tree and nested in the leaves. When the king of the country heard of it, he bade them fetch down the bird with his nest. He ordered a number of men to make a ladder up the tree. One was to stand on the

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[66] The original is found in *Mikhtevei haRav Chafetz Chayyim* by Aryeh Leib Pupko, Warsaw, 1937, p. 115.

other's shoulders until it was possible to reach up high enough to take the nest. It took a long time to build this living ladder. Those who stood nearest the ground lost patience, shook themselves free, and everything collapsed."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, pp. 54-55)

Analysis and Application:

Community and working together are essential for success. People cannot accomplish important tasks alone. This story reminds the reader that it is not alright to be alone. At a time of serious illness, a person needs the support of others. Just as the Baal Shem Tov made his need for community known to others, so too must the patient. Hearing this story may remind him/her of that.

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Looking for the Way

Rabbi Chayyim once told this story: "A man lost his way in a great forest. After a while another lost his way and chanced on the first. Without knowing what had happened to him, he asked the way out of the woods. 'I don't know' said the first man. 'But I can point out the ways that lead further into the thicket, and after that let us try to find the way together.'"

"So, my congregation," the rabbi concluded the story, "let us look for the way together."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 213)

Analysis and Application:

It is easier to find the right path when people support each other. It is important not to be afraid to reach out for help when one is in need of it. Illness can be a lonely journey for people. Finding another person or community with which to share experiences allows a person to share his/her fears, anger, and sadness about dying and may allow the person to die an appropriate death where it would have been impossible otherwise.

Issue Five:
Is There a Reason for Why Things Happen?

The Potter

R. Yonatan said: "A potter does not examine the weak vessels because he cannot strike them once without breaking them. What does he examine? The fine vessels, that he is able to strike them a number of times without them breaking. Thus, the Holy One Blessed be God does not try the wicked people but rather the righteous ones. R. Yose b. R. Chaninah said: "When a flax worker knows that his flax is fine, each time he strikes it, it glows and shines. When he knows his flax is of poor quality, he cannot strike it even once without it tearing. Thus the Holy One Blessed be God only tries the righteous, as it is said: "Adonai examines the righteous." R. Elazar said: "When a man owns two cows, one strong and the other weak, upon whom does he place the yoke? On the strong one!" Thus, the Holy One Blessed be God only tries the righteous, as it is said: 'Adonai examines the righteous.'"

(Genesis Rabbah 34:2)

Analysis and Application:

Many people think that illness is a punishment from God for the wrong doings they have done. This story teaches just the opposite. Only the righteous and strong people are tested in life and illness is such a test. Just as the potter, the flax worker, and the man with cows distinguish between the weak and strong of their collections, so too does God. God would never test someone who would fail. In thinking about illness this way, a person can rid him/herself of the feeling that he/she did something wrong to deserve the illness. In fact, quite the contrary is true.

This story may be comforting to some but very troubling to others. While it assures the patient that he/she is not being punished, other questions may arise. A person may wonder why God allows the righteous to suffer and why bad things happen to good people. When a person who has done wrong is punished, there seems to be justice in this world. When a righteous person suffers, it negates that sense of order. The storyteller should be aware of these potential issues and only use this story for those patients whom it

will help. The patients who will benefit most from this story are those who feel they are being punished.

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The Fig Tree

What is the difference between the death of the young and the death of the old? R. Yehudah said: "When a lamp goes out by itself, it is good for it and good for the wick, but when it does not go out by itself, it is bad for itself and bad for the wick." R. Abahu said: "When a fig is gathered at its proper time, it is good for it and good for the fig tree. If it is not gathered at its proper time, it is bad for the fig and bad for the fig tree.

R. Chiyah and his students, others say R. Akiba and his students, while others say R. Yose b[67]. Chalaftah and his students were used to rising early, sitting and studying under a certain fig tree. The fig tree's owner also rose early and picked the tree's fruit. They said: "Perhaps he suspects what we are doing" so they moved to another place. The owner came and said to them: "My masters, this is one *mitzvah* that you gave me, by sitting and studying under my fig tree, and you took it away from me." They said to him: "We thought that perhaps you suspected us." He reassured them and they returned to their place.

What did he do? He arose early in the morning but did not pick his fruit. The sun shone on the tree and the figs became worm infested. They said: "the owner of the fig tree knows when the fruit is ready to be picked and he picks it." Thus God knows when it is the right time for the righteous ones to be removed from the world and God removes them. Just as it is written: "My beloved goes down to his garden and picks the roses."[68]

(Genesis Rabbah 62:2)

Analysis and Application:

Although it is sometimes difficult to see, there is an order to this world. God knows when it is time for people to be born and when it is time for them to die. Just as the fig tree's owner knows when a fig should be taken from its tree, God knows when a person should be taken from this world. Death is not a punishment from God, but rather, evidence that God is present and active in this world and that there is an amount of time

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[67] "b." should be read as "ben" as in Rabbi Jose ben Chalafta. Ben = son of.

[68] Song of Songs 6:2.

that each person is allotted. Only God knows how long each person is to live and only God knows when to take that person away. In using the final quote from Song of Songs, the story implies that it is an act of love when God takes someone away from God's garden. Not only does this story offer an explanation of why people die, but it implies a relationship with God that many people seek. These two aspects may prove quite helpful for those who feel they are being punished by dying.

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Destiny

Those who are born are destined to die, those who die are destined for eternal life, and the living are destined for judgment. Let them know and make known that God is the Fashioner, the Creator, the One who decides. God is the Witness and Judge. Before God there is no unrighteousness, no forgetting, no respect of persons, nor any taking of bribes. All is God's and know that all is according to the will of God. Without your consent, you were created, and without your consent, you were born, you live and you will die. And without your consent, you will give an account before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be God.

(Babylonian Talmud, Avot 4:22)

Analysis and Application:

There is an order to this world whether people understand it or not. People live and die and it is up to God to decide when each happens. A person is conceived and born without choosing either and a person dies without having a say in the decision. Death is not a punishment, but rather one phase in the natural order of events. For the patient who struggles with what he/she did to deserve this death, this story can be quite helpful. It takes all responsibility away from the person and places it completely with God.

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Ten Strong Things

Ten strong things have been created in this world. A rock is hard but iron cleaves it. Iron is hard but fire penetrates it. Fire is hard but water quenches it. Water is strong but the clouds carry it. Clouds are strong but the wind scatters them. Wind is strong but the body endures it. The body is hard but fear breaks it. Fear is hard but wine banishes it. Wine is strong but sleep overcomes it. But death is stronger than all.

(Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 10a)

Analysis and Application:

There is a natural order to this world and death is part of it. Death is not something to fight or to fear. Rather, it is better to accept it.

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This is the Way of the World

Our Rabbis taught that on the day in which the first person was created, when he saw the sun setting, he said: "Woe to me, that because of my sins the world is darkened; the world will return to chaos. This is the death that I am being given from Heaven." Adam sat and cried all night and Eve cried too. When the dawn broke, Adam said: "This is the way of the world." Adam stood and sacrificed an ox whose horns developed before its hoofs, as it is said: "It shall please God more than an ox that has horns and hoofs."[69]

(Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 8a)

Analysis and Application:

Adam thought that the darkness was a punishment for his actions. He did not realize that there is an order to this world and that darkness occurs naturally. The same is true with death. Although some deaths are directly caused by a person's actions, death, in general, is a part of the natural order in this world. It is not something a person causes with his/her actions. This story also teaches that just as darkness falls upon the earth, so too does light. Darkness and light are part of a cycle just as death and birth are part of a cycle. Although a person may mourn his/her own death, it may be helpful to note that as

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[69] Psalms 69:32.

he/she dies, another person is born and the world continues. It is not anarchy, but a well ordered set of events that continues to rule this world.

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Before His Time

They might say; "Though a plague lasts seven years, no one dies before his time."
(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 29a)

Analysis and Application:

Each person has a designated time to be born and a designated time to die. Although a person does not know when this will happen, one is assured that death will not occur prematurely. If the dying person is young, the caregiver and patient can discuss why they think that person's "time" is now and not later.

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Playing Checkers

On one of the days of Chanukah, Rabbi Nachum, the son of the Rabbi of Rizhin, entered the House of Study at a time when he was not expected, and found his disciples playing checkers, as was the custom on those days. When they saw the *tzaddik*, they were embarrassed and stopped playing. But he gave them a kindly nod and asked: "Do you know the rules of the game of checkers?" And when they did not reply, for shyness, he himself gave the answer: "I shall tell you the rules of the game of checkers. The first one is that one must not make two moves at once. The second is that one may move only forward and not backward. And third is that when one has reached the last row, one may move wherever he likes."
(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 73)

Analysis and Application:

The game of checkers can be likened to life. Although Rabbi Nachum explained his rules in terms of a game, he was telling his students more than that. There is an order to life and it must move forward at all times. Once a person dies (reaches the last row),

he/she is free to do as he/she wants. This story teaches the readers there are rules to live by and that one will be rewarded for finishing the game.

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Extension

In his old age, Rabbi Israel said: "There are those *tzaddikim* who - as soon as they have accomplished the task appointed to them for their lives on earth - are called to depart. And there are those *tzaddikim* who - the moment they have accomplished the task appointed to them for their lives on earth - are given another task, and they live until that, too, is accomplished. That is the way it was with me."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 298)

Analysis and Application:

No individual knows how long he/she will live or why he/she dies. This story offers one explanation of why a person lives and dies. People are put on this earth to complete certain tasks and when they are done, they die. This story offers a partial explanation for why death happens. Although a person may know that death comes when his/her task is complete, he/she does not always know what that task is or when it is finished. He/she also does not know if another task is waiting to be done.

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On Earth

Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn, the son of Rabbi Shalom Shachna and Rabbi Moshe of Savran had quarreled. The rabbi of Savran, prompted by the wish to make peace, paid his adversary a visit. Rabbi Israel asked him: "Do you believe there is a *tzaddik* who clings to God unceasingly?" The other answered as one who wants to hide a doubt: "There might well be." To which the rabbi of Rizhyn replied: "My grandfather was like that; my grandfather Rabbi Abraham, whom they called the Angel." Then the other said: "He did not, come to think of it, spend many days on this earth." And the rabbi of Rizhyn: "And my father Rabbi Shalom was like that." And again, the rabbi of Savran remarked: "He too, come to think of it, did not spend many days on this earth." Then the rabbi of Rizhyn

replied: "Why speak of years and days! Do you think they were on earth in order to dry up here? They came, accomplished their service, and returned."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 52)

Analysis and Application:

It does not matter the length of a person's days on earth. What matters is the purpose for which he/she lived. Similar to the story, "Extension," this story teaches that people live in order to complete certain tasks. When those tasks are finished, the person dies. Many people may feel cheated by death, especially if the person is young, but the knowledge that the person completed what he/she was sent here to complete may give consolation.

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Suffering and Prayer

Whenever Rabbi Levi Yitschak came to that passage in the Haggadah of Passover which deals with the four sons, and in it read about the fourth son, about him who "knows not how to ask," he said: "'The one who knows not how to ask,' that is myself, Levi Yitschak of Berditchev. I do not know how to ask You, Lord of the world, and even if I did know, I could not bear to do it. How could I venture to ask You why everything happens as it does, why we are driven from one exile into another, why our foes are allowed to torment us so. But in the Haggadah, the father of him 'who knows not how to ask,' is told: 'It is for you to disclose to him.' And the Haggadah refers to the Scriptures, in which it is written: 'And thou shalt tell thy son.' And Lord of the world, am I not your son? I do not beg You to reveal to me the secret of Your ways - I could not bear it! But show me one thing; show it to me more clearly and more deeply: show me what this, which is happening at this very moment, means to me, what it demands of me, what You, Lord of the world, are telling me by way of it. Ah, it is not why I suffer, that I wish to know, but only whether I suffer for Your sake."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, pp. 212-213)

Analysis and Application:

Rabbi Levi Yitschak's plea is similar to many people's. He assumes there is an order to this world and does not expect to understand it. He does ask whether his

suffering is for God's sake. If it is, then he is able to endure the affliction. As long as there is a reason for a person's illness, he/she is able to bear it. If the illness is understood as random, then the person is less able to cope with the suffering. This story does not teach anything new, but it does lend comfort as it echoes many people's thoughts. Knowing that others experience the same questions can be comforting to the patient.

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What the All Merciful Does is for Good

R. Chunah said in the name of Rab citing R. Meir, and thus it was taught in the name of R. Akiba: "A man should always accustom himself to say: 'Whatever the All Merciful does is for good.'" This is seen in the following incident. Rabbi Akiba was going along a road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was refused everywhere. He said: "Whatever the All Merciful does is for good," and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the rooster, and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: "Whatever the All Merciful does is for good." That same night some thieves came and carried away the town's residents. He said to them: "Did I not say to you that what the All Merciful does is for good?"

(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 60b)

Analysis and Application:

Even when the reason is hidden, God has a plan for what happens in this world. A person may not understand why certain things occur but the faithful know that there is a divine plan and that it is for the good. After telling this story, the storyteller and patient can explore what good is coming out of this illness and the upcoming death. Although it is important not to whitewash the issue of the person's sufferings and losses, it lends meaning to the event if it can be reframed positively.

Issue Six:
The Role God Plays in People's Lives

The Doubter

A disciple of Rabbi Pinchas was tormented by doubt, for he could not see how it was possible for God to know all his thoughts, even the vaguest and most fleeting. He went to his teacher in great anguish to beg him to dispel the confusion in his heart. Rabbi Pinchas was standing at the window and saw his visitor arrive. He entered, greeted his master, and was about to tell him his troubles, when the *tzaddik* said: "My friend, I know. And why should God not know?"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 122)

Analysis and Application:

God is an active presence in people's lives and knows what people are thinking and experiencing. One can infer that because God is present in people's lives in this world, that God will also be present in the world to come. Not even death can make God go away. This may give comfort to those who feel that God has abandoned them in their hour of need. If a patient is doubting the presence of God in his/her life, this story can help strengthen the person's faith and belief in God.

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In Tanner's Alley

On one of his journeys, as night was falling, Levi Yitschak came to a little town where he knew no one at all, nor could he find a lodging until finally a tanner took him home with him. He wanted to say the Evening Prayer, but the smell of the hides was so penetrating that he could not utter a word. So he left and went to the House of Study which was quite empty, and there he prayed. And then, suddenly, he understood how the Divine Presence had descended to exile and now - with bowed head - stood in Tanner's Alley. He burst into tears and wept and wept until he had cried his heart out over the sorrow of the Divine Presence, and he fell in a faint. And then he saw the glory of God in all its splendor, a dazzling light ranged in four and twenty rungs of diverse colors, and heard the words: "Be strong, my son! Great suffering will come upon you, but have no fear, for I shall be with you."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 204)

Analysis and Application:

God's presence can be felt in people's lives during the most joyful and the most difficult of times. It is always present but one must recognize God's presence to actualize it. God dwells where people let God in. As long as a person is open to feeling God, God can comfort him/her.

This story is a wonderful reminder to look inside of oneself and find God. God is with each person at all times. It is the responsibility of each individual to seek God within. The caregiver can ask the patient what it means for him/her to know that God is present and how God's presence is manifested in his/her life and illness.

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Everywhere

The rabbi of Kobryn taught: "God says to man, as he said to Moses: 'Put off thy shoes from thy feet' - put off the habitual which encloses your foot, and you will know that the place on which you are now standing is holy ground. For there is no rung of human life on which we cannot find the holiness of God everywhere and at all times."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 170)

Analysis and Application:

God is present in every aspect of life. Whether in joyful times or in challenging times, one can find God. Illness is no exception. Many people who are terminally ill feel that God is no longer present in their lives. Once again, this story can remind them that God has never left them and all they must do is recognize the Godliness present.

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As Far as You Can

A prince was once stranded far away from his parent. His companions urged him to return home. He replied: "I can't, I have not the strength." His parent sent word:

"Come according to your strength, as far as you can. I will come the rest of the way to meet you." So the Holy One says to us: "Return to Me and I will return to you."[70]
(Pesiktah Rabati 44:9)

Analysis and Application:

Just as the son feels alienated from his parent, so too may a person feel alienated from God. It is important to reestablish one's relationship with God before dying. This story reminds the reader that although this may seem like an insurmountable task, a person should begin the journey. The person need only travel half way. God will meet him/her in the middle.

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My Father's Mansion

Rabbi Schmelke and Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov were traveling on a ship. A dangerous storm threatened to destroy the vessel. Rabbi Schmelke went over to the Sassover and perceived that he was engaged in a joyful dance. "Why are you dancing?" inquired Rabbi Schmelke. "I am overjoyed at the thought that I shall soon arrive in the mansion of my Father," replied the Sassover. "I shall join you then," said Rabbi Schmelke. But the storm spent its force, and the ship reached port in safety.
(Newman, Hasidic Anthology, pp. 67-68)[71]

Analysis and Application:

Death can be perceived in a variety of ways. It can be the cessation of all life or it can be the transition to a new life. In this story, death is to be celebrated as it is the passageway to a life with God. God will be present in the world to come. Hearing this story can help those who fear death and wonder what it will be like in the hereafter.

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[70] Malachi 3:7.

[71] The original is found in *Menorah haTorah* by J.A. Frankel, Prezemysl, 1911, p. 49.

The Prodigal's Return

Said the Mezeritzer: "A king had two sons. One was contented to be constantly in attendance on his father; the other preferred to enjoy himself away from the home. There evil companions led him astray. The king was prompted to send his officers to fetch him for chastisement, but out of paternal love, refrained from doing so. Later the prodigal regretted the anguish his conduct had caused his father, and of his own free will, returned with a plea for pardon. The king was overjoyed and showed him more love and favor than to the other son who had never absented himself. Likewise, when a grievous sinner returns unto the Lord, he receives greater joy and favor than those who have never sinned.

(Newman, Hasidic Anthology, p. 387)[72]

Analysis and Application:

Similar to the story, "As far as you can," this narrative reminds the reader of the importance of repentance and returning to God. No matter what the person has done in his/her life, it is important to reestablish a relationship with God before dying. God is willing to accept those who return, regardless of how long they have been away and regardless of how long the journey takes.

For a person who recognizes his/her failures and is afraid to reestablish a relationship with God, this story can ease some of the fear. The caregiver may choose to use this story in conjunction with "As far as you can" to teach the need for meeting God half way.

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[72] The original is found in *Torat HaMaggid Mezeritz Ve-Sichotav* by S.A. Horodetzky, Berlin, 1923, pp. 244-245.

Issue Seven:
Taking A Spiritual Inventory:
What Did I Accomplish and Was it Meaningful?

Two Ships[73]

The day on which a great man dies is greater than the day of his birth. Why? Because on the day a man is born nobody knows what his acts will be. But when he dies, his acts are known to all creatures. Hence, "The day of death is greater than the day one is born."[74]

R. Levi said: "This is comparable to two ocean going ships, one leaving the harbor and one entering it. On the ship which was leaving the harbor, everyone was happy while nobody was happy for the ship which was entering the harbor. On noticing this, a man there said: "I see contradictory events here. People should not be happy when the ship leaves the harbor since nobody knows what conditions she will face, what seas she will encounter, or what winds she will encounter. But people should be happy for the ship entering the harbor for they know she went out safely (peacefully) and returned safely (peacefully) from the sea."

(Exodus Rabbah 48:1)

Analysis and Application:

Although many celebrate birth and mourn death, people should reexamine what death symbolizes. Instead of death representing only loss and the thoughts of what could have been, it can be a time to recognize all that a person has achieved. Like birth, it can be a time of celebration if the person lived his/her life to the fullest. Just as the arriving ship returned safely to its home after a journey, so too is the dying person returning to his/her "home" after the journey of life. The person is returning to God, the maker of all life.

This story may introduce a seemingly radical idea for people - that the end is more worthy of celebration than the beginning. When the essential question is asked, though, people will realize that this is not such a new concept. Just as the ship has numerous

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[73] The complete story is found in Appendix A.

[74] Ecclesiastes 7:1.

accomplishments of which people can be proud, so too does the patient. The caregiver can ask the patient what some of his/her accomplishments have been in life and how they have leant meaning to that life. With these answers in mind, the caregiver can guide the patient through a discussion of how these accomplishments effect that person's attitude about the upcoming death.

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Neither Silver Nor Gold

At the hour of a person's departure, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls accompany him. Rather, Torah and good deeds alone, as it is said: "When you walk, it will lead you, when you lie down, it will guard you, and when you wake up it will talk with you."[75] When you walk, it will lead you in this world, when you lie down, it will guard you in the grave, and when you wake up, it will talk with you in the world to come. Thus it is written in the book of Psalms by King David: "The teaching of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver."[76] It also says, "The silver and gold are mine, says the Lord of Hosts."[77]

(Babylonian Talmud, Avot 6:9)

Analysis and Application:

Many people often worry they have not accomplished enough or accumulated enough wealth before dying. This story reminds the readers that achieving material wealth is not as important as other types of accomplishments. Whether the person was a good person and whether the person engaged in study and good deeds has more effect in the world to come than any material wealth he/she may have amassed.

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[75] Proverbs 6:22.

[76] Psalms 119:72.

[77] Haggai 2:8.

Telling this story offers another opportunity for the patient to take stock of his/her life. "What type of a person was I?" and "What did I accomplish that is worth remembering?" are two questions a person can ask. In reviewing these accomplishments, a person may recognize some achievements previously overlooked.

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The Fox

"As he came forth from his mother's womb."[78] Genibah said it is like a fox who found a vineyard fenced in on all sides. There was one hole and he wished to enter it but he was not able to. What did he do? He fasted three days until he was lean and frail and he entered the hole. But he ate and got fat again so when he wanted to go out, he was unable to pass through the hole. He again fasted three days until he was lean and frail. He returned to his original state and passed through the hole. When he had passed through, he turned and faced the vineyard and said: "My vineyard, my vineyard, how good and tasty are you and the fruits inside! But what enjoyment does one get from you? As one enters you, so he comes out." Thus this is the law of the world.

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:14 paragraph 1)

Analysis and Application:

Life is temporary and it is important for a person to recognize his/her finitude. This story also reminds the reader not to concentrate on acquiring material goods. As a person cannot take them with him/her, they are of no benefit. What is important is how that person lived his/her life. The caregiver and patient can discuss what the person achieved that can accompany one after death.

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Resignation

The Tsanzer Rebbe used to tell this story about himself: "In my youth, when I was fired with the love of God, I thought I would convert the whole world to God. But soon I discovered that it would be quite enough to convert the people who lived in my town, and I tried for a long time, but I did not succeed. Then I realized that my program was still

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[78] Verse 14.

much too ambitious, and I concentrated on the persons in my household. But I could not convert them either. Finally, it dawned on me: I must work upon myself, so that I may give true service to God. But I did not accomplish even this."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 214)

Analysis and Application:

In preparing to die, it is just as important to come to terms with one's failures as it is to recognize one's achievements. The challenge is not to become overwhelmed with the failures. In this story, although it seems as if the Rebbe failed at his mission, he succeeded in a less obvious way. In his struggles, he learned about himself and his relationship with God. Both of these realizations are crucial for people as they prepare to die.

For patients who seem focused primarily on their failures, a caregiver can use this story for two purposes. First, it teaches that other people have failed and the patient is not alone. The second reason to use this story is hinted at above. Just as the Rebbe really succeeded when he thought he failed, so too, did the patient probably succeed where he/she recognizes only failure. This is important to point out to the patient so that he/she recognizes that his/her life was worthwhile.

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A Vain Search

Rabbi Hanoch told this story: "There was once a man who was very stupid. When he got up in the morning, it was so hard for him to find his clothes that at night he almost hesitated to go to bed for thinking of the trouble he would have on waking. One evening, he finally made a great effort, took paper and pencil, and as he undressed noted exactly where he put everything he had on. The next morning, very pleased with himself, he took the slip of paper in hand and read: 'Hat' - there it was, he sat it on his head; 'pants' - there they lay, he got into them; and so it went until he was fully dressed. 'That's all very well, but where am I now myself?' he asked in great consternation. 'Where in the world am I?' He looked and looked, but it was a vain search; he could not find himself." "And that is how it is with us," said the rabbi.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 314)

Analysis and Application:

Many people live their lives without having any idea who they are, what is important to them, or what they have accomplished. They have little idea of how they fit into the world. While people are living and healthy, it is easy to go through life without asking oneself any of these questions. When a person prepares to die, he/she is no longer able to avoid these issues. People realize the need to find out who they are before dying so that they can gain a sense of closure on their lives. Telling this story invites the question of "Who am I really?" and allows the patient to begin exploring this issue.

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In the Last Hour

On a certain New Year's night, the Maggid of Zlotchov saw a man who had been a leader in the city, and who had died a short time ago. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"The rabbi knows," said the dead man, "that in this night, souls are incarnated anew. I am such a soul."

"And why were you sent out again?" asked the *maggid.*

"I led an impeccable life here on earth," the dead man told him.

"And yet you are forced to live once more?" the *maggid* went on to ask.

"Before my death," said the man, "I thought over everything I had done and found that I had always acted in just the right way. Because of this, my heart swelled with satisfaction and in the midst of this feeling I died. So now they have sent me back into the world to atone for my pride."

At that time a son was born to the *maggid.* His name was Rabbi Wolf. He was very humble.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 158)

Analysis and Application:

In contrast to the story, "Resignation," this story teaches that a person must recognize his/her failures as well as his/her successes. No person is perfect and everybody

has, at some time, acted improperly. It is important to admit this in order to be at peace with oneself at death.

The storyteller can use this story to warn against only focusing on one's achievements. Although it may be difficult, it is essential for people to come to terms with one's successes and failures. This is true even if it is the failure to recognize one's improper behavior.

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Master and Disciple

Rabbi Hanoch told the story: "For a whole year I felt a longing to go to my master, Rabbi Bunam, and talk with him. But every time I entered the house, I felt I wasn't man enough. Once though, when I was walking across a field and weeping, I knew that I must run to the rabbi without delay. He asked: 'Why are you weeping?' I answered: 'I am, after all, alive in this world, a being created with all the senses and all the limbs, but I do not know what it is I was created for and what I am good for in this world.'

"Little fool," he replied, 'that's the same question I have carried around with me all my life. You will come and eat the evening meal with me today.'"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 251)

Analysis and Application:

Confusion about one's role in the world and who one really is can be quite unsettling. Often times, people who experience these questions feel they are the only ones and may feel very alone. This story teaches that these questions are common. Even the wisest of rabbis experience identity issues.

If the dying person seems to question these same issues, the caregiver can use this story to begin a discussion. The storyteller can also tell this story at the end of a session in order to let the patient think about the issues until the next meeting. Regardless of the

timing, this story invites the patient to begin struggling with who he/she is and what his/her life has meant in the grand scheme of things.

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If I Knew

Rabbi Moshe once said: "If I knew for sure that I had helped a single one of my *hasidim* to serve God, I should have nothing to worry me."

Another time he said: "If I knew I had said 'amen' just once in the way it ought to be said, I should have nothing to worry me."

And still on another occasion he said: "If I knew that after my death it would be said in Heaven that a Jew was coming, I should have nothing to worry me at all."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, pp. 172-173)

Analysis and Application:

It is impossible for a person to know for sure that he/she has accomplished anything great during his/her life. Other than achievements that have immediate rewards, a person cannot be sure that he/she has succeeded. In listing what he wondered about, Rabbi Moshe caused himself to decide what was really important to him. Turning others toward God and living a proper Jewish life were what was most important to him.

After telling this story, the storyteller can ask the patient what is most important to him/her. "What do you worry about?" is a question that invites introspection and values clarification. In listing what the patient worries about, he/she may be able to explore whether he/she succeeded in these areas. If the answer is yes, he/she can die with a sense of completion. If the answer is no, the caregiver and patient can explore what that means. At this point, using another story such as "Resignation" may be useful.

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With Ten Fingers[79]

When Rabbi was about to depart from this world, he raised his ten fingers toward Heaven and said: "Master of the World, it is known to You that I labored in the study of Torah with my ten fingers and I did not enjoy [worldly benefits] with even my little finger. May it be Your will that there will be peace in my resting place."

(Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 104a)

Analysis and Application:

This is a reminder to take stock of one's achievements before dying. What did the person accomplish during life? The storyteller can also ask the person whether he/she thinks these actions will have an effect on the world to come.

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Laborers[80]

[There was once] a king who owned a vineyard and hired many laborers to work it. Among them was one laborer who was far more skillful in his work than the rest; so what did the king do? He took him by the hand and walked with him up and down. Toward evening the laborers came to receive their wages and this laborer came with them, and the king gave him the full amount. The others began to grumble saying: "We toiled all day, whereas this man toiled for two hours, and yet the king has given him his full wage!" The king said to them: "What cause have you for grumbling? This man in two hours did more work than you in a whole day."

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:11, paragraph 5)[81]

Analysis and Application:

This story reminds the reader that quality is better than quantity. This is directly applicable to measuring the worth of a person's life. Did the person achieve much in the years he/she lived? This may help a young person, especially, come to terms with dying. It is not as important how many years a person lived but rather how he/she spent those

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[79] The complete story is found in Appendix A.

[80] The complete story is found in Appendix A.

[81] Not my own translation.

years. Does this person resemble the mass of laborers who worked all day or the laborer who completed the same amount of work in two hours? Once again, the question, "What did you accomplish in your years?" can be asked and should be explored.

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The Tzaddik and His Conduct

Said Rabbi Leib Saras: "A *tzaddik* is not a person who preaches Torah, but rather lives Torah. Not his words but his actions should teach Torah to the people. I visit *tzaddikim* not to listen to their interpretations of Torah, but to observe how they conduct themselves from the time of their arising in the early morning until the time of their lying down to rest at night."

(Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim, p. 29)[82]

Analysis and Application:

Once again, what matters most is not what a person accumulates but rather how a person lives his/her life. What did he/she do to exemplify Torah in its broadest sense? Is there anything memorable about this person's life that people can learn from? Although this story seems less directly related to this topic, it is another reminder to take note of all that a person has accomplished in life.

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Where Are You?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the rav of Northern White Russia, was put in jail in Petersburg, because the *mitnagdim*[83] had denounced his principles and his way of living to the government. He was awaiting trial when the chief of the gendarmes entered his cell. The majestic and quiet face of the rav, who was so deep in meditation that he did not at first notice his visitor, suggested to the chief, who was a thoughtful person, what manner of man he had before him. He began to converse with his prisoner and brought up a number of questions which had occurred to him in reading the Scriptures. Finally he asked: "How are we to understand that God, the all-knowing, said to Adam: 'Where art

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[82] The original is found in *Geburat Ari*, R. Margulies, publisher, Lwow.

[83] A group of Jews opposed to the Chasidim.

thou?'" "Do you believe," answered the rav, "that the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation, and every man is included in them?" "I believe this," said the other.

"Well then," said the *tzaddik*, "in every era, God calls to every man: 'Where are you in the world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?' God says something like this: 'You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?'" When the chief of the gendarmes heard his age mentioned, he pulled himself together, laid his hand on the rav's shoulder, and cried: "Bravo!" But his heart trembled.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, pp. 268-269)

Analysis and Application:

When God asked Adam where he was, God was not asking where Adam was physically, but rather emotionally. Legend[84] teaches that Adam was a giant so immense that he could never have hidden from God. Instead, Adam was hiding from himself. When God asked the question, God encouraged Adam to stop hiding and take a spiritual inventory. Taking part in such an act is a traditionally Jewish thing to do. The concept of *Cheshbon Hanefesh* (a spiritual inventory) has roots in Judaism generations deep. This story reminds its readers that people should take spiritual inventories periodically throughout life. Unfortunately, many people wait until they are dying to do so. Although this is not ideal, it should still be done and is no less important at this stage. The caregiver can use this story to ask the patient, "You are so many years old. Where are you in your life?"

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He Leaves as He Comes

When a person comes from the mother's womb, he is naked and returns to leave as he came. It is taught that just as a person came, so too he will leave. A person comes into this world with a cry and leaves with a cry. A person enters this world weeping and leaves weeping. He comes into this world with love and leaves this world with love. He comes

[84] Genesis Rabbah chapter 8.

into this world with a sigh and leaves this world with a sigh. A person comes into this world without knowledge and leaves this world without knowledge.

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Meir that when a person comes into this world, his hands are clenched as to say: "the whole world is mine and I will inherit it." When he leaves this world, his hands are open as if to say: "I have received nothing from this world." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:14 paragraph 1)

Analysis and Application:

Each person leaves this world in a similar manner to how he/she arrived. Throughout life, though, people accumulate such things as knowledge, understanding and a host of other material objects. It is important to take note of all a person has gained from life. What does the patient think of the last line in the story which says, "I have received nothing from this world?" Does he/she agree with this statement? Is it a fair statement to make? Reviewing his/her life, what has the person gained from living?

Issue Eight:
Reconciling What Might Have Been with the Reality of What Is

Why Are You Crying?

When Rabbi was ill, R. Chiyah entered his house and found him crying. R. Chiyah said to Rabbi: "Why are you crying? Is it not taught that if a man dies while laughing, it is a good sign for him and if he dies while crying it is a bad sign? If he dies with his face looking up it is a good sign and if he dies with his face looking down, it is a bad sign for him. If he dies while facing the public, it is a good sign and if he faces a wall, it is a bad sign. If he dies with his face green it is a bad sign but if his face is golden or rosy, it is a good sign for him. If he dies on the Sabbath eve it is a good sign but if he dies as the Sabbath is ending it is a bad sign. If he dies on the eve of Yom Kippur it is a bad sign but if he dies as Yom Kippur is ending it is a good sign. If a man dies of diarrhea it is a good sign because most righteous people die of diarrhea." Rabbi replied: "I cry because of my upcoming separation from Torah and *Mitzvot* (commandments)."

(Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 103b)

Analysis and Application:

Sometimes, the fact that one is dying is not what makes people mourn. Rather, it is the realization that he/she will not be able to complete all the tasks that one planned to do. It is important to come to terms with this. The rabbi in this story cried for the Torah he would not study and the *mitzvot* he would not complete.

After reading this story, the patient can think of what he/she regrets not having had the chance to do. If it is possible, allow the patient to do some of what is on the list. For those things which cannot be accomplished, discuss what it means to die without having done them.

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Neither My Sufferings Nor Their Reward

R. Chiyah b. Abba was ill and R. Yochanan went to visit him. He said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you? He answered: "Neither they nor their rewards." R. Yochanan said to him: "Give me your hand." R. Chiyah b. Abba gave him his hand and he raised him.

R. Yochanan became ill and R. Chaninah came to visit him. R. Chaninah said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" R. Yochanan replied: "Neither they nor their reward." R. Chaninah said to him: "Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why couldn't R. Yochanan raise himself? They replied: "The prisoner cannot free himself from jail."

R. Elazar became ill and R. Yochanan went to visit him. He noticed that he was lying in a dark room. He bared his arm and light radiated from it. He then noticed that R. Elazar was crying and he said to him: "Why are you crying? Is it because we did not study enough Torah? Haven't we learned that the one who sacrifices much and one who sacrifices little have the same merit provided they direct their heart to Heaven? Is it because of lack of sustenance? Not everyone is able to enjoy two tables. Is it because you lack children? This is the bone of my tenth son!"

R. Elazar replied: "I am crying because of this beauty that will rot on earth."

He said to him: "For that reason, you surely have cause to cry." And they both cried. In the meanwhile he said to him: "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" He replied: "Neither they nor their reward." He said to him: "Give me your hand, and he gave him his hand and he raised him.

(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 5b)

Analysis and Application:

One reason why a person may not accept death is the realization that he/she has not accomplished all he/she wanted to achieve or experienced all that he/she had hoped to experience. The caregiver and patient can discuss what it means to die not having done certain things and what it means to have regrets for the things he/she did do.

Issue Nine:
Finishing Unfinished Business and Preparing for Death

All Announce

None can hope to escape death. All know and say with their mouths that they will die. Abraham said: "And I go childless;"[85] Isaac said: "That my soul may bless you when I die;"[86] and Jacob said: "When I lay down with my fathers."[87] When was this? When he was about to die.

(Genesis Rabbah 96:2)

Analysis and Application:

This story demonstrates a way that people have prepared for their death. They have said parting words as they were about to die. By listing the names of the patriarchs, this story teaches the importance of this act. Finishing unfinished business and giving closure to one's life is the single most effective way to prepare for death. In giving these examples, this story invites the question, "What do you want to say before you die?" A second question, "What do you want people to remember about your last days?" also begs

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[85] Genesis 15:2.

[86] Genesis 27:4.

[87] Genesis 47:30.

to be asked. Although short, this story is a powerful reminder of the importance of closure in relationships and in life in general.

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The Day that Abraham Died

The day that Abraham our father departed from this world, all the leaders of the nations stood in a line and said, "Woe to the world that has lost its leader and woe to the ship that has lost its pilot.

(Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 91a)

Analysis and Application:

Similar to the previous story, this story gives the reader an example of a great Jewish figure and then, through example, asks the question, "What do you want said about you after you die?" In hearing this question, the patient may think through what he/she considers most important about his/her life and what he/she wants people to remember. In asking the question this way, the storyteller invites the patient to partake in a values clarification exercise that may help give closure to the person's life.

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Final Instructions

Our Rabbis taught that when Rabbi was about to depart from this world, he said: "I need my sons" and his sons entered his house. He said to them: "Be careful to honor your mother, the light should be lit in its place, the table should be set in its place, the bed should be made in its place. Yoseph of Chaifa and Shimon of Efrat, who served me in my lifetime, shall serve me in my death."

(Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 103a)

Analysis and Application:

Rabbi gave final instructions to what he wanted done after he died. Not only did he request what he wished for himself, he also instructed his survivors what they needed to

do for their mother. As in the previous stories, this text gives the example of how a leader handled his death. Also similar to the previous stories, the story suggests the questions, "What do you want to say to your loved ones before you die?" and "Do you have any special requests?" This story may be used as a way to introduce the idea of making final requests.

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The Feast

R. Elazar said, "Repent one day before you die." His students asked him how a man would know which day he would die. He said to them that a man should repent today for perhaps he will die tomorrow. Then his whole life is spent in repentance. Solomon even said in his wisdom: "Let your clothes always be white and your head never lack ointment.

R. Yochanan b. Zakai said this is similar to a king who invited his servants to a feast but did not specify a time. The wise ones adorned themselves and sat at the entrance to the palace, saying: "Is there anything missing from the palace?" The fools among them went back to their work saying: "Can there be a feast without preparations?" Suddenly, the king requested the presence of his servants. The wise ones entered all dressed up while the fools entered dirty. The king was happy to greet the wise but angry to greet the fools. He said: "Those that adorned themselves for the feast, let them sit and eat and drink. Those who did not adorn themselves for the feast, let them stand and watch."

R. Meir's son-in-law said in the name of R. Meir that they are both seen as being in attendance. Both sit but these eat while those hunger, these drink while those thirst as it is said: "Thus says Adonai, behold My servants will eat and you will hunger, My servants will drink and you will thirst, My servants will rejoice in their hearts and you will cry from a sorrowful heart."[88]

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 153a)

Analysis and Application:

The goal of life is to be at peace with oneself and with God through repentance. Although nobody knows when he/she will die, preparing for death by repenting each day will make sure that one does not die without first completing the necessary repentance.

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[88] Isaiah 65:13ff.

This is difficult to do and only the very wise will accomplish this task. Caregivers can use this story to remind the patient of the need to plan ahead and finish any unfinished business between him/her and other people and him/her and God.

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The Verse Within

Once, when Rabbi Mordechai was in the great town of Minsk expounding the Torah to a number of men hostile to his way, they laughed at him. "What you say does not explain the verse in the least," they cried. "Do you really think," he replied, "that I was trying to explain the verse in the book? That doesn't need an explanation! I want to explain the verse that is within me."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 156)

Analysis and Application:

It is crucial for people to make themselves understood to others. Rabbi Mordechai understood this and he understood that sometimes it takes a great deal of explanation in order for people to appreciate who you are. While this is important during life, it is all the more so before death. Many dying people feel the urgency of knowing that they are understood and that people will remember them as they truly were.

If this is the case for a particular patient, a caregiver can tell this story and ask the patient to tell the "verse that is within him/her." Similar to other stories in this section and others, this tale opens up a discussion and encourages the patient to define what is important to who he/she is. It can lead to an exercise in values clarification and can prepare the patient to die a peaceful and appropriate death.

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His Father's Words

Israel's father died while he was still a child. When he felt death drawing near, he took the boy in his arms and said: "I see that you will make my light shine out, and it is not given me to rear you to manhood. But, dear son, remember all the days that God is with you, and that because of this, you need fear nothing in all the world." Israel treasured these words in his heart.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 36)

Analysis and Application:

Final words and teachings given to loved ones can be particularly powerful and memorable. As the given messages live on, so too does the person who offered them. Once again, the listener is given an example of how someone handled this situation. He/she is then able to decide what final words he/she wants to offer people. This may allow the person to feel more of a sense of closure before dying, especially if he/she has any regrets of not having completed a certain relationship with someone.

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The Craving

On Chanukah, when Rabbi Abraham Moshe was in the city of Biala with his mother, he said to her: "Mother, I have a craving to die." She answered: "I heard from your father that one has to learn to die." He answered: "I have learned it." Again she said: "I heard from your father that one has to learn for a very long time, to learn it properly." He answered: "I have learned long enough," and lay down. He died on the seventh day of the feast. Later his mother found out that before going on his journey he had visited his favorite disciples and taken leave of them.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 269)

Analysis and Application:

Like Rabbi Abraham Moshe, many people have a desire to die at a certain time. Dying is a task similar to many others. In order to do it well, dying requires preparation. The wise understand this. They plan ahead and finish their business so that when the time

comes, they are able to die an appropriate death. This story serves as a reminder of this. Just as Rabbi Moshe prepared for his death, so too should the listener of this story.

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After the Close of the Sabbath

One Friday on his return from the ritual bath, Rabbi Yehoshua Asher, the Yehudi's second son, asked his sons not to come to his house for the Sabbath meal as they usually did, but to go to bed early, so that they might be able to stay with him a long time the night after the close of the Sabbath. They did not however do as they said, and appeared at his table that evening as always. After the meal he said to them: "Do not visit me tomorrow during the day as you usually do, and see to it that you rest after the midday meal." But again they failed to heed his words and appeared at their father's table as always. At the third Sabbath meal the rabbi bade his eldest son cut the bread in his place, and when he was reluctant to do this, his father said: "You must learn to cut bread for Israel and to accord them abundance of blessings."

After they had eaten, said the Evening Prayer, and recited the *Havdalah*[89] blessings, the rabbi ate the meal of escort of the Sabbath with all those dear to him, and again he bade his eldest son cut the bread. After the meal he said to his sons: "I beg you not to go away but to do me the favor of staying with me." A little later he ordered clean underwear brought to his room. His wife was surprised that he wished this at so unusual an hour, but she gave the servant the garments, and the rabbi put them on. Then he told the servant to light candles in the House of Study and in all the rooms. At first his wife objected, but when she heard that the rabbi really wished it, she fetched the candles. Shortly after this, the rabbi had the doors thrown open and sent for his sons and his close friends who were waiting in the House of Study and in the entrance to the house. The rabbi was in his bed. He then asked to have his pipe handed to him. He puffed at it slowly and calmly for a little and put it down on the chair. Then he drew the covers up over his face. All they could hear, just barely hear, was a sigh, and he had passed away.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, pp. 234-235)

Analysis and Application:

As Rabbi Yehoshua Asher approached death, he made his desires well known to those around him. He also began preparing his son for his responsibilities after the Rabbi died. Rabbi Asher had a well scripted plan of what he wanted done before he died and was able to achieve much of it.

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[89] The blessings recited at the end of the Sabbath.

Like Rabbi Asher, the patient may have an idea of what he/she wants to have happen as he/she dies. Who should be present at the death? What does he/she want to say to people? Are there any personal items the person wants distributed and to whom? After telling this story, the storyteller can ask the question, "How do you wish to prepare for death?" Just as people have plans for handling various significant times in their lives, so too can they have a plan for what their death should be like. Although nothing is guaranteed, this planned deathbed scene can offer the patient the comfort of knowing that his/her last wishes will be attended to.

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Of the Baal Shem's Death

After Passover, the Baal Shem fell ill. But he continued to pray before the pulpit in the House of Prayer, as long as his strength permitted. He did not send word to those of his disciples in other towns who were held to be men whose prayers were effective through their fervor, and sent the disciples who were in Mezbizh, to other places. Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was the only one who refused to leave.

On the eve of Shavuot, the congregation met as every year at this time, in order to spend the night in the study of the law. The Baal Shem addressed them on the revelation on Mount Sinai.

When morning came, he sent for his close friends. First he summoned two of them and told them to attend to his corpse and his burial. On his own body he showed them, limb by limb, how the soul wished to depart from it, and instructed them to apply what they had learned in the case of other sick persons, for these two belonged to the Holy Brotherhood who care for the dead and their burial.

Then he bade the quorum of ten worshippers pray with him. He asked for the prayer book and said: "I want to busy myself with God for a bit more." After the prayer, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka went to the House of Study to pray for him. The Baal Shem said: "He is shaking the gates of Heaven in vain! He cannot get in at the door by which he used to enter."

Later, when the servant happened to come into the room, he heard the Baal Shem say: "I give you those two hours," and thought that he was telling the angel of death he need not torment him two hours more, but Rabbi Pinchas knew better what was meant. "He had two more hours to live," he said. "And he was saying he would make God a gift of those two hours. This is a true sacrifice of the soul."

Then, just as every year on this day, the people from the city came to him and he spoke words of teaching to them.

Some time later he said to the disciples who stood about him: "I have no worries with regard to myself. For I know quite clearly: I am going out at one door and I shall go in at another." And again he spoke and said: "Now I know for what I was created."

He sat up in bed and spoke brief words of teaching about the "pillar" by means of which the souls, after death, mount from the lower paradise to the upper paradise, to the "Tree of Life," and expounded the verse from the Book of Esther: "And with that the maiden came unto the king." He also said: "I shall surely return, but not as I am now."

After that he had them say the prayer: "And let the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us," and stretched out in his bed. But several times he sat up again and whispered, as they knew he did when he shaped and directed his soul to fervor. For a while they heard nothing and he lay there quietly. Then he bade them cover him with a sheet. But they still heard him whisper: "My God, Lord of all worlds!" And then the verse of the psalm: "Let not the foot of pride come upon me." Later on, those whom he had bidden attend to his body and his burial, said they had seen the Baal Shem's soul ascend as a blue flame.

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, pp. 83-84)

Analysis and Application:

Similar to the previous story, this tale tells of a man who made known his final wishes. His soul was able to "ascend as a blue flame" because he left nothing undone or unsaid. His wishes were expressed and fulfilled. This is a wonderful example of a man who died a peaceful and appropriate death because he took the time to prepare for it.

Caregivers can use this as an example of preparing for death. The caregiver and patient can work together to decide what the patient wants to have happen before dying. Once again, what the person chooses to do and/or say expresses what is important to that person. It is a powerful exercise in values clarification.

Issue Ten:
Deriving Meaning from Death

The Meaning

When Rabbi Bunam lay dying his wife burst into tears. He said: "What are you crying for? My whole life was only that I might learn how to die."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 268)

Analysis and Application:

For many people, the purpose of living is to understand how to die. These people view dying as an act that should be prepared for and done with skill. It should be done in a manner that honors God. Death is not viewed as something to be feared, but rather, as a natural culmination of life that is to be celebrated.

This story can ask the question, "What did you learn from your life and how has what you have learned effected your attitude toward dying?" Another question is, "Do you think that there is a proper way to die?" If the answer is yes, then one can ask, "How do you plan to prepare for death in order to make it meaningful for you and your loved ones?" This can start the patient thinking about what he/she wants to complete before dying.

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The Purpose of Creation

In the hour of his death the Baal Shem Tov said: "Now I know the purpose for which I was created."

(Newman, Hasidic Anthology, p. 68)[90]

Analysis and Application:

Many people live without ever knowing why they are alive or what their purpose is in life. Ironically, death, the very negation of life, can teach people why they are alive. Death often causes people to explore the purpose of life. When this is the case, death becomes meaningful in that it lends meaning and understanding to life. If the caregiver

[90] The original is found in *Die Chassidischen Buecher* by Martin Buber, Hellerau, 1928, p. 330.

notices that the patient is having trouble understanding either the meaning of his/her life or the purpose of his/her dying, the caregiver can use this story to begin the discussion.

Issue Eleven:
Being Proud of Who You Are

The Query of Queries

Before his death, Rabbi Zusyah said: "In the world to come, if they ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' I will know what to answer, but if they ask me: 'Why were you not Zusyah?' I will have nothing to say in reply.'"

(Buber, From the Treasure House of Hasidim, p. 18)[91]

Analysis and Application:

In our desire to succeed, we often try to imitate others and live up to standards which are not appropriate for who we are. We need to concentrate more on who we are and what we have accomplished. Part of dying an appropriate death is living a life appropriate to who we are. Recognizing this is the first step in coming to terms with our accomplishments and failures. The caregiver can use this story to begin a discussion of who the patient is. This can mean more than simply the person's identity. The caregiver and patient can then explore what the patient has accomplished in his/her life and why he/she lived the life he/she lived.

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[91] Translation mine.

Many Coins

If a man mints many coins from one mold, they are all similar to each other. If God created every person with the mold of the first person, no one would resemble his neighbor, as it is said: "It is changed as clay under the seal till its hues are fixed like those of a garment."[92]

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a)

Analysis and Application:

Each person is unique and therefore very special. The patient needs to remember this at a time when he/she is probably feeling somewhat unworthy. This story reminds people that everyone is created by God in the image of God and is therefore partly divine.

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The Treasure

Rabbi Bunam used to tell the young men who came to him for the first time the story of Rabbi Isaac, son of Rabbi Yekel in Cracow. After many years of great poverty which had never shaken his faith in God, he dreamed someone bade him look for a treasure in Prague, under the bridge which leads to the king's palace. When the dream recurred a third time, Rabbi Isaac prepared for the journey, and set out to Prague. But the bridge was guarded day and night, and he did not dare to start digging. Nevertheless, he went to the bridge every morning and kept walking around it until evening.

Finally, the captain of the guards, who had been watching him, asked in a kindly way whether he was looking for something or waiting for somebody. Rabbi Isaac told him of the dream which had brought him here from a faraway country. The captain laughed: "And so to please the dream, you, poor fellow, wore out your shoes to come here! As for having faith in dreams, if I had it, I should have had to get going when a dream once told me to go to Cracow and dig for treasure under the stove in the room of a Jew - Isaac, son of Yekel, that was the name! Isaac, son of Yekel! I can just imagine what it would be like, how I should have to try every house over there, where half of the Jews are named Isaac and the other half Yekel!" And he laughed again. Rabbi Isaac bowed, traveled home, dug up the treasure from under the stove, and built the House of Prayer which is called "Reb Isaac's Shul."

"Take this story to heart," Rabbi Bunam used to add, "and make what it says your own: There is something you cannot find anywhere in the world, not even at the *tzaddik's*, and there is, nevertheless, a place where you can find it."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, pp. 245-246)

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[92] Job 38:14.

Analysis and Application:

Each person has special gifts and traits. Sometimes it takes an outsider to remind a person of this. The challenge that Rabbi Isaac faced is not uncommon. He needed to realize that although he traveled far and thought that only others had what he didn't, the treasure really was within his reach. This is not uncommon. People need to pay attention to the good that is internal and should learn to be satisfied with it instead of always searching for external satisfaction. This story is easy to use in that it is relatively straight forward. It can remind the person to look inward to take note of the treasures within.

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In Their Own Estimation

The Strelisker recalled to his *Hasidim* the saying of Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai to the effect that he had looked about him and had observed that superior persons are small in number. Said the Rabbi: "How could he identify the superior persons? He did so by discovering those who were small in their own estimation."

(Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim, p. 122)[93]

Analysis and Application:

Although a person may think him/herself unworthy, it is not true. Everyone has special qualities that should be recognized. This story can be used to remind a patient that although he/she has doubts about self worth, those very doubts can prove that he/she is really a superior person.

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With the Sinners

The Baal Shem Tov said: "I let sinners come close to me , if they are not proud. I keep the scholars and the sinless away from me if they are proud. For the sinner who

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[93] The original is found in *Imre Kadosh*, R. Margulies, publisher, Lwow.

knows that he is a sinner, and therefore considers himself base - God is with him, for God 'dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.' But concerning him who prides himself on the fact that he is unburdened by sin, God says, as we know from the *Gemara:* 'There is not enough room in the world for myself and him.'"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, pp. 71-72)

Analysis and Application:

A person is special in God's eyes as long as he/she is humble. A person may worry that he/she is not worthy of being with God after death because of past wrong doings. This story can point out that as long as a person is honest about who he/she is, God accepts that person and will not abandon him/her.

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Answers

Rabbi Elimelech once said: "I am certain to have a share in the coming world. When I stand in the court of justice above and they ask me: 'Have you studied all you should?' I shall answer: 'No.' Then they will ask: "Have you prayed all you should?' And again I shall answer: 'No.' And they will put a third question to me: 'Have you done all the good you should?' And this time too, I shall have to give the same answer. Then they will pronounce the verdict: 'You told the truth. For the sake of truth, you deserve a share in the coming world.'"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters, p. 253)

Analysis and Application:

It is important that a person be true to who he/she is and not who others think he/she should be. Nobody is perfect and a person's fate in the world to come is not dependent on perfection. Rather it is dependent on a person's honesty with oneself and the world.

Hearing this story can remind people of the need for honesty with oneself. It can also remind people that this sort of honesty is as important as other accomplishments. Many times, a dying person may feel that he/she has not accomplished enough in life and

may feel pressured to do more before death. In realizing that just coming to terms with one's accomplishment is something to be proud of, a person may feel less urgency to do more and may accept his/her life as being worthy.

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Each His Own

Rabbi Uri said: "David could compose Psalms, and what can I do? I can recite the Psalms."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 147)

Analysis and Application:

Similar to other stories in this section, this is a reminder that each person is special in a unique way. Although a person may not be able to do many things that others can, there is something unique and important about this person's existence. The challenge that many people face is accepting that although others may succeed where they fail, each person has successes worth noting. Since part of coming to terms with dying is coming to accept who one has been in life, this story can begin the question, "What did you do that is special and worth remembering?"

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Two Pockets

Rabbi Bunam said to his disciples: "Everyone must have two pockets, so that he can reach into the one or the other, according to his needs. In his right pocket are to be the words: 'For my sake was the world created,' and in his left: 'I am earth and ashes.'"

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, pp. 249-250)

Analysis and Application:

While it is important to be humble in life, it is equally important to know how special one is. If the world was created for this person's sake, there is no doubt that this person is worthy. The challenge is to believe that the sayings in both pockets are equally true.

Many times, dying people wonder if their life meant anything to anyone and whether they will be missed after death. This story can be used to point out how special a person is and confirm that he/she will be missed.

Issue Twelve
Acceptance of Death

Acceptance of the World

One of the followers of the Rabbi of Kobryn was very poor. He complained to the rabbi about his straits, which, as he said, put him off his studies and made him unable to pray. The rabbi told him: "In these times the greatest piety, which supersedes study and prayer, is to accept the world as it is."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 354)

Analysis and Application:

Although we may not be able to alter our circumstances or the sufferings we encounter, we are able to control how we perceive the situation. Once the man accepted his poverty, he was able to spend his time studying. Acceptance is difficult to achieve but necessary to live a peaceful life.

The caregiver can use this story to suggest that although the person has no control over the illness or the upcoming death, how he/she acts during life and whether or not he/she accepts the situation is very much within his/her control.

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World Peace and Soul Peace

Rabbi Bunam taught: "Our Sages say: 'Seek peace in your own place.' You cannot find peace anywhere save in your own self. In the psalm we read: 'There is no peace in my bones because of sin.' When a man has made peace with himself, he will be able to make peace in the whole world."

(Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Later Masters, p. 264)

Analysis and Application:

We have little control over anything but ourselves. This can most clearly be understood when one is sick. A patient is unable to truly control any aspect of his illness except how he/she deals with it. The goal of experiencing a peaceful death will only be realized once the person is at peace with his/her situation and with him/herself.

A caregiver can use this story to remind the person to fight only the battles that can be won. The patient must be reminded and encouraged to work on changing only those aspects of his/her world which can be changed. A non-medical person has little control over the medical aspects of an illness but they do have control over their own attitudes.

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I Know no Sorrow

Rabbi Schmelke and his brother once petitioned their teacher, the Maggid of Mezeritch, to explain to them the words of the *Mishna*: "A man must bless God for the

evil in the same way he blesses God for the good."[94] The Maggid replied: "Go to the House of Study, and you will find there a man smoking. He is Rabbi Zusya, and he will explain this to you."

When Rabbi Schmelke and his brother put their question to Rabbi Zusya, he laughed and said: "I am surprised that the rabbi sent you to me. You must go elsewhere and make your inquiry from one who has suffered tribulations in his lifetime. As for me, I have never experienced anything but good all my days."

But Rabbi Schmelke and his brother knew full well that from his earliest hour to the present, Zusya had endured the most grievous sorrows. Thereupon they understood the meaning of the words of the *Mishna*, and the reason their rabbi had sent them to Rabbi Zusya.

(Newman, Hasidic Anthology, p. 125)[95]

Analysis and Application:

Events can be understood in both positive and negative ways. If a person is able to reframe his/her circumstances and focus on the positive aspects of what he/she is experiencing, suffering can often be greatly reduced. The power to reframe a situation in a positive light can help a person heal and come to terms with his/her illness.

This story can suggest to the patient that there are different ways to view a situation. The caregiver can ask the person what he is experiencing and how he/she understands the situation. If the focus is on the suffering and is making it difficult to proceed with the tasks necessary for an appropriate death, the caregiver can suggest the need to reframe the situation.

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Courage Amid Suffering

The Hafetz Hayyim[96] said: "He who suffers yet keeps his courage alive is more to be praised than the man who continually complains. We are reminded of a man who, on

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[94] *Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 54a.

[95] The original is found in *Midor Dor*, by M. Lipson, Tel Aviv, 1929, p. 216.

[96] Chafets Chayyim.

being arrested, is placed in chains. If he behaves calmly, his chains hurt him but slightly, but if he attempts to wriggle out of them and escape, the chains twist themselves about his body, and he undergoes great pain."

(Newman, Maggidim and Hasidim, p. 216)[97]

Analysis and Application:

A person's attitude will have a great effect on his/her physical and spiritual health. Although it is very difficult to keep a positive attitude during great suffering, it is essential. If the person can be reminded to concentrate on the less negative aspects of the illness, he/she may find that it is less painful and will have more time and energy to spend on achieving an appropriate death.

Conclusion

This chapter includes a small selection of stories that may be used in pastoral care settings. The stories are arranged thematically and address a variety of issues faced by dying people. Using chapter two as a source, caregivers should try to assess what issues the patient is confronting before selecting a story. Some of the stories will comfort the patient and some will serve to raise difficult issues, but all can help the patient work toward an appropriate death.

Caregivers are encouraged to tell these stories and are encouraged to alter them however may be most beneficial for the patient. The texts are written in their complete form and may be shortened when deemed necessary.

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[97] The original is found in *Mikhtevei haRav Chafetz Chayyim*, by Aryeh Leib Pupko, Warsaw, 1937, p. 11.

Chapter IV
Practical Concerns and Final Conclusions

The designs in a man's mind are deep waters,
but a man of understanding can draw them out.
-Proverbs 20:5

Society too often considers it the clergy's job to help dying people achieve closure in their life and find meaning in their death. Many individuals shy away from helping dying people to prepare for death either because of fear or because they do not know ways to go about helping the patient. In either case, people may feel inadequate in supporting a person's journey toward death. Medical staff and caregivers need to know that they can help the dying person to heal.[98] It is not and should not be solely the responsibility of the clergy. Friends and family can feel empowered to help their loved one achieve a sense of healing before death.

As this thesis has discussed previously, stories are a powerful method of helping people to prepare for death. Chapter one discussed the potential power of stories and ways that people use them in pastoral care while chapter two offered the reader a brief understanding of that which a dying person experiences. Although it is crucial to understand these two aspects when using stories with dying people, it is equally important to be familiar with ways of using the stories. This chapter is intended to offer guidelines concerning the use of the stories listed in chapter three. Merely knowing the stories will

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[98] Healing in this case does not imply curing. Healing refers to the emotional and spiritual aspects of the person while curing refers to the physical.

not ensure an effective telling. A person must have a rationale for selecting appropriate stories and he/she must know ways to tell the stories. This chapter first discusses ways to select an appropriate story and then discusses methods for telling it.

Methods of Selecting Stories

> The Gaon of Vilna asked his friend, the Dubner Maggid: "How do you find a parable suitable to any particular subject?" The Maggid, in accordance with his custom, responded with a parable: "A student at a military academy was returning home after graduation. He stopped over at a village inn in order to give his horse a rest. In the barn he noticed that circles had been chalked on the walls, with a bullet hole in the very center of each circle. He was astonished at such an exhibition of marksmanship and asked to see the marksman. A little, barefoot boy came over to him and introduced himself as the person responsible. 'Where in the world did you learn to shoot so accurately?' inquired the military student. 'Nowhere,' was the boy's reply. 'I simply shoot at the wall and then encircle the hole.'" "It is the same with me," continued the Maggid. "When I hear or think of a good parable, I retain it in my memory. Then I strive to fit it to an appropriate subject."[99]

Just as the Maggid strove to match situations with appropriate stories, caretakers must also select stories suitable to the situation when working with patients. This is often a challenge. Although the story is not the only aspect which makes a pastoral care session beneficial, sessions are most useful for the patient when the caretaker brings a suitable story to it. These stories do not always need to be happy or cheerful. Rather, they must be meaningful. No matter the text of the story, it must reassure the patient that life is

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[99] Israel Zevin, *Alle Meshalim von Dubner Maggid* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1925), pp. 31-32.

worth the struggle, that meaning is not an illusion, and that others share the pain of illness and separation.[100] As mentioned in chapter two, dying people often struggle to find meaning in their lives and in their deaths. A dying person must find some sense of meaning in order to put closure on his/her life and in order to die an appropriate death.[101] Dying people may also experience a sense of isolation from others and feel as though no one else can understand what they are experiencing and feeling. Effective stories can address these issues. If the caregiver chooses the stories properly, telling them can create a sense of community between caregiver and patient, it can make the patient feel less alone, and it can help the patient to find meaning and achieve an appropriate death.

There are two ways in which to choose a suitable story. The first is to pick a story from instinct and listen for the patient's response. That response then provides clues for further discussion. Depending on the listener's reaction to the story, the story teller will be able to note the suitability of the text for the situation and the teller will be able to direct the conversation toward that which is most pressing for the patient. Listening to the patient spontaneously talk about and noting the various emotions the patient displays after hearing the story will give clues concerning the patient's needs for discussion. It will also let the caregiver know about the patient's emotional state.[102] If the story adequately addresses the person's situation, telling it will naturally advance the discussion and will

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[100] Daniel Taylor, *The Healing Power of Stories* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc., 1996), p. 85.

[101] For a further understanding of an appropriate death, please refer to chapter 2.

[102] Gene Combs and Jill Freedman, *Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy*, p. 123.

deepen the pastoral experience.[103] Although it can be quite effective, this method is somewhat difficult to use and requires a great deal of experience and instinct. The storyteller must often choose a story without any understanding of the patient's character and without any knowledge of that which would be most beneficial for that person. For people newly involved in working with stories, the second method of selecting stories may be more useful.

This second approach requires the teller to match the patient's situation with a story containing similar characters and themes. Matching the story with the patient's situation is important because it demonstrates that the story is relevant to the patient's life. This may, in turn, cause the person to listen more closely to the story and its message. The stronger the connection between the story and the patient's experiences, the better the chance that the patient will use the narrative as a tool to confront necessary issues.[104] This is because stories that seem to relate to a particular experience that the patient recognizes as his/her own will appeal to the conscious mind.[105] This initial attraction will engage the patient on a conscious level and may encourage him/her to continue the task of introspection. Once the patient begins to interact with the story on an emotional level, caregivers can help the patient use the story as an aid for reflection.

It is also important to remember that in selecting stories it is imperative to choose all types of narratives. Sometimes, the mere telling of a story reassures the patient that it

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[103] Rachel Mikva, "Text and the Human Document: Toward a Model for Rabbinical Counseling," *Journal of Reform Judaism* Volume 37, Summer, 1990, p. 27.

[104] Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), p. 120.

[105] Thomas Loucheim, *The Use of Metaphor in Rabbinical Counseling*, Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1987.

is safe to explore certain issues.[106] Subjects avoided, such as questions of theodicy, are no exception. People often feel that questions about evil and suffering are inappropriate subjects to discuss with dying people. They are more concerned with comforting the patient than exploring difficult issues such as injustice and pain. Whether the caregiver wishes to recognize it or not, the patient knows that he/she is dying and it is unfair to avoid subjects that could help the person to heal. Although comforting and protecting the patient are significant tasks, it is more worthwhile to help the patient confront his/her feelings and fears. If the caregiver approaches these issues openly, the patient may feel empowered to explore his/her feelings on the subject and may begin to work through important and difficult issues.

Whichever story the caregiver chooses to tell, the goal is to give the patient an emotional experience. The story's message must affect the patient in a way that encourages him/her to explore difficult issues and to come to terms with the upcoming death. This is not possible if the story only addresses the conscious, cognitive part of the person. The story must reach deeper than that. Selecting the appropriate story is one aspect of reaching this goal. An equally important task is the proper telling of the story.

How to Tell a Story

In order for storytelling to be effective, the story must address the listener. The patient needs to feel as if the story were written with him/her in mind. *Chasidic* masters

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[106] Eliot Baskin, *The Use of Sacred Stories for Patients with AIDS*, p. 20.

have understood this fact for many years and have taught this point to their students in the form of a story:

> "Every evening after prayer, the Baal Shem went to his room. Two candles were set in front of him and the mysterious Book of Creation put on the table among other books. Then all those who needed his counsel were admitted in a body, and he spoke with them until the eleventh hour. One evening, when the people left, one of them said to the man beside him how much good the words of the Baal Shem had done him. But the other told him not to talk such nonsense, that they had entered the room together and from that moment on the master had spoken to no one except himself. A third, who heard this, joined in the conversation with a smile, saying how curious that both were mistaken, for the rabbi had carried on an intimate conversation with him the entire evening. Then a fourth and fifth made the same claim, and finally all began to talk at once and tell what they had experienced. But the next instant, they all fell silent."[107]

Although he was talking to many people at once, the Baal Shem made each person feel as if he were speaking only to him/her. Making a patient feel personally addressed involves more than selecting an appropriate story. It involves the way that the story is presented and its use in the pastoral care session.

Caregivers should use stories as a tool to further the pastoral care session and not as the reason for the session itself. One vital component of doing this is forming a relationship with the patient before a story is even used. The caregiver needs to listen to that which the patient says and to the concerns of the person in order to understand the patient's emotional and spiritual needs.[108] The caregiver must also try to understand the ways that the listener works best in order to know how to pace the stories. This is most

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[107] Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p.55.

[108] Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 261 - 262. Mentioned in Eliot Baskin's Doctor of Ministry Thesis.

easily accomplished by giving full attention to the patient's cues - through the patient's words and actions.

The caregiver must remember that listening to the patient is more important than talking to the patient. As Rabbi Simcha Bunam, a nineteenth century rabbi, taught, "words are as medicine; they must be carefully measured and precautions taken against an overdose."[109] Although people tend to be uncomfortable with silence and often speak in order to fill the void, it is important to wait for the patient to express his/her needs. Speaking prematurely or speaking too much does not allow a true relationship to form. Unless the patient is given ample time to express his/her needs, the caregiver will be unable to develop the sort of relationship required to effectively use stories in the pastoral care session.

Once a relationship is developed between the patient and caregiver, the task of telling the story begins. By emphasizing different aspects of the story, the caregiver can use the same narrative for different purposes. The very same text can be used to either comfort the patient or to encourage him/her to face difficult issues. The caregiver can decide the ways to use the story as soon as he/she has formed the relationship and has a sense as that which the patient needs.

In addition to using the same story for different reasons, caregivers can use numerous stories for the same purpose. Sometimes, it is better to use several small stories to tackle an issue than to depend on one story. Telling numerous stories allows the storyteller to approach a topic from a number of angles and it increases the chance that the

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[109] Baskin, *The Use of Sacred Stories for Patients with AIDS,* p. 39.

stories will be effective. In their work with using stories in individual and family therapy, Jill Freedman and Gene Combs have found that "it is rare for any single story, no matter how well it is designed and told, to be the decisive element in any [pastoral care session]...It is better to put your energy into finding and telling several small stories than to hang all your hopes on one tale."[110]

Regardless of the number of texts used, it is important to do more than tell the story. Stories should be explored and discussed; they should be studied in a partnership between the caregiver and patient. Both parties must meet the texts on their own terms and interpret the stories for meaning.[111] Both people should offer interpretations. Whether they are Biblical, *Midrashic*, or *Chasidic* stories, the stories demand that the listener interact with them. Caregivers need to be cautious about making sure the stories are discussed and not taught. They must also be ready to encourage patients to offer their own interpretations. Too often patients assume the storyteller has the 'correct interpretation' of the story and shy away from offering their own. If the caregiver allows his/her reading of the story to overshadow that of the patient's, the caregiver runs the risk of imposing his/her story onto the patient's story. The caregiver is, in a sense, dictating to the patient what he/she ought to feel and think. When this happens, the story cannot be a catalyst for healing as it does not encourage the patient to confront his/her issues.[112]

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[110] Combs and Freedman, *Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy*, p. 245.

[111] Mikva, "Text and the Human Document: Toward a Model for Rabbinical Counseling," p. 27.

[112] Ibid., p. 29.

At the end of life, when time is so precious, caregivers must make sure the patient is given adequate opportunity to use the story for healing. The patient must have time to interact with the story. Caregivers should not spend time giving introductions to the stories or commentaries afterward. This is especially difficult with rabbinic stories. Many *aggadot* (narratives) conclude with morals and explanations. Storytellers should remove these conclusions from the story when telling it. The rabbis' rational explanations can interfere with the story's potential to evoke an emotional response.[113] Furthermore, Combs and Freedman teach, "telling the moral of a story undermines its effectiveness because it stops people from searching for meaning relevant to them. There are exceptions such as when a person's nonverbal behavior indicates the he/she may have interpreted the story in a nonhelpful way."[114]

A final concern in telling stories is the actual presentation of the narrative. The oral delivery of the text conveys as much meaning as the text itself. Gesture and tone are vital tools in conveying the message of the story and can influence the listener. To maximize the effectiveness of the telling, the storyteller must be aware of his/her body language. He/she needs to assure that his/her voice, articulation, and emotion are consistent with the story and consistent with the mood of the pastoral care session.[115] Much of the story's impact is achieved by engaging the listener's emotions. If the storyteller is able to captivate the listener and keep the listener emotionally involved with

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[113] Loucheim, *The Use of Metaphor in Rabbinical Counseling,* p. 45.

[114] Combs and Freedman, *Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy*, pp. 249 - 250.

[115] Combs and Freedman, *Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy*, p. 173, and Loucheim, *The Use of Metaphor in Rabbinical Counseling*, p. 42.

the story, the chances of the listener interacting with the text are greatest. Adding humor to the telling often helps attract the listener's attention and may therefore intensify the impact of the story.[116]

No matter the number of stories the storyteller uses or the ways that he/she presents the narratives, the real test of the story's effect is in the listener's response. That which the storyteller says and that which the patient hears can be very different. Asking the listener about the meaning that he/she took from the story allows the caregiver to discover the patient's agenda. Paying attention to which aspects of the story the patient listened to most closely will give the caregiver a sense of what the patient is struggling with. Asking the patient open ended questions such as: what of the story will stick with you? what was going through your mind as I told the story? and with which character or situation did you identify? can facilitate this. Asking these questions helps further the conversation and gives the patient an opportunity to consciously interact with the story.[117] Although this chapter focuses greatly on ways to select and tell stories, it is crucial to remember that a story powerful for one may have no effect on another person. Unless the caregiver checks the patient's response, he/she will have no idea whether the storytelling is reaching its desired goal. If it is not, it is best to change stories. Otherwise, using the original story may detract from the session instead of adding to it.

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[116] Gardner, *Therapeutic Communication with Children: The Mutual Storytelling Technique*, p. 281.

[117] Baskin, *The Use of Sacred Stories for Patients with AIDS,* p. 41.

Final Conclusions

Dying is a complicated process that involves a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. While each person experiences his/her death in a unique manner, there are universal issues which confront dying people. These occur whether the person fears death or not. Dying people may experience fear of the unknown, a sense of isolation from loved ones, a feeling of losing control of one's life, and anxiety about separating from significant others. They may also question the meaning of life and of death. They wonder what will happen to their bodies after death and they question the role God plays in their lives. It is natural for a dying person to ask whether this illness is a punishment from God and what he/she did to deserve it. In addition to these questions, it is crucial for a person to complete certain tasks in order to achieve an appropriate death.

Caregivers are able to assist a dying person prepare for death by helping the person to complete the necessary tasks and by being present to discuss the person's fears and emotions surrounding the death. Being familiar with the dynamics of dying helps the caregiver to be sensitive to what the patient may be experiencing. This awareness is not sufficient, though. Many patients are either unable to express themselves openly or are unaware of what they are truly feeling. Thus storytelling becomes a technique often used to help support these people and encourage discussion between the patient and caregiver.

In spite of the fact that society often underestimates the efficacy of stories, storytelling can be a useful tool in pastoral care. It is a powerful method of communicating with another person and offers the caregiver a resource to use in guiding the patient on the road to accepting the upcoming death. If done correctly, storytelling

allows the listener to confront issues, clarify emotions, and internalize lessons with a minimum amount of resistance. Effective storytelling can also address many of the issues a dying person experiences. It can create a sense of community between caregiver and patient, it can make the patient feel less alone, and it can help the patient to find meaning and achieve an appropriate death.

This can only happen, though, if the storyteller selects appropriate stories and tells them successfully. Judaism offers a rich collection of stories that are useful to pastoral care settings. *Midrashic, Talmudic, and Chasidic* stories all contain lessons which patients can use in their journey toward death. These stories address critical issues such as God's role in the world and they offer consolation to those fearful of death. Caregivers can use these stories in combination with other stories or they can use individual stories to address various issues. The stories included in chapter three are merely a small sample of the stories available.

Storytelling in pastoral care is a complicated undertaking. This thesis has demonstrated that stories are more than fairytales for a child's bedtime and that storytelling does more than fill empty time. Stories are powerful medicine and can be quite effective when utilized properly. At the time when people question the meaning of life and of death, the stories Judaism offers can help caregivers guide dying people to find meaning and comfort and they can help a person to die an appropriate death. It is important that each caregiver feel comfortable using stories with the patient. In applying Jewish stories to help dying people journey toward acceptance, caregivers partake in a holy act of uniting Judaism's rich heritage with the patient's personal story. Terminally ill

people need to discuss issues surrounding death with more people than just their clergy. Medical personnel, family, friends, social workers, and hospice staff are all responsible for helping a dying person to come to terms with the upcoming death. This thesis has demonstrated that using stories with dying people is not only important but is a manageable activity that should not be left solely for the clergy.

After reading this thesis, a person has hopefully gained an appreciation of stories and at least a basic knowledge of what dying people may experience. This understanding will allow the reader to be attuned to the dying person's spiritual and emotional needs. Furthermore, this thesis has given the reader the guidance in the ways to choose and tell a suitable story. Most importantly, though, this thesis has given enough information and guidance so that people feel comfortable in working with dying people.

One suggested use of this work is to distribute it to Jewish clergy and hospice workers during a training session on story therapy. The background information offers an essential understanding of ways to use stories while chapter three provides readers with a rich collection of stories from which to draw. Once professional caregivers become acquainted with ways to use stories, they can help family and friends learn how to use them in helping loved ones. A dying person will only benefit from having a supportive group of caregivers with whom they can share their fears and emotions

Storytelling offers the caregiver a unique opportunity to comfort and guide a loved one through the journey toward death.

> When the great R. Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the

> celebrated Maggid of Mezritch had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with Heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: 'Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer.' Again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, R. Moshe Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people, once more would go into the forest and say: 'I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I do know the place and this must be sufficient.' It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to R. Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: 'I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story and this must be sufficient.' And it was sufficient.[118]

More than prayer or meditation, storytelling has the power to accomplish miracles. It can allow a caregiver to light the fire in the soul of a dying person and help that person achieve an appropriate death. Although storytelling cannot cure a person of a terminal illness, it can allow the person to heal emotionally and spiritually. When a person partakes in story therapy, he/she partakes in a holy act at a crucial time in the patient's life. This thesis allows the maximum number of people to be familiar with the art of story therapy so that the chances of a dying person having the support network necessary is also maximized. With all the stories that Judaism has to offer, and the power that story therapy offers, it is essential that caregivers learn about story therapy. This thesis is the beginning of the story; using this approach will continue the tradition of efficacious Jewish story telling.

[118] Taylor, *The Healing Power of Stories,* pp. 113 - 114.

Appendix A
Stories in Full

Two Ships

The day on which a great man dies is greater than the day of his birth. Why? Because on the day a man is born nobody knows what his acts will be. But when he dies, his acts are known to all creatures. Hence, "The day of death is greater than the day one is born"[119]

Rav Levi said: "this is comparable to two ocean going ships, one leaving the harbor and one entering it. On the ship which was leaving the harbor, everyone was happy while nobody was happy on the ship which was entering the harbor. On noticing this, a man there said: "I see contradictory events here. People should not be happy when the ship leaves the harbor since nobody knows what conditions she will face, what seas she will encounter, or what winds she will encounter. But people should be happy for the ship entering the harbor for they know she went out safely (peacefully) and returned safely (peacefully) from the sea."

Thus, when a person is born, each day brings closer (counts down) the time of death, and when a person dies, each day brings closer the time of resurrection. About this Shlomo said: "The day of death is greater than the day of one's birth."

(Exodus Rabbah 48:1)

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Laborers

When Rabbi Bun ben Rabbi Hiyya died, Rabbi Zera went in and delivered the eulogy over him on the present verse: "Sweet is the sleep of a laboring man." To whom was Rabbi Bun ben Rabbi Hiyya like? To a king who owned a vineyard and hired many laborers to work it. Among them was one laborer who was far more skillful in his work than the rest; so what did the king do? He took him by the hand and walked with him up and down. Toward evening the laborers came to receive their wages and this laborer came with them, and the king gave him the full amount. The others began to grumble saying: "We toiled all day, whereas this man toiled for two hours, and yet the king has given him his full wage!" The king said to them: "What cause have you for grumbling? This man in two hours did more work than you in a whole day."

Similarly did Rabbi Bun ben Rabbi Hiyya learn in twenty eight years more Torah than an eminent scholar could learn in a hundred years. Rabbi Johanan said: "Whoever has labored in Torah in this world is not allowed to sleep in the hereafter but is taken to the Academy of Shem and Eber, and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron. For how long? "Until I will make thee a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that are in the earth" (II Samuel 7:9).

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:11, paragraph 5)[120]

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[119] Ecclesiastes 7:1.

Three Partners

It is taught that when a child is formed in its mother's womb, there are three partners who participate in its creation - God, the child's father, and the child's mother. The father provides the white semen from which comes the white elements of the embryo - the brain, nails, the white of the eyes, the bones, and the tissues. The mother supplies the red element from which comes the blood, skin, flesh, hair, and the black of the eyes. And God, may His name be blessed, gives the child ten things. These are the spirit and the soul, beauty, eyesight, hearing, speech, the ability to raise his hands, the ability to walk, wisdom and understanding, counsel, knowledge, and strength.

When it comes time for him to die, God takes God's portion away and leaves what the father and mother contributed. They both cry. God says to them: "Why do you cry? Did I take anything of yours? I only took what was mine." They said to God: "Master of the universe, all the time that Your portion was mixed with our portion, our portion was guarded from the maggot and the worm. Now that You have taken Your portion away from ours, our portion is given to the maggot and worm."

Rav Judah HaNasi used to recite this parable: To what is this similar? To a king who owned a vineyard. He handed it over to a tenant. The king said to his servants, "Go and cut down the grapes of my vineyard, take away my portion, and leave the tenant's portion in its place." They immediately went and did as the king said. The tenant began to cry. The king said to him: "Have I taken anything of yours? I only took what was mine." The tenant replied: "My master, all the while that your portion was mixed with my portion, my portion was guarded from thievery. Now that you have taken your portion away, my portion is open to theft. The king is like God while the tenant is like the mother and father. While the soul is in the person, s/he is guarded. When he dies, he is for the worm and the maggot.

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5.10 paragraph 2, also Talmud Niddah 31a)

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With Ten Fingers

When Rabbi was about to depart from this world, he raised his ten fingers toward Heaven and said: "Master of the World, it is known to You that I labored in the study of Torah with my ten fingers and I did not enjoy [worldly benefits] with even my little finger. May it be Your will that there will be peace in my resting place." A Bat Kol came and said, "He will come in peace; they will rest on their beds."

(Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 104a)

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[120] Not my own translation.

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