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TITLE THE PRAYERS AND PRAXIS OF HEALING FOR  
THE CONTEMPORARY RABBINATE

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THE PRAYERS AND PRAXIS OF HEALING FOR THE CONTEMPORARY RABBINATE

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination.

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Referee, Prof. Katz

If one visited a sick person and did not  
pray for him, he did not fulfill his duty.

(Kitzur Shulchan Arukh, Chapter 193, law 3)

### Dedication

Dedicated with love to my wife, Shauna, whose constant encouragement and support, thoughtful advice and painstaking editing made this endeavor come to fruition. Where physicians prolong the quantity of patients' lives, she enhances the quality of the lives of the people with whom she comes into contact--especially mine.

### Acknowledgements

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## Digest

The healing process is complex. Many aspects can contribute to a sick person's recovery. In our modern world, medical science has arrived at two seemingly contradictory findings. First, a patient can be effectively cured of a disease through scientific procedures alone. Second, positive emotional, metaphysical, and spiritual awareness can effectively supplement, or at times even replace, scientific treatments.

The traditional Jewish texts have always held that prayer is central to the healing process. The second of these medical findings suggests that this Jewish view of healing is not entirely archaic. Prayer is accepted as valid means to aid recovery.

In this thesis, I look at the prayers, stories, and aphorisms of healing which are found in traditional Jewish texts. My analysis of these texts will focus on the following questions: What does "health" mean? What was the disease, and what was the healing? What is the reason given for a sick person's recovery? What is being asked for? What is the methodology employed?

In conclusion, I combine my analysis with the results of a survey which was given to Jewish hospital patients. The survey deals with attitudes on how prayer <sup>SP</sup> effects the healing process. Also included is an in-depth listing of the various ways in which prayer actually heals, and guidelines for application of these findings for the Rabbi as Chaplain.

In the four appendices, the Divine promises of healing found

## Digest

in the Bible, the stories of healing found in the Bible and Talmud, aphorisms of healing found in traditional Jewish texts, and etymologies and morphologies of the Biblical words dealing with sickness and recovery are listed with partial annotation.

## Introduction

After millenia of medical research, one thing is evident: the healing process is a complex one. We are living in a time when major strides are being made in the curing of diseases. Scientists are proving that the use of drugs, machines, and radiation are helpful in the treatment of illness. However, the process of healing can include more than medicinal means alone.

Many scientists have conducted studies that demonstrate the relationship between emotions and healing.<sup>1</sup> They have shown that hope, determination, and a positive attitude are all important elements of the healing process.

But what about the role of prayer? During my two years as a hospital chaplain at Cedars/Sinai Medical Center (Los Angeles) and the University of Cincinnati Hospital, I continually asked myself this question. Working with people at times of illness made me realize that prayer provides people with positive attitudes, hope, and determination. But that is not all; prayer goes one step further. It contains a Divine element. Our Jewish tradition provides a wealth of literature on the relationship between prayer and healing.

This thesis sets out to find and clarify Jewish views on the relationship between prayer and healing. I attempt to identify basic themes found in the prayers and practices of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism. Moreover, I try to pave the way for a more effective use of prayers and practices by contemporary Rabbis to meet the needs of Jews in times of illness.

My sources are the following:

- A. Bible
- B. Talmud
- C. Classical biblical commentators
- D. Major midrashic compilations
- E. Nachman of Bratslav
- F. Numerous prayerbooks and collections of tkhines
- G. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch
- H. Surveys of Jewish patients in hospitals.

In each of these sources, I cull prayers dealing with healing, stories of recovery, Divine promises of health, and aphorisms of illness and well being.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the concept of sickness and health in Biblical and Rabbinic sources. I explore definitions of healing and beliefs about causes of illness. This is followed by an annotated compilation of Divine promises of health and stories of healing.

The second chapter looks at prayers themselves. First, there is an in-depth analysis of Biblical prayers dealing with health. I then provide a line by line commentary of tkhines and more contemporary prayers, and cite source texts alluded to in these prayers.

The third chapter is an analysis of a survey sent to Jewish hospital patients.

The final chapter is a synthesis and conclusion. I analyze some general principles of healing derived from the Jewish texts, and then discuss some of the many ways that prayer can aid the healing process. The thesis closes with new views on the chaplain as spiritual facilitator and his/her role in the healing process.

Also included are three appendices to supplement this study of prayer and healing. The first is an anthology of Divine promises of healing, the second is an anthology of Biblical and Talmudic stories of healing with brief annotation, and the third is an anthology of Biblical and Rabbinic aphorisms of sickness, prayer, and healing.

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1. Some of such scientists are Carl and Stephanie Simonton, Candace Pert, Nicholas Hall, Norman Cousins, Michael Ruff, Ed Blalock, Hugo Besedovsky, and Gerard Renoux. For an overview of their work, see: Rob Wechsler, "A New Prescription: Mind Over Malady," Discover, 8, No. 2, February 1987, pp. 50-61.

## Chapter One:

### Definitions of Health

Before one starts to discuss how Judaism views the relationship between prayer and healing, one must first see how the Jewish texts define health. Once an understanding of health is established, it can then be contrasted with any deviance. Those individuals who have diminished physical or meta-physical abilities manifest this deviance and are possibly in need of healing. With the Jewish text's definition of health at hand, insights into when healing has taken place and what goals healing should try to accomplish can be elicited.

The most concrete definition in the Bible of a healthy life is found in Psalms 90:10: "The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years...." Malachi 3:20 teaches us that health is the ability to "leap like calves from the stall."

There are other definitions of health which are found in the context of Jurisprudence and thus are relevant to our daily lives. As part of the punishment for assault and battery, the assailant is required to pay the victim until the victim is healed. Much of this is based on Exodus 21:18-19: "When men quarrel and one strikes the other with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed--if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished." From this, we can deduce that the Bible views minimal normal health as the ability to locomote one's self with the aid of a simple implement.

From this text, Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides derive their own ideas of what it means to be healthy. In his commentary to Exodus 21:19, Ibn Ezra defines a healthy person as one who is "able to walk by himself." Note that Ibn Ezra makes no reference to a staff.

Nachmanides expands on Ibn Ezra's commentary of the same verse: "[A person is healthy when] he is able to walk as he wishes 'in the streets and in the broadways' (Song of Songs 3:2) with the help of a staff." This states that a person must be able to walk anywhere he desires independently of others, though possibly dependent upon a simple apparatus.

Rashi narrows the definition of health after an assault and battery to mean complete healing: "Man rises and walks in the street in his former vigor." Rashi's definition differs from the others in that he allows for variations in the abilities of individuals. If an athlete were to be maimed, and regained only the ability to gingerly walk with the help of a cane, he would not be healthy. However, if an elderly person, who could barely walk, was injured and healed to the same extent as the athlete, the elderly person would, in fact, be healthy.

These definitions do not account for other injuries such as loss of teeth, loss of arms, or loss of sanity. All of these would not necessarily impede the vigor with which one walks through the streets. Can one interpret Rashi liberally to mean that a complete recovery is one in which an individual can "walk through life in his former vigor?" There is validity in this more universal definition.

There are three other precedents for a universal definition of health which are found in the Bible. The first is Isaiah 3:10: "[One is healthy if one is] able to eat the fruit of one's doings." This implies that to be healthy means to be not only productive but also to be able to reap the benefits of such productivity. A healthy individual is one whose physical and mental abilities and social status enable him to enjoy the rewards of his labor. If one's physical abilities are diminished, he might be forced to be dependant <sup>SP</sup> upon the fruit of other's labor and that person's generosity. If one is of diminished mental abilities, then he might not be able to focus his labors in such a way that they are productive, and as such, would not be self-sufficient. Finally, if one is of a very low social status, such as an <sup>SP</sup> indentured servant, he might very well work in a productive manner but be unable to "eat the fruit of his doings" for they would all be syphoned off by the employer.

Isaiah's notion of health is modified slightly in Ecclesiastes 5:12-18: "[A healthy person is one] to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor." According to Koheleth, to be healthy, one must be wealthy, powerful, productive, and happy. This is developed a few verses later (6:2): "[Health is] having riches, wealth and honor so that your soul lacks nothing of all it desires." Health is having all the resources necessary to live life to the fullest extent and to be happy with it.

What about the person who is financially poor or the

person born without a limb? Are they destined to be less healthy than wealthy people who have all of their limbs? Is the person healthy, who, a week after being healed of a broken bone, commits suicide? Surely, all of the examples above are incomplete in some way.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, in his book, Likutey Moharan Tanya 3:181, offers the most universal, and most meta-physical definition of them all: "As long as the soul is stronger than the body, the body remains healthy. But when the body tries to dominate the soul, then the body itself also becomes weak and sick." This is based on the Hasidic belief that the soul is pure and eternal, while the body is impure and transitory. As the body is kept fit through exercise, the soul maintains fitness through prayer and study.

Even for those of us who don't follow all of the Hasidic creeds, there is much that we can glean from this definition of health. For the purposes of this quote, one can interpret "body" to mean all the physical attributes of a person, and "soul" as all the mental and metaphysical attributes, such as attitude, perception, faith in God and/or hope in recovery, love of self and others, determination, and awareness of and unification of all of one's energies.

One can then simply substitute any of these synonyms for "soul" in the above quote and draw new meanings from it. If one's body is diseased, but one's attitude, faith in God, and determination (to name a few) are strong enough, then he will be able to cope with the disease, and that is healthy. If one's

mental and physical attributes are weak, then a disease will devastate the person as a whole, and that is unhealthy. There are also examples of people who have weak mental and metaphysical attributes who would be defined as unhealthy, even though they might not have a disease.

However, this definition of Nachmanides has its limitations as well. It is still unclear to me what is harmful about having a strong body. Though this definition is slightly ambiguous, there is much to be gleaned from the new perspective on health that it provides us with.

There is much variation in the definitions of health listed above, from corporeal to ethereal. None of the above definitions of health which are found in Jewish texts is necessary and sufficient in and of itself. However, when viewed in the aggregate, there is much which we can learn about the way Judaism views health and illness. There is still more we can learn about the healing process when we look at Jewish textual views on the causes of illness.

## Causes of Illness

This study of various Jewish sources demonstrates that there are different causes of illness. These range from eating "unhealthy foods," to "natural" causes, to Divine punishment and chastisements of love, to being caused by human actions.

There are many references to illnesses caused by certain foods. Among the foods which the Talmud considers unhealthy are these: onions (Erubin 29b); fat meat, roast meat, poultry, roasted egg, cress, milk, cheese, nuts and cucumbers (Berakot 57b); leaves of reeds, leaves of vines, sprouts of grapevine, rough flesh of an animal without salt, spine of a fish, salted fish insufficiently cooked, and lees of wine (Shabbat 81a); pumpkin (Nedarim 49a); and, coarse black bread, new beer, and raw vegetables (Pesachim 42a). Some foods, such as fragrant dates or slices of turnips in vinegar or mushrooms, can even cause danger just by their presence if they are not eaten (Kethuboth 51a-b).

There are four biblical references to diseases that were caused solely by the natural advancement of old age: 1) Isaac's blindness (Genesis 27:1); 2) Eli's blindness (First Samuel 4:15); 3) Ahiah's blindness (First Kings 14:4); and 4) Asa's foot disease (First Kings 15:23).

Also under natural causes, there are many rabbinic statements dealing with the effect of the earth's atmosphere on human illness. They are all based on an interpretation of Proverbs 22:5. The verse reads, " *רָחֹק רָחֹק* are the way of the froward, he that keepeth his soul holdeth himself far from

them." The most common translation of  $\text{p}^{\text{r}}\text{h}^{\text{a}} \text{p}^{\text{r}}\text{h}^{\text{a}}$  is, "thorns and snares." The rabbis of the Talmud, however, interpret these words as being derived from the roots  $\text{[j]h}$ , "cold" and  $\text{h}^{\text{a}}$ , "coal," or  $\text{h}^{\text{a}}$ , "blowing." This would yield, "Cold and heat [or, cold, blowing winds] are the way of the froward, he that keepeth his soul holdeth himself far from them."

From this interpretation, Rabbi Chanina taught in Bava Batra 144b that "Everything is in the power of heaven except [illness through] cold [or] heat." I interpret this to mean that regardless of how righteous a person is, he is still susceptible to illness caused by a change in temperature. It does not require any Divine Intervention for a person to get a disease from the atmosphere. In a discussion of the causes of illness in Bava Metzia 107b, Rabbi Chanina cites this verse again to say that all diseases caused by the cold winds are avoidable, and others are not. Rabbi Samuel, in the same daf, says that all illness is caused by the wind. Most probably based on the same Talmudic interpretation, in his commentary on Exodus 23:25, Nachmanides says that all epidemics are caused by a change in the atmosphere.

Although it is unclear as to whether the Jewish sources cited above attribute illnesses to Divine ordination or circumstance, there are many texts which clearly attribute illness to Divinely ordained punishment. Many of these texts are based on Exodus 15:26. "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Adonai thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his

statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon Egypt: for I am the Lord that heals thee."

The Divinely ordained illness comes as a punishment for human disobedience.

Rashi expounds on this verse and finds instruction in each phrase.

IF THOU WILL DILIGENTLY HEARKEN -- This implies acceptance -- that one should take upon oneself the duty of performing God's commands.

AND IF THOU WILT DO -- This implies the performance of the commands.

THOU WILT INCLINE THE EAR to be punctilious in the practice of the details.

ALL HIS STATUTES -- Matters which are only the decrees of the King (decrees of God imposed by Him, as King, upon us, His subjects) and that appear to have no reason, and at which the evil inclination cavils saying, 'What sense is there in prohibiting these? Why should they be prohibited?' -- For instance: the prohibition of wearing a mixture of wool and linen, and of eating swine's flesh, and the law regarding the red heifer, and similar matters.<sup>2</sup>

I WILL NOT PLACE ON THEE -- And if I do place them on thee because thou refusest to hearken to My voice, it will be as though they had not been placed on thee, for if thou repentest of thy disobedience I will remove them immediately.

BECAUSE I AM THE LORD THAT HEALETH THEE. This is its Midrashic explanation.<sup>3</sup> But according to its literal sense the meaning is: 'For I am the Lord who healeth thee and teacheth thee the Law and Commandments in order that thou mayst be saved from them (these diseases)' -- This is analogous to a physician who says to a patient: 'Do not eat this thing lest it will bring you into danger from this disease.' So, too, it states, 'It [obedience to God] will be wholesome to thy body.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Rashi is outlining a very detailed handbook for how we should be obedient to God.

In his commentary, Nachmanides cites Rashi's comments. He

does, however, deviate from Rashi's interpretation of  $\text{רֵפָא}^{\text{ר}}$  in the last part of the verse. This leads to a more lenient delineation of obedience to God.

"... But according to the plain meaning of Scripture,  $\text{רֵפָא}^{\text{ר}}$  is not an adjective, for more precisely, a noun-adjective, as Rashi would have it, meaning "Thy physician Who teaches thee how disease should not befall thee." Instead, the meaning of the verse is 'that I am the One Who heals thee.'<sup>1</sup> Besides, it is not customary that a master should assure his servants that 'if you will do all my will and desire, I will not slay you with sore diseases.' None of the Divine assurances of the Torah are expressed in that way! Rather, the verse here constitutes an admonition by which He warned them not to be among those that rebel against Him as the Egyptians had been. By hearkening to His voice, they will be saved from all sickness, since that sickness deservedly comes upon all when they did not hearken to Him. This is similar to that which He said that He will put "upon thee all the diseases of Egypt which thou was in dread of, and they shall cleave unto thee."<sup>5</sup> And He further said, 'For I am the Eternal that healeth thee.' This constitutes a promise 'that I will remove from you sickness that comes in the natural course of events, even as I healed the waters [at Marah].'"

Nachmanides cites Ibn Ezra's commentary to say that the waters at Marah were bitter and God made them sweet, in contradistinction to the plague of the Nile. Therefore, we should love God, and He will be good to us.<sup>6</sup>

Another biblical reference is Leviticus 26:14-16: "But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commands: and if you shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that you break my covenant: I also will do this to you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and fever, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it."

Deuteronomy 28 and 29 delineate the atrocities that will transpire if the Israelites do not "keep the commandments of

Adonai thy God, and walk in His ways." The following diseases are among this delineation: Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body (possibly handicapped babies); pestilence; consumption, fever, burning inflammation, mildew, pox of Egypt; emorods; scab; incurable itch; madness, blindness, heart trouble; knee and leg ailments; severe sicknesses of long continuance, all the diseases of Egypt. Verse 28:61 adds: "Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this Torah, them will the Lord bring upon thee, until thou art destroyed."

There are other similar references in the Bible. Second Chronicles 21:12-19 has a listing similar to the one mentioned above in Deuteronomy. Hosea 6:11-7:1 shows that sins prevented the healing of Israel. Micah 6:13-14 says that sins cause sickness: "Therefore will I smite thee with sore wounds, and blight thee because of thy sins." Also in this genre is Isaiah 3:11: "Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with them."

There are cases of individual's illnesses which are directly attributed to sins. One such is the Talmudic account of Doeg's disease in Sanhedrin 106b: "Rabbi Ashi: Doeg was smitten with leprosy because he 'whored from God.'"

Another case of a person whose illness was explicitly linked to a prior transgression is found in First Kings 14:1-13. Because of Jerobaum's iniquities, God ordained that he would never have a male descendant. Jerobaum did actually have a son named Aviah, but Aviah became very sick. Jerobaum's wife disguised herself and went to Ahiah the prophet in order to have him healed. Even though Ahiah was blind, he told her that

because Jerobaum's transgressions had been so severe, the child would not live.

Nachmanides explains the unnatural state of affairs that ensues if an Israelite sins. He comments on the verses which state that both clothing and houses can have leprosy (Leviticus 13:47, and 14:33-53).

"And when the plague of leprosy is in a garment." This is not the natural order of things, nor does it ever happen in the world [outside Israel], and similarly leprosy of houses (Leviticus 14:33-53). But when Israel is wholly devoted to God, then His spirit is upon them always, to maintain their bodies, clothes and house in a good appearance. Thus as soon as one of them commits a sin or transgression, a deformity appears in his flesh, or on his garment or in his house, revealing that God has turned aside from him. It is for this reason that scripture states, "house" meaning that it is God's punishment upon that house."

Three cases of illness are associated with God's servant, Moses. First in Numbers 12:1, Miriam is stricken with leprosy for gossiping maliciously about Moses. Second, Numbers 21:1-9 shows that because the Israelites spoke against God and Moses, God brought forth a swarm of poisonous snakes which infected the people. The third case involves Moses's affliction for the sins of his followers, the people of Israel. Psalms 106:32 reads: "and they [the Israelites] angered Him at the waters of Meriva, so that it went ill with Moshe for their sakes."<sup>7</sup> Moses's illness was brought about by God's anger at the Israelites' idol worship.

In addition to illness being brought on by God as a form of

Divine Punishment, the Rabbi's also acknowledge the validity of Divine Chastisements of love as a reason for sickness. The text that best accounts for the reasons for sickness is found near the very beginning of the Talmud, in Berakot 5a.

"Raba, some say Rabbi Chisda, says: 'If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said: "Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord."<sup>8</sup> If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah. For it is said: "Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law."<sup>9</sup> If he did attribute it [thus], and still did not find [this to be the cause], let him be sure that these are chastenings of love. For it is said: "For whom the Lord Loveth He correcteth."<sup>10</sup>

"Raba, in the name of Rabbi Sachorai, in the name of Rabbi Huna, says: 'If the Holy One, blessed by He, is pleased with a man, he crushes him with painful sufferings. For it is said: "And the Lord was pleased with [him, hence] he crushed him by disease."<sup>11</sup>

This passage goes on to say that chastenings of love allow the person to still study Torah. This is based on the conclusion of Psalms 94 verse 12: "Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law." Psalms 94 verse 12 adds that some believe that these sufferings allow the person to still pray, based on Psalms 46:20: "Blessed by God, Who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me."

There are three excellent talmudic proofs for the merits of chastisements of love. Rabbi Chiyya ben Abba employs a *qal vechomer*. If a lost tooth or eye allow a slave to obtain freedom, "how much more so with painful sufferings which torment the whole body of a man!"

Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish interpreted the juxtaposition of the words "suffer," "salt," and "covenant" in Leviticus 2:13 and

compared it to the occurrence of the word "covenant" in the midst of a section dealing with the sufferings of Israel in Deuteronomy 28:69. "Even as in the covenant mentioned in connection with salt, the salt lends a sweet taste to the meat, so also in the covenant mentioned in connection with sufferings, the sufferings wash away all the sins of a man."

The third proof is by Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai. He finds proof texts to support the idea that Israel's most precious gifts, the Torah, the Land of Israel, and the world-to-come were all given by God only through suffering.

"Whence do we know this of the Torah? -- Because it is said: 'Happy is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teacheest him out of Thy law.'<sup>12</sup> Whence of the Land of Israel? -- Because it is written: 'As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee,'<sup>13</sup> and after that it is written: 'For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land.'<sup>14</sup> Whence of the world to come? -- Because it is written: 'For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light, and reproofs of sufferings are the way of life.'<sup>15</sup>

The reasoning of the first two, Torah and Israel, are somewhat straight-forward, based on clear juxtapositions. The third, for the world-to-come, is based on the metaphor of the world-to-come as light, and that "way of life" applies exclusively to this world.

There are two more rabbinic proof texts which directly allude to the concept of chastisements of love. Song of Songs Rabbah 2:5 states, "Israel says, 'O Sovereign of the Universe, all the maladies which Thou bringest upon me are to make me more beloved of thee.'"

Sanhedrin 101a-b contains an interesting passage which provides Biblical proof texts for the existence of chastisements

of love. Rabbi Eliezer, a well respected righteous man, was ill, and he was visited by Rabbi Akiba:

Rabbi Akiba observed, 'Suffering is precious.' Thereupon he [R. Eliezer] said to them [others in the room], 'Support my, that I may hear the words of Akiba, my disciple, who said "Suffering is precious." Akiba,' queried he, 'whence dost thou know this?'

He replied, 'I interpret a verse: "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem...and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."16 Now it is [elsewhere] written, "These are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out."17 Now, would Hezekiah king of Judah have taught the Torah to the whole world, yet not to his own son Manasseh? But all the pains he spent upon him, and all the labours he lavished upon him did not bring him back to the right path, save suffering alone, as it is written, "And the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people: but they would not hearken unto him. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon."18 And it is further written, "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom, and Manasseh knew that the Lord He was God."19 Thus thou learnest how precious is suffering.'

This long passage shows that Hezekiah's suffering had a positive effect which could not be accomplished in any other way. Hezekiah, who was a good king, could not teach his son, Manasseh, through the goodness of the Torah, to be on the "right path." Manasseh was an evil person, yet after Hezekiah's illness, Manasseh saw the right way and became a faithful person. Akiba extracts from this that if suffering can bring some good effects, it can have other salubrious effects, such as the atonement of the sick person or the granting of a better portion of the World-To-Come.

There are sources in Jewish texts which acknowledge that there are causes of illness other than Divine Intervention. Both the Bible and the Talmud each contain a case that talks of bad things a person can do which lead to illness. Ecclesiastes 5:12 says that hoarded wealth can hurt the owner: "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for their owner to his hurt."

Niddah 36b-37a shows that illness can come from bragging. Rabbi Assi bragged of his power and thereupon got sick with fever and chills which eventually lead to his death.

There are four citations which refer to illnesses caused by human actions. Judges 16:16 tells of Delilah harassing Samson daily with her words, so much so that he was sick to death. In First Samuel 13:2, we read that Amnon became sick with love for his sister, Tamar. Second Kings 5:27 tells of Gehazi being sp stricken with leprosy because Elisha cursed him with it. Finally, Bava Metzia 113b states that lack of exercise is a cause for illness.

The texts point to many different causes of illness. Some of these causes are Divine in origin, some are human, and some arise from the unpremeditated blowing of cold winds. From this, it logically follows that there are many ways of healing disease, from Divine healing to human action to simple passage of time. It is, however, quite reassuring to know that underlying it all is a matrix of health. This matrix of health is alluded to in the Divine promises of health which are found in Jewish texts.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. Nachman of Bratslav, Likutey Moharan Tanya (Mogilev, 1811).

2. Cf. Yoma 67b.

3. The particle כִּי, "because," gives the reason not why God will not put the diseases upon Israel but why He can remove them when He has placed them upon the disobedient nation.

4. Proverbs 3:8, from Mekhilta, implying that disease will not fall upon thee.

5. Deuteronomy 28:60.

6. This is followed by an expounding of the two expressions, צִוְּיָנוּ and צִוְּיָנוּ, "commandments" and "statutes." These seemingly redundant expressions correspond to the two ways God refers to Himself in the verse, both in the first and third person. From this, any prayer of healing should include both second and third person: "Blessed art Thou Adonai, our God, Who sanctified us with His commandments."

7. This is a translation of the Hebrew word, שָׂדֵד. See the usage of this root in Second Samuel 20:6 to mean "injurious."

8. Lamentations 3:40.

9. Psalms 94:12.

10. Proverbs 3:12 and Isaiah 53:30.

11. Isaiah 53:10.

12. Psalms 94:12.

13. Deuteronomy 8:5.

14. Ibid. v. 7.

15. Proverbs 6:23.

16. Second Kings 21:1f.

17. Proverbs 25:1.

18. Second Chronicles 33:10f.

19. Ibid. 12f.

## Chapter Two:

### Examining Specific Prayer Texts Found

#### In the Bible Which Deal With Healing

Now that a basic understanding of Jewish textual views of health and illness is established, we can begin to look at ways sickness has been treated in the Bible. In almost every Biblical story of recovery, prayer plays a central role. In some of these stories, such as in First Kings 13:6, we are told that an individual prayed for recovery and was healed; yet there is no mention of the specific words of the prayer. However, many of the Biblical stories of healing include the actual words of prayer. In addition to these prayers which are found in the Biblical narrative there is another source for prayers in the Bible, those found in Psalms. These are private supplications of the Psalmist in poetic form. Because they do not have a story to put them into context, we can't know the specifics of the situation; neither can we know if recovery actually came after the recitation of these prayers.

The prayers found in the narratives are said almost exclusively by prophets or exceptionally righteous people. We might assume that the one who invoked the prayer not only prayed verbally, but also non-verbally, and that the non-verbal element contains much that expounds upon the verbal part. These prayers are usually quite terse.

The Psalms are prayers which can more readily be emulated by the common person. Many begin with something like, "Though I have sinned, . . .", or "Sickness runs through my bones...." These

are normally more lengthy than the narrative type of Biblical prayer. For this type of prayer, we might assume that the verbal pronouncements of the author who originally composed these prayers made up almost the full extent of the prayer. If there was a non-verbal element, we might assume that it followed the outline and line of thought put forth by the verbal part.

In this chapter, I shall examine both types of Biblical prayers thematically: What do they specifically ask for? What lines of reasoning are employed by the invoker? Where there is a context, how does this specific prayer fit in? This chapter is divided into four sections which correspond to the four basic themes found in Biblical prayers for healing: General prayers which only ask for healing directly; prayers appealing to God's Mercy; petitionary prayers of thanksgiving; and prayers which ask for healing through the forgiveness of sin.

## Prayers for Healing Without Specific Appeal

The simplest form of prayer is one which asks God for healing without giving Him a reason. I have found three occurrences of this form of prayer in the Bible. They are in Numbers 12:13, First Kings 17:21, and Second Kings 6:17. In each case, a prophet prayed to God on behalf of the recovery of another person.

The first prayer of this form (Numbers 12:13) deals with Moses praying on behalf of Miriam. The story relates that Miriam and Aaron were talking, casting doubt upon the legitimacy of Moses's marriage to the Kushite woman. God overheard and struck her with leprosy.

Upon seeing Miriam leprous, Moses sensed the urgency of the situation. He appealed to God with a very terse, direct prayer for Miriam's health. The complete prayer he spoke was, "כִּי יִשְׁכַּח <sup>כִּי</sup> <sup>כִּי</sup> <sup>כִּי</sup>," which translates to "Heal her now, O God, I pray thee." The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on parsha Beshallah, chapter four, cites this prayer of Moses concerning Miriam's leprosy as being the briefest in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

Though the prayer is short, it has a nice prosody. Of the five short, one syllable words, each one rhymes, except for the initial, which is a name of God. Also, every alternate word, the second and fourth, is the same, <sup>כִּי</sup>. If it is read according to the Masoretic teamim (punctuation), then it has a very rhythmic beat to it. The prosody gives this prayer a magical or "abracadabra" quality.

When one looks at the choice of words used by Moses, one is struck first of all by the initial word, the name of God. Moses is calling to God using the name El. In Jewish mysticism, this is the name of the attribute of God which pronounces harsh judgements. It was also this attribute of God who created the world in the beginning of Genesis.

It is puzzling that Moses would refer to God here as El. Normally, when a petition is made to God for health, the petition is made to God's merciful attribute. That attribute is associated with the divine name, Y-H-W-H.

Though Rashi doesn't specifically comment on why Moses referred to God as El, he does provide us with an answer when addressing the question of why the prayer which Moses said was so short.

"Why did Moses not pray at length? In order that Israel should not say: 'His sister is in trouble, and he stands and offers long prayers!' -- another explanation is: He did not pray at length so that Israel should not say: 'On behalf of his sister he prays long, but on our behalf he would offer no long prayer.'"

It would follow from this reasoning that Moses chose to address God by the name El because that is the shortest name of God, and therefore the quickest to pronounce.

Perhaps another reason why Moses used the divine name of El in his prayer can be found if we look at the full context of the story. Miriam and Aaron had their doubts about Moses's marriage to the Kushite woman and made their opinions known. God acted with harsh judgement to defend Moses's honor from malicious gossip and struck Miriam with leprosy. When Moses showed that he was not interested in having his honor defended in that way, he

needed to appeal to The Judge who decreed the punishment on Moses' behalf. It was as though Moses was a victim who dropped the charges of the prosecution. Moses did appeal to God's Harsh Judgement and did not call on God by the name of Adonai.

Rashi interprets this prayer as a supplication; however, is this the case? Following the line of reasoning put forth by the Sifre, Rashi points to the second word,  $\text{פָּ} \begin{smallmatrix} \text{ך} \\ \text{ר} \end{smallmatrix}$ , and calls this a word of supplication. "Scripture intends to teach you by this form of prayer the correct attitude in social life--that if one is asking a favor of his fellow man he should first say two or three words of supplication and then solicit the favor." As such, Rashi is not wrong.  $\text{פָּ} \begin{smallmatrix} \text{ך} \\ \text{ר} \end{smallmatrix}$  is the correct word for "please" which a subordinate uses in a request to one who is higher in status.

If this is the case, however, why doesn't Moses use the Merciful name of God? The answer lies in the fact that if Moses would forgive the "defendants," then God (who afflicted Miriam and Aaron as a means of protecting Moses' name) could nullify His edict.

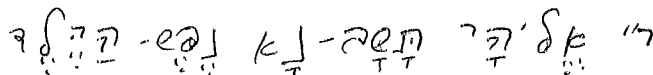
Why doesn't Moses give any reasons why God should perform the healing? It would certainly seem appropriate in a situation such as this. The reason might be that Moses had a close, prophetic relationship with God.


Perhaps, because of his great merit, Moses didn't need to cite his own merits or those of others, as others commonly do in suppliant prayers. Possibly, Moses doesn't give any reasons why God should perform the healing because he was in such close

communion with God that he didn't need to verbally state the reasons.

It is interesting to note that even though Miriam's onset of leprosy was quite sudden, her healing was not immediate. After the prayer was said by Moses, God banished her for a week of isolation, and, as Midrash relates, a week of healing. We can learn from this that even when prayers are answered, healing comes about in its own time.

Another biblical prayer which calls for God to heal without giving any stated reason is found in First Kings 17:21. The narrative is as follows. Elijah was sent by God to go to a poor widow's home. He asked her for food and water, but she had only enough for a handful of meal for her son. Elijah asked her to make one cake and give it to him, then make another for her son, and a third for her. Sure enough, neither the jar of meal nor the jug or oil ever went empty. Later the son took ill. Elijah took the son from her breast and asked a rhetorical, challenging question of God, "God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I lodge, by slaying her son?"

He stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to Adonai this prayer: "  "Adonai, my God, please return the soul of this child to be within him."

This prayer is terse and direct. With the exception of the word , it is almost in the form of a command as opposed to a request. As differentiated from the previous prayer by Moses,

Elijah calls to God by the name of Adonai.

Like the prayer Moses said on behalf of Miriam, this prayer also doesn't include any particular reason God should perform the healing. Our commentators are quick to provide reasons.<sup>2</sup> Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer: If the child isn't healed, people would interpret his death as a punishment for immoral acts that the widow committed with Elijah.<sup>3</sup> According to Redak, God has already punished Israel for their sins by stopping their rainfall; this is excessive punishment. According to Abarbanel, to cause her child to die is to punish the righteous (the child) like the wicked and is unfair.

Rashi provides an interesting explanation. He says that God gave Elijah the key to the rains. Elijah had to give it back before he could have the key to resurrection. Because it was an even exchange, Elijah need not provide reasons for the trade. Further, once Elijah had the key of resurrection in his possession, he knew that he would be able to perform the healing acts without being required to provide explicit reasons.

The aspect of Elijah's stretching himself over the boy three times in order to engender his recovery is very similar to the story of Elisha and the healing of the son of the Shunamite woman (in Second Kings, Chapter four). Redak explains the repetition of the prostration and recitation of the prayer. He suggests that Elijah kept praying until life was restored to the boy and that after the third time, no more was necessary.

The final biblical prayer in which no reasons are given is found in Second Kings 6:17. In its context, it is not actually a

prayer for healing, yet it is referred to many times in liturgy when dealing with blindness.

Aram was at war with Israel. A servant to the king of Aram was sent out in a scouting party. When the scouting party came upon the Israelite camp, Elisha said this prayer, "אֲדֹנָי יְהוֹהֵנוּ פָתַח עֵינָיו" "Adonai, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see." Immediately, the Aramite scout saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. This ploy helped Elisha win the war against the Aramites.

When interpreted in its context, this is not specifically a prayer for healing, because one assumes that the scout's eyesight was healthy to begin with. However, Rashi, Leviticus Rabbah, and Ecclesiastes Rabbah view this as a model of a prayer for healing blindness.

In citing Genesis Rabbah 3:8, the story of the creation of light by God to give us sight, Rashi takes notice of the fact that God's name is mentioned to open the Aramite's eyes; yet God's name is not called upon in the following curse of blindness. Leviticus Rabbah 3:8 reads: "I shall cause the blind to see in the Time to Come, and have already done such a thing; as it says, 'And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man' -- of Elisha." Similarly, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 15:1 reads: "I am He who will make the blind to see in the Messianic Era as I have already done through Elisha, as it is said, 'And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man.'"

Elisha called upon God to give people sight on two different

occassions. It is likely that part of the daily, morning prayers, *birkot hashachar*, is based on these two references in Second Kings. The *birkot hashachar* include a specific prayer to God as He Who opens the eyes of the blind.

There are a few Biblical prayers for healing in which there is no mention of a reason as to why God should perform the healing. A closer analysis of these prayers reveals that they are all invoked by men who are clearly shown to be prophets. We can assume that they had a greater communion with God and that they did provide reasons for Divine Healing, though possibly not verbally. As such, these prayers might not be appropriate role models for us to emulate.

The next type of prayer for healing is one which is suitable for emulation. It deals with appealing to God's Infinite Mercy to perform the healing.

## Prayers Appealing to God's Mercy

The most common form of biblical prayer for recovery is one which appeals to God's Divine Mercy to heal. Prayers in this category are the logical extension of the many promises of health which God made to the People of Israel. (See "Promises of Health" in Appendix 1.)

An explanation for this type of prayer is found in Second Samuel chapter twelve. In this chapter, David admitted to Nathan that he had killed Uriah for Batsheba, and Nathan prophesied that their son would die. David's boy by Batsheba fell ill. David fasted and lay on the ground all night. For seven days, David did not move. The child died. Then David got up, washed, anointed himself, and changed clothes. He went into the house of the Lord and bowed, then came home and ate. He was questioned as to why he appeared more mournful over the illness than the death, and he responded:

"While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, who can tell? God may be merciful to me, and the child may live/ But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not come back to me."<sup>4</sup>

Even though David knew that God had ordained that his son would die as a punishment for David's illicit actions, he still knew that he could appeal to God's mercy. The commentators explain that even though God did not heal this child's illness, David's faith in God's mercy was great. It was so great that David's prayers were indirectly answered in that he had another son with Batsheba. This son, Solomon, grew to become the next

King of Israel.

There is a straightforward example of prayer which appeals to God's Divine Mercy found in the sixth Psalm, verses two through six.

O Adonai, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Adonai; for I am weak: O Adonai heal me; for my bones shudder; and my soul is much affrighted. And thou, O Adonai, how long? Return, O Adonai, deliver my soul: oh save me on account of thy steadfast love.

Adonai, "Y-H-W-H," is the name of God which refers to the Divine attribute of Infinite Mercy. This name of God appears eight times in this short eleven verse Psalm. This is significant in that it shows an appeal which occurs over and over again, like a spiritual trance, to God's Mercy.

The seventy-seventh Psalm is also a prayer which appeals to God's Divine Mercy but in a slightly different vein. It calls upon God to perform miracles as He did in the days of old. The one miracle in particular this prayer supplicates for is the individual's health.

"I will cry aloud: aloud to God. O, hear me! In the day of my trouble I sought Adonai: my hand is stretched out in the night, and rests not: my soul refuses to be comforted. I remember God, and moan: I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah. Thou holdest fast my eyelids: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I meditate with my heart: and my spirit makes diligent search. Will Adonai cast off for ever? and will He be favorable no more? Is his steadfast love clean gone forever? does his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? has he in anger shut up his tender mercies? ...

"I will remember the works of Adonai: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also on all thy work, and muse on thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in holiness: who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people...."

This Psalm is quite remarkable in that it turns the deepest despair into hope and faith.

Another example of appeal to God's Mercy is found in the very ordering of the Biblical verses. There is an interesting interpretation drawn from the juxtaposition of the two Psalms, 102 and 103. The one hundred and second Psalm is one which calls out from the deathbed to God.

A prayer of the afflicted, when he faints, and pours out his complaint before Adonai. Hear my prayer, O Adonai, and let my cry reach thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thy ear to me: in the day when I call, answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is smitten like grass, and withered; so that I forget how to eat my bread. ...

I say, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.

This Psalm reflects personal destitution. It would be easy to turn this despair into cynicism and hatred towards God. It is of no small coincidence that this Psalm is followed by a very optimistic Psalm praising God's Infinite Mercy. The one hundred and third Psalm is such a prayer. There is no direct petition in it, only praise.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all thy iniquities; who heals all thy diseases; who redeems thy life from the pit; who encircles thee with love and compassion; who satisfies thy old age with good; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Because God is the Creator of all, everyone, sinner and saint alike, can appeal to God's Mercy for healing. One doesn't

need to rely on one's merits. As such, these prayers can serve as appropriate models for all of us to recite in times of need. There are still other avenues of prayer found in the Bible which can be invoked at a time of sickness. One such type is that of asking for healing amid the offering of thanksgiving to God for past blessings.

## Petitionary Prayers of Thanksgiving

There is a very subtle genre of biblical prayers asking for health. Rather than beginning with heart-rending pleas of despair, humbling self-debasement, or repentance of sin, this type of prayer begins with a counting of blessings given to the author by God. As the invoker is offering countless words of thanksgiving, he slips in a single verse petitioning that the good fortune and good health continue.

One such example of this is found in the thirtieth Psalm:

"I will extol thee, O Adonai; for Thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Adonai my God, I cried to thee and thou hast healed me. O Adonai, Thou hast brought up my soul from She'ol: Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. Sing to Adonai, O His pious ones, and give thanks to His Holy Name. For his anger endures but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Adonai, by Thy favour Thou has made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was affrighted. I cried to Thee, O Adonai; and to the Lord I made supplication.

"What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall dust praise Thee? shall it declare Thy truth? Hear, O Adonai, and be gracious to me: Adonai, by Thou my helper.

"Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou has loosened my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Adonai my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever."

(The division into paragraphs is simply to demonstrate variances in theme.)

Of the thirteen verses of this Psalm, eleven are thanking God for previous health, good fortune, and answering of prayers. One verse is bargaining in nature, and one is petitionary.

In his commentary to Numbers 12:13, Rashi explains that the proper form of prayer is first supplication and then petition. This Psalm follows that format, with praise of God in the form of thanksgiving replacing supplication. Either is a form of placation of God.

The theme of bargaining with God for health is a common one. It is interesting to note that, superficially, healing is a "one-way street." Healing is done by God, yet there is no tangible way to recompense God. This way of thinking makes the sick person a passive participant in to his/her own healing. The ill individual searches for a way to fulfill his need in taking a more active role. Thus we have bargaining with God. Healing now becomes, or at least is perceived in such a way that it is, a two-way street, with the sick person in at least a minor state of control. In this case, we have the petitioner saying that it is to God's benefit to keep him/her alive, and if God does, s/he will recompense God with praise forever.

This is similar to the bargaining found in verse six of the forty-second Psalm: "Hope in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." In other words, heal me, and I will be good and praise you.

The sixteenth Psalm is of quite a similar vein. The major difference is that the petition comes first and is followed by the thanksgiving. The bold facing used here is for emphasis.

A mikhtam of David. **Preserve me, O God:** for in thee do I put my trust. I have said to the Lord, Thou art my Lord: I have no good apart from thee; and to the saints that are on the earth, They are the excellent, in whom is

all my delight.

Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names upon my lips. Adonai is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage, I bless Adonai, who gives me counsel: my reins also admonish me in the night seasons. I have set Adonai always before me: surely he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also dwells secure. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to She'ol; nor wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see the pit. Thou wilt make known to me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

The thanksgiving comes in the form of praising God for all of the good which He has brought. Towards the end of this Psalm, the psalmist counts his blessings, all of which he attributes to God.

Many parts of this Psalm seem to say, "I have been a good person. I have lived up to my end of the brit you made with Abraham by trusting in you, blessing you, and not worshipping idols. You should follow through on your part, God, and preserve my health."

It is almost as though the author assumes that good health is his Divinely ordained right. This is consistent with the theme of "If you are good, God will keep you healthy, and if you sin, God will punish you through illness." This topic will be addressed in the section dealing with prayers for healing which are based on forgiveness of transgressions.

There is biblical precedent for pleading for health on behalf of one's merits. This can be found in the enigmatic story of the healing of Hezekiah, although many commentators interpret it otherwise. The prayers of Hezekiah are dealt with at length

in the Appendix B.

To petition God for healing by first offering Him thanksgiving is, in a way, anthropomorphising God. It attributes to God the human quality of acquiescence after flattery. This does not necessarily detract from the prayer's effectiveness on either the human or Divine level. People might need to assume that God has human qualities so that they can feel close to God or even communicate to God. If God were viewed as entirely other and ethereal, then He might not play a role in people's daily consciousness. It can be very comforting to know that the same methods of petition which work with people also apply to The Healer. On a Divine level, we know that we are created in the image and likeness of God. Perhaps these "anthropomorphisms" which we attribute to God are actually Divine qualities with which we were created.

Another type of Biblical prayer which attributes to God human-like qualities is that which appeals to God for healing through the forgiveness of sin.

## Healing Through Forgiveness of Sin

Forgiveness of sin as a prerequisite for healing is a common theme in Rabbinic literature. Contrastingly, there are only three prayers in the Bible which mention forgiveness in a petition for healing. These are the thirty-eighth, sixty-ninth, and forty-first Psalms. The theme of sin as the cause of illness was discussed briefly in the second part of the first chapter and will be dealt with more depth in the fourth chapter.

The thirty-eighth Psalm contains many petitions for Divine forgiveness of sin as a means of healing. The following is an abridgement:

O Adonai, rebuke me not in Thy wrath: nor chasten me in Thy hot displeasure. For Thy arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presses me sore.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of Thy anger; nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head: like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink; they fester because of my foolishness...

For I will declare my iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But my enemies are in vigorous life; and they who hate me wrongfully are many. They also who render evil for good are my adversaries; because I follow what is good. Forsake me not, O Adonai: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Adonai my salvation.

This Psalmist attributes both his poor health and his ill fortune to his transgressions. Perhaps the Psalmist realizes that according to harsh Divine Judgement, these sufferings are due to him. He appeals, not to God's Attribute of Judgement which is associated with the name El, but rather to God's Attribute of Divine Mercy implicit in the name Adonai.

It should be noted that those who equate sin with suffering and ill fortune often attempt to point out to God the iniquities of their adversaries. Apparently, if God is made aware of this, He will punish the foes as well and that might attenuate the former's sufferings.

Admitting to one's transgressions, asking for forgiveness, and then pointing out that one's enemies are also continually sinning is a formula found in the forty-first Psalm. This Psalm goes one step further, asking directly for the Divine punishment to come down upon the Psalmist's adversaries.

The forty-first Psalm begins with sayings and truisms which are similar to those found in wisdom literature. While the central theme is that God will preserve those who help the poor, the psalmist immediately admits to sin. We can assume that he might have neglected his responsibilities to the poor. "I said, Adonai, be gracious to me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee."

After this innocent and humbling appeal for health, the Psalmist immediately points a wrathful finger of accusation at his foes.

My enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? And if one comes to see me, he speaks vanity: his heart gathers iniquity to itself; when he goes abroad, he tells it. All that hate me whisper together against me: against me they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaves fast to him: and from where he lies he shall rise up no more. Even my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. But thou, O Lord, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may requite them. By this I know that Thou favourest me, because my enemy does not triumph over me. And as for me, Thou upholdest me in my integrity, and settest me before Thy face for ever....

Perhaps the most striking prayer for the punishment of one's enemies in the context of praying for one's health is found in the sixty-ninth Psalm. This too, exemplifies the thematic punishment for transgression as sickness and ill fortune.

The sixty-ninth Psalm also begins and ends with a humble appeal to God to heal the invoker's pain and an admission that that pain was caused by the invoker's transgressions. This is again an abridgement:

Save me, O God; for the waters are come in to my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, and the flood overwhelms me. I am weary with my crying: my throat is dried: my eyes fail while I wait for my God. They who hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head: they who would destroy me are many, who hate me wrong-fully. What I took not away, that must I restore. O God, thou knowst my folly; and my sins are not hid from Thee....

But I am afflicted and in pain: let Thy salvation, O God, set me on high. I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it shall please the Lord better than an ox or a bullock that has horns and hoofs.

In this Psalm we also find an appeal for God to exact vengeance upon the invoker's enemies:

Insult has broken my heart; and I am sick: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. And they gave me poison in my food; and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Let their table become a snare before them: and when they are at peace, let it be a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out Thy indignation upon them, and let Thy fierce anger overtake them. Let their habitation be desolate; let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom Thou hast smitten; and they tell of the pain of those whom Thou hast wounded. Add iniquity to

their iniquity: and let them not be admitted to Thy vindication. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

The Psalmist asks God to set him on high. Does that mean in God's high regard, in high spirits and fortune, or simply high above his adversaries? In this context, amid petitions for Divine vindication, it appears that the latter is being asked for.

Prayers which petition for the demise of one's enemies, such as these, are out of harmony with the sensibility of contemporary Jews. There is so much good which we can derive from our tradition that it would be counter-productive to focus on these vindictive elements.<sup>5</sup>

These Biblical prayers have served as models for Jewish prayers for milenia. Much of our liturgy for the sick derives from the themes, motifs, and formats of these Biblical prayers.

### Analysis of Liturgy Dealing with Healing

The prayers we recite today grew out of traditions of our past and contain many Biblical and Rabbinic references. In this chapter, I shall examine the themes, metaphors, and methodologies of four prayers dealing with healing. The prayers relevant to healing which I chose are the following: a traditional part of the daily prayer service found in the Amidah, a sampling of lines dealing with sickness found in tkhines, women's home prayers, a turn of the century English translation of a German folk prayer, and a modern Reform prayer found in Gates of the House. I chose these prayers because of their relevance to this thesis and because they are representative of diverse areas of Jewish liturgy. In each, I will cite corresponding Biblical and Talmudic passages.

The first prayer is the part of the daily Amidah which asks for health.

Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed;  
Save us and we shall be saved;  
For thou art our praise.  
Grant a perfect healing to all our wounds;  
For thou art a faithful and merciful God, King and Healer.  
Blessed art thou, O Lord, who healest the sick among thy  
people Israel.

This prayer for healing is the eighth blessing of the daily Amidah. The first line of this prayer is taken from Jeremiah 17:14. There is, however, one noticeable change--the Jeremiah verse is in the first person, singular. Jeremiah reads, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise."

The justification for this change in number is given in the Tur, Orach Chaim 116:

A Baraitha warns us not to change any verse worded in the plural to the singular, and vice versa. Now, this verse is couched in the singular...how may we recite it in the plural...? The above admonition, however, refers to the translating or reading of the verse itself. A sentence in the liturgy, however, recited, not as a Scriptural reading but by way of prayer and supplication, is similar to the rest of the prayers and may be altered to suit the needs of the hour and the content of the particular supplication and petition.

This text provides us with the Rabbinic justification for the change of number but doesn't answer why the Rabbis would want to change the Scriptural verse. I believe the reason for this is found in Job 42:10: "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends...." From this, we can glean that God is more apt to heal an individual if he prays for the health of another. By changing the verse from the singular to the plural, all who recite it are automatically praying for the benefit of others.

The repetition of "heal us ... and we shall be healed" might imply that the roots of all healing are miraculous; yet it is up to us to complete the healing. This is a different type of healing from the second line, which asks for a perfect healing, entirely from God. The Etz Yosef attributes the former to the healing of the soul and the latter to the healing of the body for the body "is entirely in God's Hand."<sup>6</sup>

The phrase, "because thou art our praise," is a form of pleading one's case for health based on past action. If Adonai is the object of one's praise, then that person has not turned to

idolatry. The inclusion of this line might be based on any of the following: the Hezekiah story; Nachmanides' commentary to Deuteronomy 11:10, "The sick person needs merits and prayer in order that God heal him;" or Shabbat 32a, "One needs to show one's merits to be healed."

The second line is petitionary and appeals to Divine promises of health. The phrase, "Grant a perfect healing to all our wounds; for thou art a faithful and merciful God," might refer to Jeremiah 30:17 which reads, "For I will restore health to thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, says the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Tzion, for whom no one cares." The Jeremiah verse refers to God healing the wounds of Israel solely because of God's Mercy. An appeal to God's Mercy does not necessitate that one be a tzadik.

The reference to God and King might refer to Isaiah 33:22-24 which reads, "The Lord is our King. He will save us. ... And the inhabitant shall not say 'I am sick.'"

Finally, the appeal to God as Healer and the concluding line which refers to God as the One Who "heals the sick among thy people Israel" probably stem from Exodus 23:25. The Exodus verse is of Adonai's words to the Israelites: "I am The Lord that heals thee."

The second prayer is a tkhine. A tkhine is a Yiddish prayer which was written specifically for women. At the time, women were excluded from traditional synagogue worship. The following are parts of much longer tkhines which deal with healing:

"Dear God, where can I find a doctor who will know [the cause of] my pain, and if he were to know, would [he be able to] help me?"<sup>7</sup>

"I beg You, God, do not cast me off in my old age, so that I may serve You with all my heart."<sup>8</sup>

"With the help of Almighty God who heals all the sick, may He remove from you all suffering and evil encounters."<sup>9</sup>

The first of these is a petition for health in the form of praise of God. The form of this is similar to that of Exodus 15:11, which is a part of the daily liturgy: "Who is like Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, awesome in praises, doing miracles?" This is praising God's unique powers and, at the same time, asking for those powers to be used.

The second *tkhine* asks God for health by offering something in return: continued service and praise. This form of bargaining is found in Psalms 47:6: "For I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."

The third *tkhine* asks God to heal solely because God has told us that He is the one who heals all. This promise is found in Exodus 15:26: "I am The Lord that heals thee."

The third form of liturgy is also a woman's prayer. It is from a Nineteenth Century prayerbook entitled Devotions for the Daughters of Israel: A Collection of Concise Prayers for Jewish Females, for Week Days, Sabbath, New Moons, Festivals, and Fasts. by M. H. Bresslau.

## For a Sick Child

Scarcely has this child lovingly smiled upon me, scarcely has it recognised [sic] me, and its head already inclines to the valley of sorrow. O Divine compassion, from the lowest depths cries unto Thee the mother's heart penetrated with unspeakable suffering; spare, all-kind Father this hardly budded flower, spare it, Father of mercy, and do not withdraw from me this good, the loss of which I should scarcely be able to overcome. Send to me, O Father, as Thou sendest unto the "Shunamite" who mourned for heavily sick child, a messenger of help, so that I may not be deprived of the precious gift which Thou hast presented me. Didst Thou not instruct us through Thy prophet. [sic] "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver Thee, and thou shalt glorify me!" And through Thy prophet Isaiah Thou didst promise to Thy people of Israel<sup>10</sup> "I will pour out my spirit upon Thy seed, and my blessing upon Thy offspring:" extend then also this paternal promise to my child, bestow upon it health and long life.

Yes, O Father, hope whispers to me: that Thou only wouldst prove my trust in Thee, Thou hast not determined on the death of my child, and after the short night, which now overclouds me, many delightful days will follow.

Amen.

The initial descriptions of the baby as "lovingly smiling" and "recognizing" the mother are included to validate that the child is a good person. The loving smile demonstrates that the child is not an evil soul who is deserving of suffering; the ability to recognize its mother shows that it is a viable human. The entire first sentence shows the sick child as someone who is unfairly suffering. This is reminiscent of the Jeremiah 30:17 (see above) passage which portrays God as the Healer of Israel at a time when Israel is being unjustly oppressed. With the exception of a loving smile, the child has not done anything yet which would be considered righteous. Because of this, it is inappropriate to plead for health on the child's merits. The first path of prayer is to plead for God's Infinite Mercy.

The second sentence begins with an appeal by the mother from "the lowest depths." Possibly this alludes to the one hundred and third Psalm: "[Adonai] Who heals all thy diseases; Who redeems thy life from the pit."

The rest of the sentence seems to make the case that the child is needed. The mother who is reciting this prayer says that if the child dies, "I should scarcely be able to overcome [the mourning]." This is suggestive of Erubin 29b, which tells of Rabbi Hanina's near death: "His colleagues begged for Heavenly Mercy and he recovered because his contemporaries needed him." This shows that one will be healed if one is needed.

The next sentence alludes to the story of Elisha and the Shunamite woman found in Second Kings 4:8-37. In this story, the Shunamite's son took ill and died. She sent for Elisha, "the man of God" to heal, actually revive, her son. The bible states that the mother's "soul is grieved within her." This prayer tries to appeal to the same Divine Compassion which healed the child in the Second Kings story.

There are two more appeals to God's healing powers which are stated in the Bible. The first is from the fiftieth Psalm, verse 15. This verse actually provides an outline for the entire prayer--first show that this is a time of trouble, then call upon God, and end by glorifying God. The invoker hopes that in the middle of this process, "[God] will deliver." The second verse quoted is from Isaiah 44:3. This is a Divine promise of compassion which is specifically directed towards children.

The hope which still whispers is possibly an allusion to "The Still, Small Voice" of God in First Kings 19:12. After a great wind, earthquake, and fire, Elijah heard the hopeful, still small Voice of God coming out of the wake of disaster. In our prayer, the mother is listening for a small voice of hope coming up from out of her despair.

The final contrast of short night to many delightful days as a metaphor for the contrast between death and life is reminiscent of First Samuel 2:6. This verse mentions death first and life as coming out of death: "The Lord kills, and gives life: He brings down to the grave, and brings up." Hopefully, after only a short period of the child suffering, the illness will abate and leave the child with life renewed.

The last prayer to be analyzed is from the 1976 Reform prayerbook, Gates of the House: The New Union Home Prayerbook, edited by Chaim Stern.<sup>11</sup>

On behalf of the sick

Lord, we thank You for the gift of life and the strength of faith. Sustain ..., our loved one, through these days of illness with the courage to endure weakness and pain. We thank You for the healing powers at work within him (her). Be with all who suffer illness of body or mind. May they recover speedily from their afflictions and return in health to family and friends.

ברוך אתה יהוה, "ר, הַמְּקֵיץ וְהַמְּשִׁיב  
Blessed is the Lord, the Source of healing.

From the first line on, this prayer falls into the category of a petitionary prayer of thanksgiving. There are biblical

precedents for thanking God and subsequently asking for health. The thirteenth and sixteenth Psalms are examples of this. See pages 40-43 below for a further analysis of petitionary prayers of thanksgiving.

The second verse is typical of Reform ideology. There are parts of Reform liturgy which refrain from asking for Divine Intervention for the performance of a miracle. This line asks God for a less overt intervention--namely that the sick person be able to cope with his illness. This ideology is expressed by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner in his book When Bad Things Happen to Good People<sup>12</sup>: "Neither, as we have suggested already, can we ask God to change the laws of nature for our benefit, to make fatal conditions less fatal or to change the inexorable course of an illness."

The next two lines pray for the health of all people who are sick. This might be based on Job 42:10: "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends...." The final verse might be a reference to Exodus 23:25: "I am The Lord that heals thee."

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Vol. I, 1976 ed. (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1933), p. 216.

2. See: Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, First Kings: A New English Translation, (New York: The Judaica Press, Inc., 1980).

3. Chapter 33.

4. Second Samuel 12:22-23.

5. It is difficult for me to accept this tradition of praying for the demise of enemies as part of my Reform Judaism. I cannot, in good faith, recite the words of the thirty-fifth Psalm, "Strive, O Lord, with those who contend against me; fight against those who oppose me. ... But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I afflicted my soul with fasting; and as for my prayer may it return to my own bosom."

As our world continues to draw smaller because of the increasing ease of communication and transportation, it is becoming more and more essential for us to realize that even our enemies are people too. Ideally, in performing tikkun olam, we will come to see our foes as decent people who have a right equal to our own to live and strive for happiness and meaning in this world.

I cannot deny that prayers such as the ones above are part of the Jewish Tradition. They are at the very heart of our theological system as they are clearly written in our Holy Scriptures. I can't argue that these passages are meant to be read allegorically and not literally because their meaning is so clear. These concepts are a part of our tradition which, as a whole, I cannot accept as my own. I would prefer to cite those prayers which pray for the benefit of the whole world. The fourth verse of the sixtieth Psalm is one such prayer, "O God, turn Thyself to us again....Heal the earth's breaches, for it totters."

By extension, it is also difficult for me to reconcile myself to the theme that all punishments are forms of Divine Retribution for human transgressions. Are we then to assume that all handicapped persons either are or were sinners, and, as such, are deserving of whatever sufferings they must incur? Must we avoid giving aid to these handicapped people because they are convicted sinners? This contradicts many Jewish ideals, including tzedakah and bikkur cholim in which we are instructed to aid those who are less fortunate. These are based on the concept that cripples are not in the least considered to be criminals.

6. B. S. Jacobson, The Weekday Siddur, (Israel: Sinai Publishing, 1978), p. 232.

7. Untitled in A Naye Ikhine: Sharey Demoes by Rabonis Khane trans. Tracy Klirs, Bizkhus fun Sore, Rivke, Rokhl un Leye: The Ikhine as the Jewish Woman's Self-Expression (Cincinnati: HUC Rabbinic Thesis, 1984), p. 91.

8. Untitled in ibid. pp. 97-98.

9. Rabonis Rokhl, "An Incantation Against the Evil Eye" in Ikhine fun Eyner Ishe Khashuve, trans. Tracy Klirs in Bizkhus fun Sore, Rivke, Rokhl un Leye: The Ikhine as the Jewish Woman's Self-Expression p. 101.

10. The Hebrew is אֵלֶּיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְעַתָּה יִשְׁמָעְךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

11. Chaim Stern, The Gates of the House: The New Union Home Prayerbook (New York: CCAR, 1977), p. 127.

12. Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, (New York: Schocken Books: 1981), p. 116.

### Chapter Three:

#### Survey Given To Jewish Hospital Patients

With the intent of gathering a sampling of lay Jewish perspectives on prayer and the healing process, I compiled a survey. The following questionnaire was distributed in the Fall of 1986, by Rabbi Joseph Levine to a dozen Jewish patients he visited with at the National Institute of Health in Washington, D. C. where he is the chaplain.<sup>1</sup> There was an 83% response rate. These are the questions which I asked:

1. Would you like a Rabbi to share a prayer with you?
2. Have you ever found prayer to be beneficial in any way?
3. If it has, how so?
4. Do you pray more often now that you are in the hospital?
5. If you do pray, are your prayers fixed or spontaneous?
6. If you do pray, do you mostly pray by yourself or with others?
7. How, if at all, do you think prayer affects the healing process?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Responses

1. Yes 40%  
Sometimes 50%  
No 10%
2. Yes 80%  
Not Really 10%  
No 10%
3. The following is representative of the responses, with a \*  
for multiplicity of response.

\* It makes me feel better.  
Only in the belief it may be answered.  
Made a heart test go well.  
Over my life, various prayers have been answered.  
Relieves tension.  
Gives peace of mind.  
Gives confidence.  
Shares feelings.  
Beneficial to express my thoughts and feelings.  
Gives a more positive, forward looking outlook.  
In fatal illness by the next of kin.  
Puts you more in touch with God.

4. No 50%  
Yes 30%  
No Response 22%
5. Spontaneous 70% (Includes both respondents who found  
little and no benefit to prayer.)  
Both 20%  
Fixed 10%
6. Self 80%  
Both 20%
7. The following is representative of the responses, with a \*  
for multiplicity of response.

\*\* Prayer, positive thinking, and belief in ability to overcome  
adversity are instrumental to a successful recovery.  
\*\* It puts me in a positive state of mind.  
\* It can accelerate healing.  
\* It makes me feel better.  
\* Provides hope.  
Makes one atone for one's misgivings.  
Helps the individual to adapt and cope with their disease,  
psychological homeostasis. The negative influence of  
stress on the immune system is well accepted.  
Shows confidence that you want to get well and have the

desire to live and maintain a closer relationship with the Supreme Being.

8. The responses to this last question were quite varied, from statements of general theological tendencies to questions of faith; from descriptions of present health to criticisms of the survey. These are some of the responses.

I'm a religious person, but not in the Jewish traditional view. But feel that I can improve myself by taking control of my life.

I'm an agnostic with a slight sway to there must be some power. But to live with your fellow man you must be fair.

I don't think religious observance effects life's rewards and adversities.

I don't understand how sickness and suffering fit into God's plan.

I don't like your questionnaire. It is too simplistic for me.

I wish you the best of luck with your study.

I know that none of us live forever but we try to pray for a better life.

If our prayers are not answered, what does that mean?

Though hospitalized, I am not terminally or critically ill.

I would like to say that although we have not attended church, temple or synagogue regularly, our hearts reigned with a vase belief and honesty and trust in God. To date because of this we feel He has answered many of our problems.

I have never been faced with a fatal illness until now and have never prayed for anything so crucial before. I can only pray that my prayers be answered.

### Analysis

This survey was carefully constructed following the guidelines described by Donald A. Dillman in his book, Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method. It was meant to be non-imposing to the respondent. As such, the questions were kept simple and direct; the length of the questionnaire was limited to one page (which included the "cover letter"); and strict confidentiality was maintained.

Questions dealing with age, socio-economic status, general theological or religious labelling (i.e. Reform, Orthodox, Agnostic, etc.), place of birth, or marital status can be intimidating to the prospective respondent. For this reason questions of this sort were left out.

Throughout the questionnaire, I tried to fashion the questions to allow for the full spectrum of response. In other words, I did not say that the results of this survey would be used to support the positive importance and beneficial usage of prayer in the healing process, rather I said, "I am preparing an extensive study on how prayer affects the healing process in Judaism, and your opinions are very important to me." The prospective respondent is then free to express his/her opinions, whether or not they are consistent with mine.

In keeping with this, questions five and six begin with "If you do pray," thereby allowing for one to say that s/he does not pray. Similarly, the seventh question also allows for and invites the negative response by starting with "How, if at all,

does ...". The eighth question invited the prospective respondent to add anything which I might have forgotten or had not left enough room for.

Based on the responses of the first two questions, I feel that it is imperative that all Reform Rabbis who visit patients in the hospital be open to the role of prayer as a positive force. Almost half of the patients specifically want a Rabbi to share a prayer with them, and ninety percent would if the presentation and timing are right! I can only wonder how many Reform Rabbis feel comfortable offering to share a prayer and then actually do so. My guess from talking with Reform Rabbis and rabbinic students is that few do.

The sheer fact that four fifths of the respondents have found prayer beneficial is justification for the Reform Rabbi to offer a prayer to every patient s/he visits. If not the Rabbi, who will offer a prayer in a Jewish tradition? Certainly, the major roles of the Rabbi and Spiritual Leader are to facilitate ritual observances and to meet the spiritual needs of Jews. If we don't offer to share a prayer, are we squelching the needs of patients?

Only thirty percent stated specifically in the third question that their prayers had been answered; yet, everyone who responded to question three listed tangible benefits of prayer. Almost all of these Jews found prayer beneficial during the time of their illness. Two people said simply that prayer makes them feel better. Others said that it relieves tension, gives

confidence, shares feelings, gives a positive, forward looking outlook, and provides an avenue for expression.

Even an atheist, or one who believes that God plays no role in the world as we know it, would concede that the aforementioned "Humanistic" benefits of prayer are valid ones. (When I say "Humanistic," I am not ruling out "possibly Divine.") Even our admittedly agnostic respondent listed benefits derived from prayer. As such, these "Humanistic" benefits alone make prayer very powerful. Doctors do not have any drug available to them which can bring about all of the benefits listed above. In this way, most doctors welcome the role of the clergy as part of the healing process.

Sincerity is an important aspect in the efficacy of prayer. It might not be beneficial for a Rabbi to pray for something s/he doesn't believe in simply because it is what the Jewish patient wants. However, whether a Reform Rabbi believes in Divine Intervention or not, s/he should be aware of all the ways that patients believe that prayer can help. Perhaps, the Rabbi will be able to pray confidently and with sincerity if s/he takes these things into account.

The response to the fourth question surprised me. I thought that more people would answer "yes," yet clearly half answered "no." Based on the response to this question alone, one could derive two interpretations. If one assumes that people don't pray much when they aren't in the hospital, then one would conclude that people don't pray much in the hospital, and, therefore, there is little need for a Rabbi to offer a prayer.

However, if one assumes that people pray often when they aren't in the hospital, then one can assume that there is a great need for prayer both in the hospital and in day-to-day environments. Given the response to the first two questions, I feel that the latter interpretation is the more accurate. Perhaps Reform Rabbis should look for ways to introduce prayers into this aspect of their rabbinate.

I found the responses to the fifth question quite interesting. Ninety percent of the respondents pray with spontaneous prayers--with more than two thirds praying almost exclusively with spontaneity! This means that if a Reform Rabbi is to be effective in visiting the sick, s/he must be open to spontaneous prayer. It appears beneficial to offer a fixed prayer but not in such a way that it denigrates or stifles spontaneous prayer. Perhaps, at the conclusion of a fixed prayer, the Rabbi could ask if there is anything that anyone would like to add. At the very least, a Reform Rabbi should feel confident to expound on, add to, or deviate from the fixed text to make it appear more relevant to the patient.

In hindsight, the response to question six is not surprising. Even for the orthodox Jew who attends synagogue services three times daily, private prayers play a very important role and might even be the most frequent type of prayer. There are the little *berachot* for day-to-day sights, such as those for seeing a handicapped person or a rainbow as well as those for rising and for retiring. There are also the personal prayers

asking for direction, strength, or changes of fate which are prayed at the time when they are needed. Finally, even though the orthodox prayer service consists partly of prayers recited in unison, the majority are recited privately.

It is not surprising to find that eighty percent of the respondents pray mostly by themselves. However, this should not deter a Reform Rabbi from inviting prayer. For many people, a Rabbi is not just another stranger. Where a person might feel uncomfortable to pray in public, a given individual might be uncomfortable to discuss aspects of his/her private life in public; yet that same person might very well share private matters with his/her Rabbi. Likewise, where a person might feel uncomfortable praying in public, that same person might be quite happy praying "privately" with the Rabbi.

It is beneficial on another level for the Reform Rabbi to pray "privately" with a patient. In doing so, the Reform Rabbi serves as a role model for the individual's actual private prayers. When the Reform Rabbi prays with others, s/he validates their private prayers at times when the Rabbi is not there.

The seventh question was quite revealing in that ninety percent of the respondents answered it, and each of their responses reflected a positive relationship between prayer and healing. The majority said that prayer puts people in a positive and hopeful state of mind, and that both of these are instrumental to a successful recovery. It is significant that no one said that prayer could be detrimental to the healing process.

Medically speaking, it is the rare drug (if indeed any exists) which is beneficial to the healing process and which has no negative side effects whatsoever. As Reform Rabbis, we have the ability to put people into a positive state of mind; we can inject hope and optimism; and we can make people feel good.

The responses to the eighth and final question confirm the diversity of the respondents. These surveys have been filled out by the mildly sick and the critically ill; by the hard core atheist, the faith believer and the questioner as well. Thus, even though this sampling is small in quantity, it is of good quality. It must be kept in mind that this is only a sampling; yet, those responses which are very lop-sided might very well be indicative of the feelings of most of the Jewish laity.

The results of this questionnaire indicate to me that there are many Jews in the laity who believe that prayer can be beneficial to the healing process, and they want the Reform Rabbi to at least invite prayer. This is true for Jews who hold a diversity of theological beliefs. As Reform Rabbis, we have a unique role in the healing process to perform.

Where the doctor treats the patient by prescribing a drug to suppress feelings, the Rabbi aids the person by evoking feelings. Where the surgeon brings about healing with the scalpel, the Rabbi brings about healing with the prayer. The results of this questionnaire tell us that the feelings which a Reform Rabbi can bring out are positive, hopeful, and optimistic. The vast majority of the people who responded to this survey believe that

our tool of prayer is very powerful.

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. The full survey sent to the patients was as follows:

Hello,

I'm Jeff Glickman, a student at Hebrew Union College in my last year of studying to be a Rabbi. I am preparing an extensive study on how prayer affects the healing process in Judaism, and your opinions are very important to me. Please don't put your name on this paper. If you want a summary of the survey results, write your address on the envelope. Feel free to write on the back side, or use other pieces of paper. Thank you for your help.

Would you like a Rabbi to share a prayer with you?

Have you ever found prayer to be beneficial in any way?

If it has, how so?

Do you pray more often now that you are in the hospital?

If you do pray, are your prayers fixed or spontaneous?

If you do pray, do you mostly pray by yourself or with others?

How, if at all, do you think prayer affects the healing process?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

My best wishes for your recovery,

Jeff Glickman  
c/o HUC 3101 Clifton Ave.; Cincinnati, OH 45220.

## Chapter Four:

### General Principles of Jewish Prayers

When Jewish prayers and stories of healing are viewed in the aggregate, there are certain overriding principles about healing which come to the surface. Some of these principles of healing are particularly consistent with modern day medical practices. As such, these are especially relevant for the chaplain in the hospital setting.

The first of these principles is based on the stories of healing in Second Kings 4:8-37, First Kings 17:8-24, and Genesis 25:21. The Second Kings story is of Elisha who "revived," with God's help, the son of the Shunamite woman when he prayed to God, and he "lay upon the child and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child was warmed." The Rabbis interpret this to mean that Elisha intended to breathe life into the child. With the very air of the breath of his prayer, Elisha tried to warm up the body of the child to the natural temperature.

The First Kings story is of Elijah who healed, with God's help, the poor widow's son. The bible tells us that Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times and then prayed to God. The biblical commentators interpret this to mean that Elijah performed the same actions as Elisha, in that he put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eye upon the child's eye, and his hand upon the child's hand, and that the laying upon the child's body was to give it warmth.

The Genesis story is of Isaac praying for his wife, Rebekah, to have a child. Based on a pun of  $\pi\text{ז'}$  which means either "facing" or "opposite," Rashi interprets this to mean that Isaac lay prostrate while praying. Redak takes this a step further to say that Isaac was laying prostrate upon Rebekah in much the same manner as Elisha lay upon the child. Ralbag extends this to say that Elijah tried to enkindle the spirit of his own life into the body of the youth.

Based on these three stories, Redak surmises an interesting Jewish principle of healing. He states that "many miracles are performed only after something is done to achieve the same result in a natural way." Thus, it was only after Elisha, Elijah, and Isaac performed every action which was available to them to heal--from breathing into the ill person's lungs to warming the body--that God would come down and perform the miracle. Redak is quick to point out that the actions alone didn't bring the healing. In each of these stories, the action was accompanied by prayer.

This has great ramifications for the role of the Rabbi in the contemporary healing process. In contradistinction to the Christian Scientist clergyman who shuns medical technology stating that the only healing is Divine, the Rabbi, (who might very well share the belief that the only healing is Divine,) will welcome all of modern medical practices. It is necessary to do all that is humanly possible before the Divine healing will come. In Judaism, the spiritual leader and the secular healer needn't be at odds; rather, each performs a complementary role in the

healing process.

A second general principle implicit in Jewish prayers and stories of healing is that the cause of illness contains within it the agent for healing. The stories of healing which most directly convey this are found in Second Kings 2:21, in Exodus 15:25, and in Numbers 21:9.

In Second Kings, a story is told of Elisha who "healed"<sup>1</sup> the waters of Jericho. The waters had been unpleasant and had caused untimely births. Elisha healed the water by using something which ordinarily would make pure water unpotable, salt. "And Elisha said: 'Bring me a new flask, and put salt in it.' And they brought it to him. And he went out to the spring of the waters, and cast salt in there, and said, 'Thus says the Lord, I have healed this water; there shall not be from there any more death nor miscarriage.' So the water was healed to this day." A similar story of water being healed is told in Exodus. The waters of Mara were bitter, and Moses cast a bitter<sup>2</sup> tree into the water to make it sweet it. Again, the bitter tree would normally make water undrinkable.

A third example of this--the cause of illness being the agent of healing--is found in Numbers. When the Children of Israel were wandering through the desert, they were complaining to God. Because of their lack of faith, venomous serpents came and bit many of the people. They were healed through two things: repenting for their sins and a brass statue of a snake. "If a serpent had bitten a person, when he beheld the serpent of brass,

he lived."

Nachmanides notices the similarity of these three passages and comments: "The general intention is that God commanded that they should be healed by the harmful agent whose nature is to kill." Nachmanides doesn't specifically mention, but could, that every case of healing through forgiveness of sin also falls into this category. If it was the sin which caused a person to become ill, then it is in the repentance of that very sin that the cure lies.

It is interesting to note that this same principle is verified by modern medicine. Perhaps the story of the brass serpent foreshadowed our modern treatment for poisonous snake bites. Snake venom is needed to make an effective antidote. A similar thing is true of a person who is bitten by any potentially rabid animal; if the animal is found, doctors can have a much clearer idea of the proper treatment for healing. It is miraculous that the vaccines which prevent diseases such as polio, small pox, and measles are all made from the same micro-organisms which cause these diseases.

I find it quite intriguing that many of the stories of healing are so consistent with modern medical practice. This overlap between religion and medicine is something which both clergy members and physicians are beginning to recognize. A second area of overlap is in views of the many ways that prayer effects the healing process.

## How Prayer Heals

Most of the Biblical prayers and stories about healing deal with prayer as a plea to God for Divine Intervention to bring about health. However, there is textual substantiation for the psychological healing powers of prayer. This psychological element of prayer is alluded to in a law put forth by Maimonides dealing with idolatrous spells. If there is one thing which is unequivocally forbidden in Jewish texts, it is idolatry or anything related to it. The Bible tells us that idols have no power. "They that make a carved idol are all of them vanity.... Who has fashioned a god, or cast an idol? It is profitable for nothing."<sup>3</sup> Given that there is believed to be no Divine power from any pagan prayer, perhaps there is another aspect to prayer in general.

It is this psychological aspect of healing implicit in "generic" prayer which Moses Maimonides alludes to in his Mishna Torah. In "Laws of Idolatry" chapter 11 law 11, he writes, "If a person was bitten by a snake or scorpion, it is permitted to whisper a charm on the place where he was bitten---even on Shabbat---in order to give the person peace of mind and to give him psychological strength. Even though the charm provides absolutely no medicinally therapeutic benefit since the person is in a dangerous condition, this is permitted so that he will not become distraught."

It appears that Maimonides is writing his law based on an interpretation of Sanhedrin 101a which allows the whispering of a

charm over a snake or serpent on Shabbat in particular and condones the whispering of a charm over a wound as long as there is no exhortation which accompanies it, in general.<sup>4</sup>

The reason that Maimonides permits the whispering of a charm is that he sees it as a placebo. It works only because the patient thinks that it will work.

If this is true for a pagan charm, how much the more so for a Jewish prayer, which is acknowledged by our tradition as evoking Divine Healing! I don't want to rule out the possibility of such Divine Intervention in the curing of disease. There are many physicians who also feel that God might very well have a miraculous role in the healing of patients. See the next section for a more in-depth discussion of healing by Divine Intervention.

In this section, however, I would like to concentrate on other non-Divine, or psychological, powers of prayer for healing. For the sake of analysis, I have broken down the psychological ways that prayer can heal into eight interrelated groups:

1. Evokes Hope
2. Comforts
3. Creates Avenue for Self-Determination
4. Mobilizes Latent Internal Healing Powers
5. Provides A Link with Judaism
6. Enlarges Patient's Perspective
7. Facilitates Communication Between Patient and Rabbi
8. Eases Closure of Visit

### Hope

In his book, Anatomy of an Illness, Norman Cousins, a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles Medical School, writes about the effect of optimism and humor on the healing process. He starts with the proven negative role of stress and depression on the healing process. He postulates that if there are unhealthy mental states, it logically follows that there must exist mental states which are more conducive to health. The remainder of his book is clinical documentation, studies, and case histories which all support his postulate. He shows conclusively that a patient's positive attitude, specifically hope, is an important element of the healing process.

There are many ways that a prayer can evoke hope in a patient. Prayer can make a patient feel that God is there to heal him/her. If the sick person has little hope that his doctor can heal him, prayer can provide the hope that there is a greater power which will help. There is something that can instill hope into the very marrow of an ill person when he reads Exodus 15:26, "I am The Lord who heals thee."

A prayer, such as the Seventy-Seventh Psalm, can recall God's miracles of old and provide the hope that if God can do these things, then God can also heal individuals, specifically, the sick person who prays. The Seventy-Seventh Psalm is particularly hopeful in that it is written in the first person and begins by describing the depths of utmost despair. This

despair might even be more desolate than that of the sick person reading the Psalm. This might be encouraging in and of itself.

I have offered this Psalm to many patients to read together, and I have seen a transformation within them as they read. It contains a healing in itself. When a sick person reads this, s/he first begins to empathize with the initial part. One senses that the author suffered a despair as great as can be put into words. For many patients, tears begin to well up. Then, as they read on, they are emotionally and spiritually lifted by the words. When their despair is converted into faith, the effect on the reader is therapeutic: the patient is suddenly filled with hope.

## Comfort

A second benefit of prayer is that it can comfort a sick person. In his book on medical halachah, Responsa: Tsits Eliezer, Eliezer Waldenberg authors a responsa (volume 13, number 87) on the use of painkilling drugs such as morphine which don't directly heal the cause of the illness. The drug comforts the patient but might hasten death. In the course of his argumentation in favor of administering such drugs to suffering patients near death, he addresses what is halachically meant by healing:

The injecting of morphine given exclusively to silence pain is in all cases and however you look at it, in the pursuit of healing<sup>5</sup> the patient, because there is no thing which is harder for a man to bear than great sufferings.... Therefore, with the giving of things to silence pain: that is, by itself, considered healing.

Therefore, bringing comfort in any way is healing.

Praying can lessen sufferings and augment comfort by reducing both physical pain and mental anguish. It can alleviate physical pain in that it gives the sick person an avenue to think of things greater than himself or herself. In praying, the sick person is able to step out of his bodily suffering--if only for a brief moment, to aspire towards the Divine. When the prayer is over, the patient can return to the struggle against disease and pain with renewed fortitude.

Prayer can also bring relief to mental pain. Many patients feel great anguish when they think that they are alone, that there is no purpose to their pain, and that the world is an impersonal *tohu vavohu*, chaos and void--limbo. When we pray,

we can derive comfort from the belief that there is a warm, divine presence which blankets our entire world. There is comfort in knowing that there is some power that is omnipotent, that is watching over us, and that is protecting us.

Faith in God helps the terminally ill patient to be better prepared to accept death. For many people, prayer helps give meaning to and validates the meaning of life. Likewise, through prayer, we can derive a meaning for death. Death becomes less like total disintegration and more like integration into life and the universe.

### Self-Determination

The most difficult type of stress is that which is borne by those who cannot control their situation. In a hospital environment, there is very little a sick person is in control of. He is told when and what to eat, when to sleep, what to do and what not do. He is not even in control of his own room; strangers enter and leave when they desire. Perhaps the most upsetting realization for the sick person is that he is no longer in control of the way others treat his body.

The only real choice that patients have is to either follow the doctor's orders or refuse. Taking control means disobeying the doctor. If a patient elects to control his own actions, he is reprimanded for doing something which goes against the "most efficient" prescribed path for healing.

Prayer provides the patient with an avenue for Self-Determination. With prayer, the patient can choose when he wants to pray, how he wants to pray, and what he wants to pray about. In this small but significant way, he is entirely in control. If the patient feels that prayer is an important part of his healing process, then he can have the confidence of being in control of that entire aspect. Self-confidence is raised, as well as the ability to better cope with the de-personalizing environment of the hospital.

## Mobilization and Focusing of Latent Internal Healing Powers

When a person is ill, there can be many factors which scatter the sick person's energies and prevent him from channeling his energies properly. First, the pain makes it hard to focus on anything. Second, much energy is expended tensing the body in response to the pain. Third, the whole environment of the hospital is disconcerting and foreign. It is very difficult to establish a firm foundation upon which to stand and confront the illness. There is little security. It can seem like each time a fixed, familiar routine is established, something is changed. This is like pulling the rug out from under the patient's internal system of resistance to disease. The fourth factor which can scatter the ill person's energies is that each decision is often made with such urgency that there is little or no time to reflect. The patient can find himself in a whirlpool, with no understanding of direction, no foresight, and no purpose.

Prayer can be a constant which permeates the entire period of illness. It can be the foundation upon which all of the patient's energies stand. Through prayerful meditations, the patient can assess all of his energies and compile his personal inventory for healing. Prayer can help the sick person focus his body energies away from the very tense defense against pain, away from the xenophobic fears of strangers who enter the hospital room, and away from more trivial worries. This newly liberated strength can now be focused towards personal healing.

## A Link with Judaism

In his book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner discusses the value of prayer at times of sickness. "The first thing prayer does for us is to put us in touch with other people, people who share the same concerns, values, dreams, and pains that we do."<sup>6</sup> These people can be in either the past or the present.

A way that prayer links a patient to Jewish people of the past is because of the years of tradition surrounding a given prayer. There is strength in being in touch with one's heritage--knowing that this prayer was handed down to us from one's ancestors, and that it was useful to every generation. The patient might rightly think, "For thousands of years my ancestors were deriving hope from saying this very prayer; certainly I can too."

There is a second way that prayer can link the patient to his Jewish past. He might have positive feelings about Judaism from youth which have atrophied. There might be fond memories of deceased family members of the sick person's youth which would be recalled during a Jewish prayer. When one is very sick, there is a strong tendency to regress to one's childhood, to a time when things were easier and possibly happier. Jewish prayer might very well be able to reach the sick person on this level.

Not only does prayer link a sick person to his Jewish past, it also links him to the contemporary Jewish community. Prayer can help to remind the patient that there are other people who

care about him, who are praying for him. They are also saying this prayer. This is especially true for prayers which are said in Hebrew, even if the patient doesn't understand anything beyond "Shalom."

## Enlarges Perspective

When people are ill, they often become egocentric---concerned only with their own situation. In almost all cases, this is entirely justified. However, this might not be the best thing for the patient, for it closes off avenues for positive feelings. There are many positive feelings associated with performing a deed with only the intent of helping others.

There is precedent in halachah for helping others even at a time when one is in need of help oneself. "Even a poor person who is kept alive by Tzedakah funds must give to Tzedakah from what he receives."<sup>7</sup> I believe that the spirit of this law can be carried over to praying for another person's health.

Praying for one's own health in the context of praying for the health of the sick of all of God's children can provide many positive feelings. For someone who is so ill that he can not even walk, it can be quite empowering to know that he can do something to help others. There can also be a sense of humbling relief when a patient realizes that he is not alone or that there is someone worse off than he.

## Facilitates Communication Between Patient and Rabbi

Most hospital patients want to be able to trust the chaplain. However, it is sometimes hard to break through the initial tension of a visitation. This is quite normal, for in most situations the chaplain and the patient have never before met. Most of this tension is caused by the the fact that the patient doesn't know what the chaplain wants, and the fact that the chaplain doesn't know how the patient feels about his visit. The beginnings of visits are normally filled with small talk which deals with current events, temperature, weather, nurses, attendants, doctors, diagnosis, family, and prior Jewish commitment. Many times, this would be the full extent of the visit, without ever getting to deep feelings about recovery, the role of religion, personal fears, or the resolution of conflicts, fears, or problems.

Not all patients want to have a deep conversation. But there are in fact many patients who would love to discuss more than superficial concerns; yet these same patients feel they cannot comfortably shift the mood of the visit. One way that I have found to comfortably invite a deeper the level of conversation is through the offering of a prayer. If the patient does accept the offer of prayer, which happens the vast majority of time, prayer can be a significant shared experience for the two of them. Once something of value has already been shared, closer communication can transpire.

As long as the patient feels he isn't pressured to say

"yes," he can freely say "no." Even if the sick person does not want to pray, the Rabbi has shown that he is willing to share something of himself with the patient for the sole purpose of the latter's recovery. In this way, prayer can release the initial tension, and help to develop an atmosphere of trust.

Prayer itself can evoke significant conversation. Discussions about the efficacy of prayer can branch off into talks about other spiritual concerns, such as the meaning of death, the purpose of illness, or the role of religion. Discussions of this type, if conducted with sensitivity, usually leave the patient with a new perspective which is optimistic and hopeful.

The prayer need not be in the beginning of the visit for it to be an effective aid to communication; however, I would encourage that the idea of prayer be introduced early. The Rabbi and the sick person might very well agree to end the visit with a prayer. In this way, an agenda is established, and the prayer is anticipated and looked forward to. Prayer is introduced as a subject which can be talked about, and any anxieties about prayer can be dealt with. When the session is drawing to an end, the prayer creates an eventful climax.

### Closure

Prayer also helps to provide closure to the visiting session. As awkward as the beginning of a hospital visitation is, at times, the ending can be worse. How do you know when to leave? Does the patient want you to stay longer, yet can't express it? Will your leaving appear as though you are abandoning the patient and thereby negate the positive things accomplished in the visit? Will the departure leave the patient in a bad mood? Will the patient think that this was only a waste of time and, therefore, be less willing to have the chaplain return?

As mentioned above, the visit can be geared to prayer at the end, as the highpoint of the meeting. If this "agenda" is established, then both the patient and the chaplain have a code which can be evoked to bring the end of the session. Prayer then becomes a natural conclusion which leaves the patient happier in that he feels more reassured. This is particularly important because happiness is something which is quite rare in a hospital environment.

Even a prayer which is shared in the middle of the visit helps ease the closure. The patient is less apt to feel that the visit was a waste of time because he and the Rabbi have accomplished something concrete, a shared prayer. When it is time to close, the Rabbi has something substantial to leave the patient with, an offer to return in the next couple of days to share another prayer. This provides the patient with something

specific to look forward to in the next visit. Also, because an agenda has already been formed and a bond has been made, the opening tension of the next session will be eased.

Once the chaplain realizes that prayer can play numerous roles, with a plethora of benefits, he is in a better position to help patients. The Rabbi has a wealth of resources available to him if he feels comfortable about inviting and sharing prayer with a sick person. With the current research into the role of emotions in the healing process, the role of the chaplain is put into new light.

## New Views on the Chaplain as Spiritual Facilitator and Healer

In ancient times, there was very little difference between a doctor and a spiritual leader. The witch doctor would use religion to heal and miracle healings to buttress support for the religion. Dr. Lewis Thomas, president of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, readily admits that at the beginning of the twentieth century, medicine "was, in its own way, faith healing."<sup>8</sup> Even though the early physician had a medicine bag and a stethoscope, and wrote prescriptions in Latin, almost all of his resources for healing were palliative. "They were placebos, and they had been the principal mainstay of medicine, the sole technology, for so long a time--millenia--that they had the incantatory power of religious ritual."<sup>9</sup>

For most of mankind's history, the spiritual leader and the physician performed very similar roles in the treatment of the sick. Their major difference was their uniform. Though neither had many means of directly combatting disease, each took advantage of the resources available to him. What many of us fail to realize now is that the doctors and spiritual leaders actually performed healing with their <sup>SP</sup> "primitive" treatments. These treatments included touching the sick person, talking with the patient, and offering prayers to add meaning to the person's life.

Dr. Thomas discusses the effectiveness of some of these treatments:

The shaman had epileptic fits, saw visions, and heard voices, lost himself in the wilderness for weeks on end, fell into long stretches of coma, and when he came back to life he was licensed to practice, dancing around the bedside, making smoke, chanting incomprehensibilities, and **TOUCHING** the patient everywhere. The touching was the real professional secret, never acknowledged as the central, essential skill, always obscured by the dancing and the chanting, but always busily there, the laying on of hands. There, I think, is the oldest and most effective act of doctors, the touching. Some people don't like being handled by others, but not, or almost never, sick people. They **NEED** being touched, and part of the dismay in being very sick is the lack of close human contact. Ordinary people, even close friends, even family members, tend to stay away from the very sick, touching them as infrequently as possible for fear of interfering, or catching the illness, or just for fear of bad luck. The doctor's oldest skill in trade was to place his hands on the patient.<sup>10</sup>

Think of the impact on a patient's attitude towards healing, his perspective of self-worth, and his feelings of loneliness if someone he is close with, be it family, friend, physician, or Rabbi, followed Elisha's actions as a role model for supplemental treatment. Second Kings 4:33-34 tells us that in treating the sick boy, Elisha "prayed unto the Lord... and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon him; and the flesh of the child waxed warm."

The sick person could feel that this person who is putting himself in an exposed, giving, empathetic position is truly reaching out to him. It could make the patient feel that he is viewed by others with great respect, that they would give of themselves for his health. He might not feel so alone, knowing that someone has actually come to his level, and seen the world as he sees it.

Touching with the naked ear was one of the great advances on the history of medicine. Once it was learned that the heart and lungs made sounds of their own, and that the sounds were sometimes useful for diagnosis, physicians placed an ear over the heart, and over areas on the front and back of the chest, and listened. It is hard to imagine a friendlier human gesture, a more intimate signal of personal concern and affection, than these close bowed heads affixed to the skin. The stethoscope was invented in the nineteenth century, vastly enhancing the acoustics of the thorax, but removing the physician a certain distance from his patient. It was the earliest device of many still to come, one new technology after another, designed to increase that distance....11

Medicine is no longer the laying on of hands, it is more like the reading of signals from machines.12

The more that modern medical practices move towards the use of machinery, the more they move away from viewing the patient as an individual human being, with hopes and fears, ideas and opinions, emotions and aspirations. Dr. Perri Klass writes: "You can examine the patient in detail, listen to the heart, lungs, and stomach, feel all pulses--and never see the person."13

One way to begin to see the patient as a person is to talk with him. Dr. Thomas talks about his father's medical practice at the turn of the century. "In my father's time, talking with the patient was the biggest part of medicine, for it was almost all there was to do."14 With doctors being as busy as they are today, very few of them make the time to simply sit at the patient's bedside and talk. Proverbs 15:4 speaks to us about the healing quality of sincere dialogue: "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life"

Our life is primarily defined by our perception of it. If a patient perceives that few people with whom he comes into contact are willing to talk with him and show respect for his

individuality, that most of the people he sees view him only as a disease to be diagnosed, then certainly his perception of the meaning of life is affected.

This is where we, as chaplains, can play a role in the healing process. What is the quest of a Rabbi apart from helping others find meaning in life? The recitation of daily blessings elevates the mundane to the status of Divinely bestowed, the celebration of the holidays instills meaning to the seasons, the observance of rites of passage corresponding to life-cycle events defines the meaningful direction of life. Traditionally and etymologically, our Torah is our "guide" to direct us through the halacha, our "path" of life.

The ability to help another find meaning in his life should not be underestimated. Hippocrates realized that the healing process involves both the injection of drugs and instillation meaning into the patient when he said: "The doctor who is also a philosopher is like unto the gods."

Freud has postulated that humans have a innate will to pleasure, Adler hypothesized that people have a natural will to power: perhaps humans have an ingrained urge to find meaning in their lives. It is upon this third assumption that Dr. Viktor Frankl bases his method of therapy which he calls logotherapy. In his book, The Doctor and the Soul, he shows how major strides can be made in the treatment of emotionally and physically ill patient if the patient is placed in a environment which is conducive to spiritual values and encourages the patient's quest for meaning in life. He demonstrates that instilling meaning into one's life

is a cure. "Of course one can manage without all that [instilling meaning] and still be a doctor, but in that case, one should realize that the only thing that makes us different from a veterinarian is the clientele."<sup>15</sup>

This type of thinking is particularly relevant today when it is easy for the people who practice medicine to focus on the disease to the exclusion of the person. Such an example would be the following: a doctor amputates a patient's leg to save him from dying of gangreen, yet the patient then commits suicide because he can't find meaning in life without being able to walk. What healing did the doctor actually do?

This is where the Rabbi as Chaplain can play a vital role. The Rabbi can take the time to talk with the patient, to touch the patient, and to share a prayer with the sick person. The prayer can transform the sterile hospital room into a Divine sanctuary; the prayer can transcend the moment of illness to give the sick person direction and meaning which will stay with him. Prayer can satisfy the patient's will to find meaning and instill a will to live. Dr. Alexis Carrel relates the following from his experience:

As a physician I have seen men, after all therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer. It is the only power in the world that seems to over-come the so-called 'laws of nature.'<sup>16</sup>

We have seen that the majority of people are open to having the Chaplain share a prayer. Also, I have demonstrated that there are many ways that prayer can facilitate the healing process, psychologically, emotionally, and physically, even

possibly miraculously. Based on these two propositions, I conclude that if we refrain from sharing a prayer with sick people, then we are withholding from them something which could be an important part of their healing.

## Notes to Chapter Four

1. The Hebrew word used for the purification of these waters is יָדַף, which comes from the root meaning "to heal". See Appendix D.
2. The Mechilta and Nachmanides refer to it as bitter.
3. Isaiah 44:9-10. For other stories of the powerlessness of idols, see First Samuel 5:1-5 and First Kings 18:25-29.
4. These, however, are based on Mishna Sanhedrin 11:1 which says that the one who whispers a charm over a wound will not receive a portion of the world to come.
5. The Hebrew word which Rabbi Waldenberg uses is מְדַבֵּר. See Appendix D for a fuller explanation of this Hebrew word.
6. Harold S. Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 119.
7. Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 248:1 see also *ibid.* 248:3.
8. Lewis Thomas, The Youngest Science: Notes of a Medicine Watcher (New York: The Viking Press, 1983), p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
13. Dr. Perri Klass, , "A Patient is More Than the Sum of Physical Findings" in Discover Magazine, October 1986, p. 21.
14. Thomas, p. 59.
15. Dr. Viktor E. Frankl, Doctor and Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. xiv.
16. The Strength of Faith: Prayers and Meditations in Time of Illness, ed. Dr William B. Silverman. (Kansas City, Missouri), p. 3.

## Appendix A: Divine Promises of Healing

One of the major forms of prayers for health is that which appeals to God's Infinite mercy. This mercy is shown in Divine promises of health. Twenty-three such references in the bible are found, and they take various forms.

Exodus 15:26:

I am The Lord that heals thee.

Exodus 23:25-26:

And you shall serve The Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread and thy water...;

And I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. None shall miscarry, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfill.

Deuteronomy 7:15 (cf. Deuteronomy 28:60):

And The Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all those who hate thee.

Deuteronomy 33:27

The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

First Samuel 2:6:

The Lord kills, and gives life; He brings down to the grave, and brings up.

Isaiah 3:10

Say of the righteous that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

Isaiah 19:22

And The Lord shall smite Egypt: He shall smite and heal: and they shall return to The Lord, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them.

Isaiah 30:26:

Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of seven days, on the day that The Lord binds up the breach of His people, and heals the stroke of their wound.

Isaiah 33:22-24:

For The Lord is our Judge, The Lord is our Lawgiver, The Lord is our King: He will save us. ... And the inhabitant shall not say 'I am sick.'

Isaiah 35:5:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Isaiah 57:16-20:

For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always angry: but the spirit and the soul which I have made, should faint before me. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wrathful, and smote him; I hid me, and was angry: but he went on perversely in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and bestow comforts on him and on his mourners. I will create a new expression of the lips: Peace, peace, both for far and near, says The Lord. And I will heal him.

Isaiah 58:8-11:

Then [with the coming of the Messiah] shall thy light break forth like the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee: the glory of The Lord shall be thy rearguard. Then shalt thou call, and The Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, 'Here I am.' If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking iniquity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thy gloom be as the noonday: and The Lord

shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make strong thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Jeremiah 3:22:

Return, faithless children, and I will heal your backslidings.

Jeremiah 30:17:

For I will restore health to thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, says The Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Tzion, for whom no one cares.

Jeremiah 33:6:

Behold, I will bring it [the nation of Judah] healing and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth.

Ezekiel 34:16:

Said the Lord God, 'I will seek that which was lost, and bring back the strayed, and will bind up the crippled, and will strengthen the sick.

Hosea 6:1-2:

Come, and let us return to The Lord: for He has torn, and He will heal us; He has smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His Presence.

Malachi 3:20:

'But to you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in its wings; and you shall go out and leap like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,' says The Lord.

Psalms 23:

The Lord is my Shepherd; ... He restores my soul; ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my

life: and I will dwell in the house of The Lord forever.

Psalms 103:1-5:

Bless The Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me  
bless His holy name. Bless The Lord, O my soul; and forget  
not all His benefits: who forgives all thy iniquities; who  
heals all thy diseases; who redeems thy life from the pit;  
who encircles thee with love and compassion; who satisfies  
thy old age with good; so that thy youth is renewed like the  
eagle's.

Psalms 107:19-20:

He sent His word, and healed them,

Psalms 147:3:

[God] Who healeth the broken in heart,  
And bindeth up their wounds.

Second Chronicles 7:14:

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble  
themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their  
wicked ways; then I will bear from heaven, and I will  
forgive their sin, and I will heal their land.

Implicit in almost all of these verses are the concepts that  
Israel must uphold the Commandments and must not turn away from  
Adonai. Many of these promises state that God is the one who  
ordains both sickness and health and that He can administer each  
as He sees fit. With this view of illness and well being, one  
need only to appeal to God to be healed. Indeed, there are many  
stories which are found in the Bible and Talmud where an  
individual does appeal to God and healing does follow as a  
result.

## Appendix B:

### Anthology of Healing in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature

There are many stories of healing found in Jewish texts. For the sake of organization, I have grouped them into the following seven sections:

1. Recovery without action;
2. Recovery brought on by actions alone;
3. Recovery brought about by prayer:
  - A. Prayer for self which healed the invoker;
  - B. Prayer for others which healed the invoker;
  - C. Prayer for others which healed them;
  - D. Prayer for forgiveness of sin;
4. Prayers for the prevention of illness.

## Stories of Recovery Without Any Action Stated

Daniel 8:27:

And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days;  
Afterwards I rose up.

Babylonian Talmud Bava Bathra 16b:

R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Abraham had a precious stone hung round his neck which brought immediate healing to any sick person who looked on it, and when Abraham our father departed from this world, the Holy One, blessed by He, suspended it from the orb of the sun.

Abaye said: This bears out the popular saying, 'As the day advances the illness lightens.'

Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 55a:

[An Israelite named] Zunin said to R. Akiba: 'We both know in our heart that there is no reality in an idol; nevertheless we see men enter [the pagan shrine] crippled and come out cured. What is the reason?'

He replied, 'I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a trustworthy man in a city, and all his townsmen used to deposit [their money] in his charge without witnesses. One man, however, came and deposited [his money] in his charge with witnesses; but on one occasion he forgot and made his deposit without witnesses. The wife [of the trustworthy man] said [to her husband], "Come, let us deny it." He answered her, "Because this fool acted in an unworthy manner, shall I destroy my reputation for trustworthiness!" It is similar with afflictions. At the time they are sent upon a man the oath is imposed upon them, "You shall not come upon him except on such and such a day, nor depart from him except on such and such a day, and at such an hour, and through the medium of so and so, and through such and such a remedy." When the time arrives for them to depart, the man chanced to go to an idolatrous shrine. The afflictions plead, "It is right that we should not leave him and depart; but because this fool acts in an unworthy way shall we break our oath!"'

## Stories of Recovery Brought on by Actions Alone

First Samuel 16:14-16, 23:

Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him. And Saul's servants said unto him: 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God terrifieth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, that are before thee, to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall be, when the evil spirit from God cometh upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.'

...And it came to pass, when the [evill] spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took the harp, and played with his hand; so Saul found relief, and it was well with him, and the evil spirit departed from him.

Second Kings 2:19-22:

And the men of the city said unto Elisha: 'Behold, we pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is bad, and the land causeth untimely births.' And he said: 'Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein.' And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast salt therein, and said: 'Thus saith the Lord: I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or miscarrying.' So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the word of Elish which he spoke.

Second Kings 5:10-14:

And Elisha sent a messenger unto him [Naaman, the king of Israel who was a leper] saying: 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come back to thee, and thou shalt be clean.'

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said: 'Behold, I thought: He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Amanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?' So he turned, and went away in a rage.

And his servants came near, and spoke unto him, and said: 'My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee: Wash and be clean?'

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came back like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Second Kings 20:7:

And Isaiah said: 'Take a cake of figs.' And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

Babylonian Talmud Erubin 26a:

This [Second Kings 20:4] teaches that Hezekiah was stricken with illness and Isaiah proceeded to hold a college at his door [for Torah study banishes disease]. From this [it may be inferred] that when a scholar falls ill a college is to be held at his door.

Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 40a:

Did it not once happen that one of R. Akiba's disciples fell sick, and the Sages did not visit him? So R. Akiba himself entered [his house] to visit him, and because they swept and sprinkled the ground before him, he recovered. 'My master,' said he, 'you have revived me!' R. Akiba went forth and lectured: He who does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood.

Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 85b:

Samuel Yarhinaah was Rabbi's physician. Now, Rabbi having contracted an eye disease, Samuel offered to bathe it with a lotion, but he said, 'I cannot bear it.'

'Then I will apply an ointment to it,' he said.

'This too I cannot bear,' he objected.

So he placed a phial of chemicals under his pillow, and he was healed.

## Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 28a:

There is a full discussion of many folk remedies for various ailments. The following is one of the most interesting:

What about R. Abbahu, who too was a distinguished man, yet Jacob the heretic prepared for him a medicine for his leg, and were it not for R. Ammi and R. Asi who licked his leg [to suck the poison out, and healed him], he would have cut his leg off?

## Various remedies in the Bible and the Talmud:

Leviticus 14  
Second Kings 2:20-12  
Isaiah 38:21  
Jeremiah 6:2  
Jeremiah 6:14  
Jeremiah 8:11  
Jeremiah 8:22  
Jeremiah 30:12-14  
Jeremiah 30:17  
Jeremiah 46:11  
Jeremiah 51:8  
Jeremiah 51:9  
Ezekiel 30:21  
Ezekiel 47:12  
Ecclesiastes 12:5  
Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 57b  
Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 66b-67b  
Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 82a  
Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 108b-111b  
Babylonian Talmud Erubin 29a  
Babylonian Talmud Erubin 29b  
Babylonian Talmud Kethuboth 50a  
Babylonian Talmud Gittin 69a-69b  
Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 107b  
Tosefta Bava Metzia 7:2  
Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 28a-29a

## Recovery Brought on by Prayer:

## Stories of Recovery Brought on by Prayer for Self

One might think that in all the Biblical stories of healing many would deal with a person praying for his/her own recovery. Actually, there is only one such story. The only true Biblical account of an individual praying for his own healing is the story of Hezekiah. The story of Hezekiah's recovery is quite a complex one and requires much elucidation.

The account of Hezekiah's illness is told in three sections of the Bible: Second Kings 20:1-7; Isaiah 38:1-22; and in Second Chronicles 32:24-33. It is interesting to note that only in the first two citations is it explicitly mentioned that Hezekiah was healed. Also, the reasons for the healing differ in these first two passages.

The story of the prayer for Hezekiah's health is mentioned several times in the Bible and thus has been interpreted in many different ways. (In one way or another, either through biblical account or through rabbinic interpretation, one can derive almost all of the types of prayers of healing in this story.) The first biblical mention of Hezekiah's illness, and his subsequent prayer to Adonai for health, is found in Second Kings 20:2-3.

"In those days Hezekiah fell mortally sick. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, 'Thus says Adonai, "Set thy house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live."' Then he [Hezekiah] turned his face to the wall, and prayed to Adonai, saying, 'I beseech thee, O Adonai, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly."

Second Kings gives the narrative account of Hezekiah's illness.

Hezekiah is clearly pleading his own case for healing by citing his merits.

Rashi's comments on these verses are quite significant. Rashi believes that praying for health solely on behalf of one's own merits is not worthy enough for the prayer to be answered. Rashi says that the word  $\text{אֵי} \text{לָךְ}$  should not be interpreted as "please" but rather as "where." According to Rashi, Hezekiah's true supplication was "Where, O Adonai, where is your Mercy?" By citing a double entendre, Rashi interprets this as a petitionary prayer. Healing is brought about by God's Divine Mercy.

Why would Rashi want to make this prayer into a petitionary one? One reason is that Hezekiah would then become a more universal role model. If Hezekiah was healed solely because he pleaded his own merits, a problematic scenario would arise. Imagine a person who was as ill as Hezekiah, and who also pleaded to God on his own merits. Can we assume that if he is not healed that he is less holy than Hezekiah? If, however, this was purely a petitionary prayer, then anyone could follow Hezekiah's example, regardless of how righteous a person he is. The second reason can be derived from the context of the story. Later on in the narrative, God says that He heals Hezekiah for two reasons: for His, God's, own sake, and for King David's sake.

The passage in Second Kings continues to show how Adonai heard and answered Hezekiah's prayer:

"Thus says the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of Adonai. And I will add to thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the

king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.' And Isaiah said, 'Take a cake of figs.' And they took and laid it on the festering place, and he recovered."

There are two other accounts, one in Isaiah 38:9-22 and the other in Second Chronicles 32:24-29. The Isaiah account is in the form of the petitionary letter which Hezekiah wrote.

"The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: 'I said in the noontide of my days, I shall go to the gates of She'ol: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see Adonai, the Lord, in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world. My dwelling is plucked up and is removed from me like a shepherd's tent: I have rolled up my life like a weaver: he will cut me off from the loom: from day to night thou dost make an end of me. I wait for morning; as a lion, even so he breaks all my bones: from day to night dost thou make an end of me. Like a swift or a crane, even so do I chirp: I moan like a dove: my eyes fail with looking upwards: O Adonai, I am oppressed, by thou my security. What shall I say? he has both spoken to me, and himself has done it: I shall walk softly all my years for the bitterness of my soul. O Adonai, with these things men live! and in all these is the life of my spirit: wherefore restore me and make me live. Behold, for in peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it, from the pit of destruction: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

"For She'ol cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.'"

The third account in Second Chronicles is of a markedly different form:

"In those days Hezekiah fell mortally sick, and he prayed to Adonai: and he spoke to him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not pay back according to the benefit don to him: for his heart was proud: therefore wrath came upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Hezekiah did humble himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Adonai did not come upon them in the days of

Hezekiah."

Notice, that there is no mention of healing here.

There are some major thematic differences between the three accounts of the prayer. The first one is the only one in which Hezekiah cites his own righteousness as the reason for the healing. "I beseech thee, O Adonai, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight."

The first account does say that Hezekiah was healed but for reasons which are different from those he used to entreat God. God explains that the healing will take place because of:

- 1) Hezekiah's tears;
- 2) God's own sake; and,
- 3) David's sake.

Are we to assume that God doesn't heal a person based on their merits of righteousness, or should we assume the opposite?

## Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 32a:

Here is a rabbinic discussion of what one should do to bring about health. R. Isaac ben Rab Judah said, "if a person falls sick he is told, 'Show thy merits and be quit.'" When asked by Mar 'Ukba for the proof text, it is interesting to note that the Hezekiah text is not cited. The text which is cited is Deuteronomy 22:8. This verse speaks about the necessity of building a protecting barrier around the roof to prevent a worker from falling off. However, when used as the proof text, the verse is not cited in its context, rather only the last four words are alluded to. This phrase reads, " *לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם* <sup>לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם</sup> *לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם* <sup>לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם</sup> *לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם*," meaning, "if the one who falls will fall from it [the roof], or "if any man fall from it."

In context, this refers to the liability for a man who falls from the roof; out of context, it is subject to a different interpretation. Because there is no genderless third person in the Hebrew language, the English expression, "from it [the roof]" must be read "*לִי וְלִכָּל הָעָם*" or "from him." This can also be interpreted, "from within him." Thus Rabbi Isaac ben Rab Judah interprets this phrase to mean, "If a man falls [sick], [then] from within him [is his cure]." Following Rabbi Isaac ben Rab Judah's line of reasoning, if a man's cure is within him, then it must be a result of his merits. Furthermore, if he is ill at the time and cannot add to his merits, then this verse must mean that a sick person must demonstrate his merits to be healed by God.

## Stories of Recovery of Self Brought on by Prayer for Others

Genesis 20:17-18 and 21:1 (the next verse):

So Abraham prayed to God [in Abimelech's behalf]; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants; and they bore children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

And the Lord remembered Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived.

Psalms 41:2-4:

Happy is he that considereth the poor;  
The Lord will deliver him in the day of evil.  
The Lord preserve him, and keep him alive,  
Let him be called happy in the land;  
And deliver not Thou him unto the greed of his enemies.  
The Lord support him upon the bed of illness:  
Mayest Thou turn all his lying down in his sickness.

Job 42:10-17:

There is a particularly interesting story of healing in the book of Job. After suffering the most painful illness imaginable, "vile sores from the soles of his feet to his crown," [Job 2:7] he is finally healed when he prays for the behalf of others. "And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends...[and many other good things]... After this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

Babylonian Talmud Bava Kamma 92a:

Here is an exposition of the Job verse, "the lesson taught by our Rabbis that one who solicits mercy for his fellow while he himself is in need of the same thing" will be answered first. This lesson is also derived from Genesis 20:17 where Abraham prays for Abimelech's behalf, and God healed Abimelech and his wife. Then, immediately following, in Genesis 21:1, the text relates that God remembered His promise to Sarah that she and Abraham would have a child. The pairing of these two verses, Job 42:10 and Genesis 20:17 is also found in Numbers Rabbah 19:23.

## Stories of Recovery Brought on by the Prayers of Another Person

Genesis 20:17-18:

And Abraham prayed unto God; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants; and they bore children. For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.

Genesis 25:21:

And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord let Himself be entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Numbers 12:1-15:

Miriam and Aaron had spoken ill of Moses about his marriage to the Kushite woman, and God had appeared to them in a cloud:

And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and He departed. And when the cloud was removed from over the Tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam; and, behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said unto Moses: 'Oh my lord, lay not, I pray thee, sin upon us, for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned. Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.' And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying: 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee.'

Afterwards, Miriam was healed.

Numbers 21:5-9:

And the people [of Israel] spoke against God, and against Moses: 'Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, and there is no water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.' And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said: 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us.' And Moses prayed for the people.

And the Lord said unto Moses: 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass,

that every one that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live.' And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon the pole; and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.

First Kings 13:1-7:

The story is told of Jerobaum who heard that Josiah would be born to the House of David and that bad things would happen to Jerobaum. Jerobaum then put out his hand to stop it, and his arm dried up and froze. Jerobaum then asked the prophet to pray to God, and he did, and his arm was healed.

First Kings 17:17-22:

And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him....

And he [Elijah] cried unto the Lord, and said: 'O Lord my God, has Thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?' And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said: 'O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come back into him.' And the Lord hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back into him, and he revived.

Second Kings 4:32-35:

And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. he went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed into the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon him; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house once to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

## Second Kings 6:17:

And Elisha prayed, and said: 'Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

## Second Kings 6:20:

And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said: 'Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.' And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

## Second Chronicles 30:18-21:

For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying: 'The good Lord pardon every one that setteth his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, though [he be] not [cleansed] according to the purification that pertaineth to holy things.' And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

## Mishna Berakoth 5:5:

It was related of R. Hanina ben Dosa that he used to pray for the sick and say, this one will die, this one will live. They said to him: 'How do you know?' He replied: 'If my prayer comes out fluently [is fluent in my mouth], I know that he is accepted, but if not, then I know that he is rejected.'

## Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 5b:

R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. 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.' He gave him his hand and he [R. Johanan] raised him.

R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. 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.' He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? They replied: 'The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.'

There is a third, similar, story of healing on the same

## Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 6a:

R. Bibi b. Abaye did so [he followed the superstition of putting powder into his eye], and saw them [demons] and came to harm. The scholars, however, prayed for him and he recovered.

## Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 34b:

Our Rabbis taught: Once the son of R. Gamaliel fell ill. He sent two scholars to R. Hanina b. Dosa to ask him to pray for him. When he saw them he went up to an upper chamber and prayed for him. When he came down he said to them: 'Go, the fever has left him.' They said to him: 'Are you a prophet?' He replied: 'I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I learnt this from experience. If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he is accepted: but if not, I know that he is rejected.' They sat down and made a note of the exact moment. When they came to R. Gamaliel, he said to them: 'By the temple service! You have not been a moment too soon or too late, but so it happened: at that very moment the fever left him and he asked for water to drink.'

## Babylonian Talmud Berakoth 34b:

The son of R. Johanan ben Zakkai fell ill. He said to him: 'Hanina my son, pray for him that he may live.' He put his head between his knees and prayed for him and he lived. Said R. Johanan ben Zakkai: 'If Ben Zakkai had stuck his head between his knees for the whole day, no notice would have taken of him.' Said his wife to him: 'Is Hanina greater than you are?' He replied to her: 'No; but he is like a servant before the king [who has permission to go in to him at any time], and I am like a nobleman before a king [who appears before him only at fixed times].'

## Babylonian Talmud Erubin 29b:

It once happened that R. Hanina ate half an onion and half of its poisonous fluid and became so ill that he was on the point of dying. His colleagues, however, begged for heavenly mercy, and he recovered because his contemporaries needed him.

## Babylonian Talmud Megillah 7b:

Rabbah and R. Zera joined together in a Purim feast. They became mellow, and Rabba arose and cut R. Zera's throat. On the next day he prayed on his behalf and revived him. Next year he said: 'Will you honour come and we will have the purim feast together.' He replied: 'A miracle does not take place on every occasion.'

## Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 3a:

Rabbi besought God's mercy on behalf of two mute men and they were cured, and it was found that they were versed in Halachah, Sifra, Sifre and the whole Talmud!

## Babylonian Talmud Yebamot 64a:

[Isaac's prayer got to God before Rebekah's in Genesis 25:21] because the prayer of a righteous man the son of a righteous man is not like the prayer of a righteous man the son of a wicked man [Rebekah's father was Bethuella].

R. Isaac stated: 'Why were our ancestors barren? Because the Holy One, blessed by He, longs to hear the prayer of the righteous.'

## Babylonian Talmud Kethuboth 103b-104a:

It was taught: Rabbi was lying [on his sickbed] at Sepphoris...

Rabbi's handmaid [a famous character known for her sagacity and learning] ascended the roof and prayed: 'The immortals desire Rabbi [to join them] and the mortals desire Rabbi [to remain with them]; may it be the will [of God] that the mortals may overpower the immortals.' When, however, she saw how often he resorted to the privy, painfully taking off his tefillin and putting them on again, she prayed: 'May it be the will [of the Almighty] that the immortals may overpower the mortals.' As the Rabbis incessantly continued their prayers for [heavenly] mercy she took up a jar and threw it down from the roof to the ground. [For a moment] they ceased praying and the soul of Rabbi departed to its eternal rest.

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 95a:

Rab Judah in the name of Rab commented on Second Samuel

21:18:

...So he [Ishbi-benob] threw David up [in the air] and stuck his spear [into the earth], saying: 'Let him fall upon it, and perish.' But Abishai pronounced the Divine Name, by means of which David was held suspended between heaven and earth. Why did not David pronounce it himself? Because 'a prisoner cannot free himself from prison.'

## Healing Through the Forgiveness of Sin

There have already been references cited above which would fall into this category. Specifically, see Genesis 20:7, Genesis 2:17-18, Numbers 21:4-9, and Second Kings 5:10. The following references supplement the Jewish views on how forgiveness of sins aids the healing process.

## Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 32a:

Our Rabbis taught: 'If one falls sick and his life is in danger, he is told, "Make confession," for all who are sentenced to death make confession.'

## Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 41a:

R. Alexandri said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: 'A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases." [Psalms 103:3]

R. Hamnuna said: 'He [then] returns to the days of his youth, for it is written, "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." [Job 33:25]

## Prayers for the Prevention of Disease

Nachmanides commentary on Exodus 23:25:

"And ye shall serve the Eternal your God [and no sickness will come]"--Means that service by offering or prayer is to be devoted to the Divine Name.

Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 32a:

R. Isaac the son of Rab Judah said: 'Let one always pray for mercy not to fall sick.'

Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah 16a:

R. Joseph said: 'Whose authority do we follow nowadays in praying [daily] for the sick and for the ailing? Whose authority? That of R. Jose. Or if you like I can say that it is after all that of the Rabbis, but that at the same time we follow the counsel of R. Isaac. For R. Isaac said: 'Supplication is good for a man whether before the doom is pronounced or after it is pronounced.'

Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah 18a:

R. Meir used to say: 'Two men take to their bed suffering equally from the same disease, or two men are before a criminal court to be judged for the same offense; yet one gets up [heals] and the other does not get up, one escapes death and the other does not escape death. When does one get up and the other not? Why does one escape death and the other not? Because one prayed and was answered, and the other prayed and was not answered. Why was one answered and the other not? One prayed with his whole heart and was therefore answered, the other did not pray with his whole heart and was not answered.'

R. Eleazar, however, said: 'The one man was praying before his final sentence had been pronounced [in heaven], the other after his final sentence had been pronounced.'

R. Isaac said: 'Supplication is good for a man whether before the final sentence has been pronounced or after.'

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 44b:

"Hadst thou prepared thy prayer before thy trouble came?" [Job 36:19, interpretation based on two puns] R. Eleazar said: 'One should always offer up prayer before misfortune comes; for had not Abraham anticipated trouble by prayer between Beth-el and Ai [cf. Genesis 12:8], there would not have remained of Israel's sinners a remnant or a survivor [at the Battle of Ai in the days of Joshua].

Resh Lakish said: 'He who devotes his strength to prayer below [on earth], has no enemies [to overcome] above [in heaven].

## Appendix C: Aphorisms of Healing

Throughout the traditional Jewish texts, there are many references to healing which are not directly related to either a prayer or a story of healing. These aphorisms help to define the Jewish view of how prayer affects the healing process.

Leviticus 19:14:

Thou shalt not curse the deaf,  
Nor put a stumbling-block before the blind.

Psalms 41:2-4:

Happy is he who considers the poor;  
The Lord will deliver him in the day of evil.  
The Lord preserve him, and keep him alive, let him be called  
happy in the land;  
And deliver not Thou him unto the greed of his enemies.  
The Lord support him upon the bed of illness;  
May Thou turn all his lying down in his sickness.

Psalms 133:1-3:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brethren to dwell together in unity!  
It is like the precious oil upon the head,  
Coming down upon the beard;  
Even Aaron's beard,  
That comes down upon the collar of his garments;  
Like the dew of Hermon,  
That comes down upon the mountains of Tzion:  
For there the Lord commanded the blessing,  
Even life for ever.

Proverbs 3:7-8:

Be not wise in thine own eyes;  
Fear the Lord, and depart from evil;  
It shall be health to thy navel,  
And marrow to thy bones.

Proverbs 4:22-23:

For they [God's words] are life unto those that find them,  
And health to all their flesh.

Above all that thou guardest keep thy heart;  
For out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 12:18:

There is [one] that speaks like the piercings of of a sword;  
But the tongue of the wise is health.

Proverbs 13:12:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick;  
But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 13:17:

A wicked messenger falls into evil;  
But a faithful ambassador is health.

Proverbs 14:13:

Even in laughter the heart aches;  
And the end of mirth is heaviness.

Proverbs 14:30:

A tranquil heart is the life to the flesh;  
But envy is the rottenness of the bones.

Proverbs 15:4:

A soothing tongue is a tree of life;  
But perverseness therein is a wound to the spirit.

Proverbs 17:22:

A merry heart is a good medicine;  
But a broken spirit dries the bones.

Proverbs 18:14:

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;  
But a broken spirit who can bear?

Job 5:18:

For He makes sore, and binds up;  
He wounds, and His hands make whole.

Ecclesiastes 3:3:

A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up.

Ben Sira 38:

Show the physician due honor  
For the Lord has created him;  
Healing comes from the Most High.  
The Lord has created medicines out of the earth,  
And a sensible person will not refuse them.  
My child, be not negligent when you are sick,  
But pray to the Lord and He will cure you.

Song of Songs Rabbah 6:17:

A gate which is not open for the Commandments  
Is open for the physician.

Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 11:10:

The sick person needs merits and prayer in order that God  
heal him more than the healthy one who is not struck by  
illness.

Talmud Shabbat 127a:

R. Judah b. Shila said in R. Assi's name in R. Johanan's  
name: There are six things, the fruit of which man  
eats in this world, while the principal remains for him  
for the world to come, viz.: Hospitality to wayfarers,  
visiting the sick, meditation in prayer, early  
attendance at the Beyt Hamidrash, rearing one's sons to  
the study of Torah, and judging one's neighbour in the  
scale of merit.

Talmud Shabbat 137a:

Luda taught: The day of his recovery is like the day of his birth.

Talmud Pesachim 68a:

Raba: It is written, "I kill and I make alive" [Deuteronomy 22:39], whilst it is also written, "I have wounded, and I heal" [Deuteronomy 22:39]. Seeing that He even resurrects, how much the more does He heal!

Talmud Megillah 13b:

"After these things" [Esther 3:1] After what?--Raba said: After God had created a healing for the blow [which was about to fall]. For Resh Lakish has said: The Holy One, blessed be He, does not smite Israel unless He has created for them a healing beforehand, as it says, "When I have healed Israel, then is the iniquity of Ephraim uncovered." [Hosea 7:1]

Talmud Yebamoth 64a:

R. Isaac further stated: Why is the prayer of the righteous compared to a pitchfork? [based on a pun of the root { 7 78 }]. As a pitchfork turns the sheaves of grain from one position to another, so does the prayer of the righteous turn the dispensations of the Holy One, blessed by He, from the attributes of anger to the attribute of mercy.

Talmud Yebamoth 71b:

The day of a child's recovery is like the day of his birth....No; the day of his recovery is superior to the day of his birth.

## Talmud Nedarim 38b:

It is taught: There is no measure for visiting the sick. What is meant by, 'there is no measure for visiting the sick?' R. Joseph thought to explain it: its reward is unlimited. Said Abaye to him: Is there a definite measure of reward for any precept? But we learnt: Be as heedful of a light precept as of a serious one, for thou knowest not the grant of reward for precepts? But Abaye explained it: Even a great person must visit a humble one. Raba said: [One must visit] even a hundred times a day. R. Abba son of R. Hanina said: He who visits an invalid takes away a sixtieth of his illness [var. pain].

## Talmud Nedarim 41a:

R. Alexandri said in the name of R. Hiyya B. Abba: A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." [Psalms 103:3] R. Hamnuna said: He [then] returns to the days of his youth, for it is written, "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth." [Job 33:25]...

R. Alexandri also said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: Greater is the miracle wrought for the sick than for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. [For] that of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah [concerned] a fire kindled by man, which all can extinguish; whilst that of a sick person is [in connection with] a heavenly fire [i.e. fever raises one's temperature], and who can extinguish that?

## Talmud Nedarim 41a-b:

Raba said: Feverishness, were it not a forerunner of the angel of death, it would be as salutary once in thirty days as thorns which surround [and protect] a palm tree, and as theriak [a painful drug believed to cure snake bites] to the body.

Talmud Sotah 5a:

Hezekiah said: A man's prayer is not heard unless he makes his heart [soft] like flesh; as it is said, "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, shall all flesh come to worship." [Isaiah 66:23]  
Concerning flesh it is written, "And it is healed," [Leviticus 13:18] but it is not written concerning man, "And **he** is healed." [From this we learn that a person must be humble and make his pride soft like flesh, so that he may be healed.]

Talmud Bava Metzia 59a:

R. Eleazar said: ...Yet though the gates of prayer are locked, the gates of tears are not, for it is written, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears." [Psalms 39:13, meaning that earnest prayer from the depths of the heart is always accepted.]

## Appendix D:

### Morphologies of Biblical Words Dealing with Sickness and Recovery

Much can be learned about the Biblical view of sickness and recovery by an examination of the words used. There are three primary ways of studying these Hebrew words. First, we can see how the same word is used in other contexts in the Bible. Second, we can take advantage of the Biblical writing style of parallelism and analyze words which are in parallel passages to our given word. And finally, we can study the etymology of the given word, and see if there are subtle nuances in meaning between it and its corresponding words in cognate languages.

#### Words of Sickness

[חל] = to be weak, to be sick

Occurs many times in the Bible.

Noun forms:

חל  
חל  
חל  
חל  
חל

חל = sickness

Parallels חל (pain) in Isaiah 53:3,4

Parallels חל (wound) in Hosea 5:13

Parallels חל (wound) in Deuteronomy 28:59,61

Parallels חל (smite) in Jeremiah 6:7

$\text{קִשְׁיָא}$  = sickness, disease

Parallels  $\text{שֶׁדַּי}$  -  $\text{שֶׁדַּי}$  (stroke, wound, plague, plague-spot) in  
First Kings 8:37 and Second Chronicles 6:28

$\text{קִשְׁיָא}$  = sickness, disease

Found only in Proverbs 18:14 and Second Chronicles 21:15

$\text{קִשְׁיָא}$  = sickness, suffering (caused by wounds)

Found only in Second Chronicles 24:25

$[\text{כָּדַע}]$  = to be in pain

Possibly from Arabic: to be sorrowful, sad

Possibly from Assyrian: pain, ruin

Occurs many times in the Bible

Verb  $\text{כָּדַע}$

Noun  $\text{כָּדַע}$

$\text{כָּדַע}$  = to be in pain

Parallels  $\text{שֶׁדַּי}$  (his soul mourns) in Job 14:22

Parallels  $\text{יָדַע}$  (poor, afflicted, humble) in Psalms 69:30

Parallels  $\text{יָדַע}$  (a pricking brier) in Ezekiel 28:24 with  
the context of national distress

Parallels  $\text{שֶׁדַּי}$  (wound severely, smite, shatter) in  
Job 5:18

$\text{כָּדַע}$  = pain

Parallels  $\text{קִשְׁיָא}$  (sickness) in Isaiah 17:11

Parallels  $\text{שֶׁדַּי}$  (wound) in Jeremiah 15:18

$\text{כָּדַע}$  (pain of the heart) parallels  $\text{כָּדַע}$   
(broken spirit) in Isaiah 65:14 with the context of  
mental pain

$[\text{כָּדַע}]$  = to be ill, unwell, sorrowful, miserable, menstrual  
sickness

Found in Leviticus 12:2, Deuteronomy 7:15, Isaiah 1:5, and  
Lamentations 1:13

[713] = to press down and out, wound (as needing to have its matter pressed out)

Found only in Jeremiah 30:13, Obadiah 7, and Hosea 5:13

## Words of Healing

[כִּוַּר] = to heal

Possibly from Arabic = to darn, mend, repair, pacify

Possibly from Ethiopic = To stitch together, mend

Verb: כִּוַּר

Nouns: כִּוַּרִּי , כִּוַּרִּי = healing, cure, health

מִכְוָר = remedy, medicine

מִכְוָר = healing (only in Proverbs 3:8)

פְּכִוָר = shades, ghosts

Personal Names:

כִּוַּר First Chronicles 8:2, a Benjaminite

כִּוַּרִּי First Chronicles 4:12, a Judahite

כִּוַּר First Chronicles 8:37, in Saul's line

כִּוַּר Numbers 13:9, a Benjaminite

כִּוַּר First Chronicles 3:21, in David's line

First Chronicles 4:22, a Simeonite

First Chronicles 7:2, an Issacharite

First Chronicles 9:43, in Saul's line

Nehemiah 3:9

שְׁכִוָר Joshua 18:27, a Benjaminite

כִּוַּר = to heal

Occurs many times in the Bible

Opposite שִׁנָּה (wound severely, smite, shatter) in  
Job 5:18 and Deuteronomy 32:39

Opposite שָׁחַט (smite) in Isaiah 19:22

כִּוַּרִּי , כִּוַּרִּי = healing, cure, health

Parallels שְׁלֵמָה (peace, completeness) in Jeremiah 14:19

Parallels חַיָּה (life) in Proverbs 4:22

רִפְּאָה = remedy, medicine

Only found in Jeremiah 30:13; 46:11, and Ezekiel 30:21

רְפָאִים = shades, ghosts

Only found in Isaiah 14:9; 26:4, 19, Psalms 88:11,  
Proverbs 2:18; 9:18; 21:16, and Job 26:5

Parallels רְפָאִים (dead people) in Isaiah 26:4 and  
Psalms 88:11

Parallels רְפָאִיִּם (your dead people) in Isaiah 26:19

Parallels רְפָאִים (dead) in Proverbs 2:18

עָלָה = to go up, ascend, climb

עָלָה = raise up, strengthen, heal (of new flesh and skin  
forming over wound) found in Jeremiah 30:13; 46:11

עָלָה = health recovered

אָרַךְ = to lengthen

אָרַךְ = lengthening of one's days, healing found in  
Isaiah 58:8 and Jeremiah 8:22; 30:17; 33:6

חָבַל = to bind up, gird

חָבַל = healer in Isaiah 3:7

וְיַחְבֵּדֵנוּ (He will bind us) parallels וְיִרְפֵּאֵנוּ (He  
will heal us) of God in Hosea 6:1

חָלָה = to depart, i.e. to be cured, healed

Possibly from the Aramaic = to be freed

חָלָה (he will cure) parallel to רָפָא (to heal) in  
Hosea 5:13

חָלָה (healing, cure) found in Proverbs 17:22

חַלְחַלְתִּי = weakening, healing

Found only in Nahum 3:19

יְשׁוּעָה = salvation, safety, health

Meaning of health in Jeremiah 17:14, and Psalms 42:11; 43:5

שְׁלֵמָה = peace, completeness, health

Meaning of health in Second Samuel 20:9, Isaiah 57:19,21,  
Jeremiah 33:6, and Ezekiel 34:25

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