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TOWARDS A RECOVERY OF PRAYER:

A REFORM RESPONSE TO HEALING

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

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DIGEST

Toraitic, Talmudic, and other traditional Rabbinic sources have addressed questions regarding illness and healing. Their focus generally revolved around man's relationship to God, and the rightness of that relationship. While the consequences of that relationship were in God's hands, man had the power of intervention, through behavior or prayer, to change God's decree. The Rabbis of old found permission for intervention in Torah and expanded upon it in their legal texts.

Through discussions of the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim and the role of physicians, the Rabbis offer various approaches to intervention, in God's plan for health, through prayer. Their words gave strength to the suffering and offered visions of the World- To- Come to those who found no relief in this life. Jews found comfort in an all powerful God who attended to their needs, hopes, and desires. Prayer was their tool for communication with God to express their concerns and feelings.

Today, Reform Jews are distanced from prayer as a vehicle for healing. Issues relating to the language and the efficacy of prayer have precluded its use. However, with a resurgence in Reform Jewish connections with ritual and spirituality, modern Jews are looking to reconnect with prayer.

This paper is an attempt to bridge the gap between

traditional Jewish prayer for healing and modern sensibilities. With a foundation in traditional Rabbinic sources, I discuss the limitations and possibilities for prayer in the healing process for the modern Jew. In the concluding chapter, my goal is to leave the reader with a sense of strength built with traditional rubrics and girded with the thought and sensitivity of the modern Reform Jew.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1988, the Central Conference of American Rabbis published a work entitled Gates of Healing. In it, the Rabbis included prayers and readings, based on Psalms, as an inspiration and comfort for those who are ill at home or confined to the hospital. According to its authors, "its message comes from both traditional and modern sources, combining the past and present to bring comfort and strength."(back cover) The authors also mentioned that it was important for this publication to be printed in large type so that it would be accessible to every age group.(back cover)

When the authors stated that large type would make this work accessible, they neglected to consider its substance. A work only becomes accessible if the matter with which it is concerned is accessible. The prayers and readings are the matter in Gates of Healing, and it is the focus of this paper to examine what makes prayer accessible to the Reform Jew, other than large print.

Gates of Healing, contains material from both traditional and modern sources. The meaning of the words "traditional" and "modern" are called into question, when the authors do not realize that what is traditional is not necessarily old, and what is new is not necessarily modern. Traditional prayer text is that which is deemed traditional by the people it serves. Modern prayer text is likewise

determined by the people who use it. It appears that, in Gates of Healing, traditional sources are those produced ages ago. The modern sources are those which contain language responsive to the patient's needs throughout their suffering and healing.

What the authors neglect to recognize is both traditional source material for the stated outpourings of the individual, and modern prayers that address the needs and concerns of ill people without reference to God in traditional formulas. Readings like, "O God, you know my feelings..."(p.23) address the concerns of an individual coping with a modern hospital situation, however, the relationship of an all knowing God to the situation is not a modern understanding of God. Over and over again God is expressed as "Creator", "Willful", and "Merciful". All of these attributes are found in traditional sources. Also, the inclusion of ancient Hebrew text may serve to amuse the reader, but lack of transliterations may make it inaccessible. Even the Shema(p. 10) is left untransliterated. While many Jews may recognize it by title or when led by another person, solitude, suffering and unfamiliarity may preclude its use.

Gates of Healing was an attempt, by the Reform Movement to address the needs of its members in times of suffering and recovery. Since its creation, many other volumes have been added to the shelves of Jews looking for

strength and direction in healing. To date, however, I am unable to find a "modern" work that provides Jewish prayer, to those in need of healing, in an honest and acceptable form.

The purpose of this paper is to address a need for Jewish prayer, in healing, that appeals to the sensitivities of the Modern Jew. I will address traditional sources as they authorize and support a Jewish perspective on healing. They are provided to lay a foundation upon which will stand modern questions addressing the needs and concerns of a Modern Jew. We are in the midst of an era in which Reform Jews, who after years of disassociation with prayer, are looking to address their needs in terms of spirituality and prayer.[1] During this search for spirituality, modern thinkers are sometimes disillusioned with ancient words and formulas and seek out other resources. It is my hope to address the modern thinker, in an effort to provide alternative perspectives on ancient language and ritual. The goal being to make prayer truly accessible to these Jews in times of illness and healing.

To this end, after providing traditional Jewish source material on healing and prayers for healing, I will attempt to address modern Jewish questions about the role prayer takes in healing. These questions include God's role in

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[1]Winston, Diane, "Searching for Spirituality- Reform Judaism Responds", Moment, Volume 17, Number 3, June 1992, pp.29-35.

healing, the individual's role and concerns in healing, and the language of prayer that inhibits or enables one to pray for healing. In the concluding chapter, an attempt will be made to bridge traditional sources with modern sensibilities, which can connect the modern person praying with Jewish tradition.

Chapter 1

This chapter will begin a discussion of illness and healing as it was addressed by the rabbis of the Talmud and commentaries that followed. The purpose of this chapter is to extract Talmudic and other classical rabbinic views of illness and healing. Emphasis will be placed on the causes of illness and measures used to bring about healing. Also, the role of intermediaries, in the process of healing, will be addressed. Intermediaries include physicians and others who wish to participate in healing.

Before beginning a discussion of healing, the natural place to start is the question of "from where does illness come?" For it is in the answer to this question that our Jewish sources divulge the method to healing. If illness is man made, then the approach to its remedy will be different than if illness is thought to come from God. Also, if illness is God given, one must then look at the intention of illness in our lives. If illness does come from God, our theology dictates its intention. We are called to question our behavior and our relationship with God, to determine what measures will relieve the situation and return the individual to a right relationship with God.

Therefore, our first priority is to determine the nature of illness, as an indicator of the state of our relationship with God, as is expressed throughout Jewish history. Since our primary document describing the

relationship between man and God is the Torah, it is through Toraitic reflections on illness that this discussion begins.

"The central perspective on healing in the Hebrew Scriptures is that illnesses are caused by sin and healed by God."[2] This is based on Exodus 15:26: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." In this passage, the power to heal, and therefore the power to make ill, belongs to God. As these are God's words, expressed through the hands of Moses, there is no greater authority for this interpretation. Also, its place in the Torah, as a piece of Israel's first communications from God, expresses its primacy in the doctrine of Israel. Our later writings, in Talmud and in later commentaries, then allude to this message in an effort to understand its theology. For example, a sick man was seen going into an idolatrous shrine and upon leaving he was healed. The Rabbis of the Talmud state that this was a coincidental event and that God had already ordained this time for the end of the man's illness.(Avodah Zarah, 55a.) The shrine had nothing to do with the healing process. Healing was brought by God.

In Exodus 17:11 and Numbers 21:9, Moses' raised hands healed the people. "In both cases", says the Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 29a), "do you really think it was the upraised hands of Moses- or the upward gaze to the banner that saved

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[2]Hogan, Larry P.,Healing in the Second Temple Period, Freiberg, Schweiz: univ.-Verl.: Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1992. p.301.

and healed? No. but when the people look heavenward and subject their hearts to their Father in heaven they are healed."[3] Already, two chapters later in Torah, the people have internalized their relationship with God. Later, the Rabbis of the Talmud offer interpretations of biblical relationships, recognizing God as the source of healing and illness. It is no longer simply a statement made by God about His power in healing. Now the people of the Torah feel the effects of this statement. They are healed when they turn their focus and attention to God. The Rabbis also express, in this Talmud passage, their recognition of the power of God in relationship to illness and healing. They also represent men as having the power to turn to God for healing. People are given the freedom to choose healing by directing their actions appropriately.

Beyond the Torah, Biblical sources address questions regarding illness and the relationship of man to God in the process of healing. Job confronts the possibility that illnesses are related to one's relationship with God. He questions the validity of the point based on his outstanding connection to God.(Chapter 9) "He nonetheless, acknowledges that it is God who afflicted him and only God who could remedy his desperate situation."[4]

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[3]Feldman, David M., Health and Medicine in the Jewish tradition, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1986. p.17.

[4]Hogan, p.302.

As later biblical commentators look at man's relationship to God, they begin to address the purposes for illness in our lives. Iben Ezra has been quoted as saying that "Sickness, which is an act of God", is presumed to be manifestations of divine rebuke or punishment and only God may heal or remove them.(Iben Ezra's commentary to 2 Chronicles 16:12) This system works if we presume illness to be part of a divine plan operating with the concepts of sin and retribution. The Rabbis did operate under this set of beliefs and therefore responded to questions concerning illness with a methodology for realigning oneself with God.

The question then is what are appropriate measures to aid in healing once one had determined that sin had brought illness to that individual? The answer lies not in the method employed, rather it is concerned with the individual's acceptance of Divine authority. "Though the Mosaic code in its numerous health regulations may be viewed as preventive medicine par excellence, the Hebrew Scriptures do not give preventing illness as the motive for observing the regulations. Rather, they are to be observed out of obedience to God as an expression of the covenant relationship with Him."[5] To begin with, the Rabbis saw the adherence to the codes presented in the Torah as a primary aid in healing. Since one became ill do to a lack of alignment with the ideals and practices found in Torah, it

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[5]Hogan, p.305.

was only logical that realignment with these ideals and practices would bring about healing.

The book of Exodus, for example, contains statements of moral and ethical duties based on this precept. These duties, when observed, could be seen as preventive medicine or later as aids in healing. "If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all of his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon Mitzrayim: for I am the Lord that healeth thee."(Exodus 15:26) This biblical verse is specifically invoked by Ramban to direct Jewish practice around healing to the observance of Divine command.[6] Ramban sees the use of doctors as secondary to following the commandments of the Torah. This, however is an unnatural state of affairs, one in which Israel is unlikely to find itself. This is due to the fact that Israel had accustomed itself to seeking doctors and not seeking God for help in healing.

Ramban recognizes that people should not have to take

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[6]Ramban's commentary to Leviticus 26:11. "When Israel is in perfect accord with God, constituting a large number, their affairs are not at all conducted by the natural order of things, neither in connection with themselves, nor with reference to their land, neither collectively nor individually, for God blesses their bread and their water, and removes sickness from their midst, so that they do not need a physician and do not have to observe the rules of medicine, just as He said, "for I am the Lord that healeth thee." (Translation by Chavel)

medication for illness if they are in line with God's teaching. The problem is one of fact: Why, if all illness and healing emanate from God, do Jews report to physicians? Rambam's answer affirms the basic theology, but he posits that our own choices have changed that original state of affairs. Biblical theology cannot explain history, therefore, theology is consigned to an ideal world where all Jews possess perfect faith. Therefore, Ramban allows for the intercession of physicians but warns against seeking them. He continues with the thought that if people had not accustomed themselves to taking medication, they would be punished according to their sin and would be healed by God. If one follows the teaching of God, they are not ruled by nature, rather they are under God's control. It is under God's will that healing is granted.

Without Divine sanction for healing, a person in line with this system of Jewish thought would be unable to affect the course of their illness. The illness would be seen as Divine providence and the ill individual would have to accept their fate. But the Torah does give license to heal. And, that license is given to the physician. Specific Divine license for a physician to heal is derived by the Rabbis in the Biblical phrase "and heal he shall heal"(Exodus 21:19) which relates to compensation for personal injuries."[7] With this license, Man is then able to impact his own healing.

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[7]Baba Kamma 85a.

The Jewish people is proud of its physicians. It has a long history of involvement in the medical fields.[8] Many of our Rabbis also hold degrees in the medical arts. In this, we can see that the Rabbi and physician are compatible career choices and the ministrations of one do not necessarily interfere with the other. This does not, however, negate the relationship Jews have with God in relationship to healing. The physician must always recognize that God is the true healer of the sick and that a doctor is only an instrument of God in the ministrations of the sick."[9]

As they do with all other human endeavors, the Rabbis express the need to find scriptural proof for the actions of physicians. The rabbis interpret Exodus 21:19 as the Toraitic granting of the power to heal by God to the physician.[10] And, once this power had been granted, we were commanded to use physicians.[11] It is then through this interpretation that the status of the physician is elevated and healing becomes a respectable profession. Like the career of Rabbi, the role of the physician was held in high esteem. During the early centuries, this profession was

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[8]Feldman, p.15.

[9]Rosner, p.9.

[10]Babba Kamma 85a.

[11]Tur to Yoreh Deah 336.

given a similar spiritual status to that of Rabbi.[12]

Is it only the physician who has the right and the power to heal in Jewish tradition? What is clear, from rabbinic teachings, is that the Jew has the power to affect healing in other ways than professional medicine. The rabbinic law of Bikkur Holim, the requirement of visiting the sick, not only gives permission to the individual to intercede between man and God in healing, but it goes further to mandate this behavior.

While the physician's skill is seen as an instrument of God's Divine will, the visitor preforming the act of Bikkur Holim is stepping outside the system in hopes of changing the Divine decree. This behavior seems to contradict the Rabbis' theological understanding, however it continues to be strictly enforced.

The answer to this dilemma seems to lie in the intention of the Rabbis in regard to the results of this mitzvah. With regard to Bikkur Holim, along with visiting to make the patient feel better, an additional purpose of the visit is to recite prayers on behalf of the ill person. The code of Jewish Law Incorporates this element.[13] But the primary purpose of visiting is to perform an act of kindness. The essential feature of this mitzvah is to attend to the patient's needs, to determine what he needs for his

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[12]Feldman, p.49.

[13]Yoreh Deah, 335:5.

benefit, and to give him the pleasure of one's company.[14]

The requirements of the mitzvah of Bikkur Holim are, however, extended to include requesting mercy on behalf of the sick individual.[15] Here, the visitor is required to intervene between the ill person and God. This act is called into question when it is thought that the illness is serving a Divine purpose. The person praying is then questioning God's decree, as well as interfering with Divine providence. So, while the visitor is providing acts of love and kindness, they are imposing their wishes upon the situation, that the person heal in spite of their apparent lack of connection with God. The act of healing is still in the hands of God. And, after the visiter leaves, the process of healing is left unresolved.

This process of healing begins even before the individual falls prey to illness. The rabbis are clear that illness and healing are derived from the relationship that one maintains with God through their involvement with mitzvot. It is therefore up to the individual to maintain this relationship in a manner that avoids illness. If they do fall prey to illness, it will take an act of merit to restore their health.[16] It would seem more difficult to achieve this, yet the Talmud makes this process easier than

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[14]Yoreh Deah, 335:3.

[15]Yoreh Deah, 335:6.

[16]Shabbat 32a.

relying on doctors for restored health.

In the Talmud, the rabbis posit that an individual with a headache should turn to Torah to relieve their pain.[17] In doing so, the rabbis of the Talmud direct the individual to consider their relationship with Toraitic tradition and the teachings associated with it. It allows the individual the possibility of realigning with God's Will, thus insuring healing. Again, the Talmud strengthens the position that illness is a function of relationship with God and that sin, or disconnection with Toraitic teachings, is a cause of this result of illness.

The rabbis of the Talmud, like their predecessors of the end of the Second Temple period, also posit however, that seeking the use of physicians is a valid form of intervention in healing. "There are several factors that bring healing to man. The difference between what brings illness and what brings healing is this: the causes of illness are not necessarily related to sin, though they frequently are. The means of healing, however, are closely related to their source. Those means are sometimes unusual but their source is, nonetheless, the same, The One God of Israel."[18] And that source favors life over death. And in doing so is willing to accept human intervention in the

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[17]Eruvin 54a.,"Chash b'rosho ya'asok b'Torah", If one has a headache let him get involved in Torah.

[18]Hogan, p.312.

process of healing and recovery.

"Like the pithy statement in another mishnaic context, 'All is foreseen but freedom is given.' (Mishnah Avot 3:19) which sets up the paradox of God's foreknowledge and man's free will, so human efforts at healing and God's ultimate power in the effectiveness or otherwise of this healing are simultaneously affirmed. God is both omnipotent and benevolent, and so we pray that our success will be His Will."[19] Health and healing are in line with Jewish teachings. All of the text that the rabbis left us points to the fact that our efforts to keep the mitzvot are to bring about this end.

While it is true that every life ends in death, the life we have is intended by God to be a healthy one. "To maintain the body as well as the soul in good health is a religious imperative; to do so reflects Jewish teachings concerning body-and-soul and other theological issues, which have contributed to the role of Judaism and Jewish physicians in medicine and medical ethics."[20] The circle is complete. First there is devotion to God and then healing follows, or there is healing and then devotion to God. Either way the cycle begins and ends with God. And, whether the person seeks the aid of a physician or he is visited by someone who asks for mercy on his behalf, recovery is

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[19]Feldman, p.29.

[20]Feldman, p.15.

dependent on the Will of God.

Once it is acknowledged that an individual can pray on behalf of another individual, the question is then "what is the power of this prayer?" One answer is that prayer helps by "bringing the individual in line with divine principles of wholesomeness."[21] Another answer continues a similar line of thought. In the Talmud, the question is addressed in reference to the raised hands of Moses. In Exodus 17:11 and Numbers 21:9, Moses raised his hands and healed the people. The Talmudic scholars responded to the plain meaning of this verse. They stated that it was not the upraised hands of Moses that healed the people, rather it was their focusing their attention towards God.[22] The people directed their efforts towards that which would bring about healing.

Yet, this effort was done without an expectation that Divine intervention would be forthcoming. The individuals in these two Biblical instances were merely focusing their attention towards God and not taking an active role in their healing on an earthly and practical level. We find, however, Rabbinic support for an obligation to guard one's health. According to Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Deot 4:1, "Since the body is healthy and sound (one treads) in the way of the Lord, it being impossible to understand or know anything of the knowledge of the Creator when one is sick,

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[21]Feldman, p.29.

[22]Rosh HaShanah 29a.

it is obligatory upon man to avoid things which are detrimental to the body and acclimate himself to things which heal and fortify it." This requires the individual to really take care of their body even though one has the belief that God is the Great Healer. In Deuteronomy 4:15, we read,"v'nishmartem me'od l'nafshotaichem." Literally this means to guard your "soul". It is then up to the individual to take responsibility for their health and to make every effort to prevent illness.(Hilchot Rotzeach 11:4) Then, when illness does arise, the individual has a sense of ownership for the illness and can take necessary measures to resolve the illness. Whether the illness is a result of falling out of line with Divine principles of Holiness or simply not paying special attention to one's health, the responsibility for alleviating the situation is on the individual. The responsibility of the others around him, in regard to his particular healing, fall then under the rubric of Bikkur Holim and do not negate or mitigate the responsibility of the owner of the illness to seek healing. It seems that the individual should have a built in sense to reach out for healing and to take an active role in maintaining health. Yet at times we see individuals leave their lot in the hands of Divine fate and relinquish any responsibility for their health. When one begins to participate in his own healing, there may also be a mechanism in him to ask another for support in this effort. The other then has to decide whether

his efforts to intervene are in the realm of what God has planned for this individual or at least are in line with a Divine plan of wholesomeness. The rabbis are quite clear that in the face of illness, action on the part of the physician or the visitor is an act of God. The Physician may feel, however, that intervention would seem to exhibit a lack of faith in God. A story from the rabbis elaborates on the root of this dilemma. It is the story of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva.

"Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva were walking through the streets of Jerusalem and met a sick man who asked them: 'How can I be cured?' They answered: 'Do thus and such until you are cured.' He said to them: 'But who afflicted me?' 'The Holy One, blessed be He,' they answered. 'So how can you interfere in a matter that is not your concern? God afflicted me and you wish to heal?' The rabbis then asked: 'What is your vocation?' 'I am the tiller of the soil. Here is a vine-cutter in my hand.' They asked: 'But who created the vineyard?' 'The Holy One, blessed be He.' 'Well you interfered in the vineyard which was not yours. He created it and you cut away its fruits?' they asked. 'But were I not to plow and till and fertilize and weed, the vineyard would not produce any fruit,' he explained. 'So,' they responded, 'from your own work have you not learned what is written (Ps. 103:15): as for man his days are grass. Just as the tree, if not weeded, fertilized, and plowed, will not grow

and bring forth its fruits, so with the human body. The fertilizer is the medicine and the means of healing, and the tiller of the earth is the physician."[23]

Through this story, both the physician and the ill person are granted permission to participate with one another in the process of healing. We also learn that the permission is granted by God and supported by the rabbis. It is no coincidence that the two rabbis in this story are two of our greatest sages. Their presence and support for human intervention in healing is then mandated by this story.

As we have seen, there is ample rabbinic material which allows for the intervention of humans in the affairs of healing. The role of the doctor is created through human inability to follow the ways of The Lord in strict accordance with rabbinic teachings on those paths. As was stated earlier, if one was to follow God's command completely and with a full heart, one could rely on God to heal and would not obviate the need for doctors. However, we do not live in a perfect world and human intervention in the live of each other is prescribed. Along with doctors, comes other sources of healing which include visiting the sick and prayers for healing.

The next chapter of this work will focus on Talmudic sources for healing prayers. The purpose will be to

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[23]15 Midrash Temurah, in J.D. Eisenstein, Otzar Midrashim, vol. II, pp. 580-581.

elaborate on the need and use of such prayers, as well as, the efficacy of these prayers to bring about healing. Once it is established that traditional Rabbinic authorities recognize the use of prayer in healing, I will turn my attention to modern practices and beliefs, mainly those found in the Reform movement's use of prayer.

The purpose in establishing Reform theological beliefs in the use and efficacy of prayer in healing is to attempt to link our practice, and possible practice in this area, to our traditional roots. Traditional Rabbinic Jewish prayer is closely tied to a relationship with God, in whatever form that relationship is manifest. Reform theological interpretations will then establish a foundation upon which to place prayer language and ritual.

Once this theological foundation is established, it will be possible to discuss sample practices and beliefs with regard to healing liturgy. This chapter will be focused on the relationship of spirituality, as it has been defined by Reform Jewish thinkers, and religious practice. The main purpose of this chapter will be to uncover healing prayer and practices, within the Reform movement, as well as to discover room for new practices. It is my intention to draw upon traditional sources, where ever possible, in this pursuit.

Finally, in a concluding chapter, I will attempt to address the bridges, between traditional and Reform

theologies and practices, with regard to healing. This effort will hopefully make available new Jewish practice based on information found within Jewish systems rather than searching outside traditional Jewish sources.

Chapter 2

"Rabbah b. Bar Hana said: When Rabbi Eliezer fell sick, his disciples entered his house to visit him. He said to them, 'There is a fierce wrath in the world.' They broke out in tears, but Rabbi Akiba laughed. 'Why do you laugh?', they asked him. 'Why do you cry?', he responded. They answered, 'Shall the scroll of the Torah lie in pain, and we not cry?' He replied, 'For that very reason I rejoice.'" (Sanhedrin 101a) What was it that Rabbi Akiba knew that the others did not yet know? It was the fact that God settles the debt of the righteous prior to their death so they are able to enter the World to Come with a clean slate. The others only recognized that a great sage was suffering. This suffering seemed to be unwarranted in the eyes of all the onlookers, except Rabbi Akiba.

Rabbi Akiba understood that no individual is free from sin. Being in a state of sin obviates punishment. Rabbi Eliezer fell sick because of the minor infractions he amassed throughout his life. God brought illness upon him to clean his slate. And, while he lay upon his sick bed, the disciples who came to visit him mourned the pain of such an important man. They even referred to Rabbi Eliezer as a "Scroll of the Torah". (Sanhedrin 101a) They could not imagine why God would afflict such a righteous man. Rabbi Akiba, however, was busy paying attention to the details of his teacher's life.

He noticed that all that belonged to his master, his wine, his flax, his oil, and his honey were pure and clean. Nothing disturbed Rabbi Eliezer's life. It was not until he fell ill that Rabbi Akiba was gladdened. His faith in God had been shaken until that point. Under the conditions that a righteous man would not suffer at all in this world would have led Rabbi Akiba to believe that there is no system of Divine justice. If the righteous prosper along with the wicked, in this world, then the future hope of a righteous person would be challenged. Rabbi Eliezer's suffering restored Rabbi Akiba's faith.

This text comes to teach that no one, including the most righteous person, is exempt from sin. It also teaches that the righteous suffer to relieve them of the burden of carrying their transgressions into the World to Come. Along with these points, the text also teaches that God imposes rule over individuals. God is responsible for meeting out reward and punishment according to the responsibility of the individual. In doing so, God is closely aware of the individual's interactions with the world. This is a picture of an involved and immanent God.

The individual, on the other hand, is full of the pressures of free will. The individual will reap what he sows. Transgression brings about suffering, and suffering may take the form of illness. The one who transgresses, however, can only be assured of Divine punishment but may

not experience that punishment in this world. This creates the appearance that suffering is not directed by an external force, rather it is free floating and may affect anyone at any time. Therefore, individuals who transgress should be aware that the appearance of random suffering may be just that, an appearance. It is important then for an individual who is suffering to question their past behavior and at the same time, to hope for the future. In their questioning they may redirect their focus to God and upright behavior.

Akiva makes this point to Eliezer: Hezekiah, king of Judah, found this to be true with regard to his son Manasseh. According to the Talmud, Hezekiah was known for his love of Torah. He was acknowledged for copying the proverbs of Solomon for the people to study. In doing so, the question was raised:"Now would Hezekiah king of Judah have taught the Torah to the whole world, yet not to his own son Manasseh?"(Sanhedrin 101b) The question is asked rhetorically.

Hezekiah certainly taught his son Torah. Akiva even goes so far as to say that he went to great pains in teaching Manasseh. Yet all was for naught because Manasseh did not heed the words of his father. Manasseh lived free from distress until the solders of the king of Assyria captured him. Akiva notes that it was due to the Lord that Manasseh was afflicted. Once afflicted, Manasseh turned to the Lord and prayed and humbled himself.(II Chronicles 33)

After he had suffered and prayed, God heard his pleas and restored him to Jerusalem unto his kingdom.

It was not the Torah teaching, nor was it the attention of his father that directed the path of Manasseh. It was not until he suffered that he turned towards God. And it was God that directed his suffering. God stands in this story as the focus and the director of events. Manasseh has free will until he no longer has the ability to change. God steps in and causes him pain through defeat and capture. Once Manasseh repents, God accepts his prayers. This story then has a double message.

First, it teaches that suffering has a place in the world. The place for suffering is to help redirect one towards God and the ways of God. Second, it teaches that God is interactive in the affairs of Man, in both causing and relieving suffering. God's purpose in causing suffering, as is expressed in this Talmud passage, is to invite repenting. God causes suffering to bring about the betterment of the individual, this is to achieve long lasting positive results. Akiva ends this passage with the words,"Thus you learn how precious is suffering." (Sanhedrin 101b)

It is easy to extrapolate these views of suffering to illness. The Rabbis of the Talmud are quick to make this comparison. Sin is seen as the cause of all suffering and illness, whether it be the sin of a truly righteous man or a wicked one. It is then the turning or returning of the

individual towards God that brings about relief and healing. Without this option of return, individuals would be free to see that God smites and man heals. This is a point that the Rabbis wish to overcome.

As we have seen, the rabbis take great pains to express the view that healing, or the relief from suffering, comes from prayer. It comes from the prayer of the individual who is suffering. Prayer is then seen as the action that represents the inner devotion of the person praying. In other words, it may not be the prayer that heals; rather it is the turning towards God, that is evidenced by the prayer, that brings about the bodily changes.

Sometimes, however, the individual that is ill or suffering is unable to pray on their own behalf. This may be the result of extreme suffering or the state of being that does not allow for conscious thought. This state can be the result of unconsciousness or an inability to see the need to focus on the return to God. In both of these states, the individual suffering will require another person to pray on his behalf. Like the doctor, who intervenes on behalf of a patient, the person who offers prayer on behalf of a sufferer is also intervening. The Rabbis of the Talmud were willing to see this behavior as effective. Prayer, on behalf of an ill individual, could bring about healing.

In Brachot 5b the Rabbis address this question. They say that when Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba fell ill, that Rabbi

Johanan went to visit him. At thát visit Rabbi Johanan asked the question "are your sufferings welcome to you?" Here, Rabbi Johanan is addressing the question of the effect of suffering. If the sufferings of Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba are welcome to him, it means that he can see that he will be rewarded in the World to come. It means that he understands the relationship between suffering in this world and the reward of the world to come. Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba states that "Neither they nor their reward" are welcome to him.

Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba was unable to make the shift necessary to heal himself. He was unable to see the connection between his sufferings and the good that would befall him after his death. He was in a state of suffering that blinded him to the possibility of healing. Rabbi Johanan was well aware of this fact. He took Rabbi Hiyya's hand and healed him. Here we witness that Rabbi Johanan has the wherewithal to heal his fellow Rabbi. He is able to stand in as proxy while Rabbi Hiyya is unable to make the transition that would heal him. Easy enough for a learned and righteous Rabbi to do for another, but what about when the suffering is his own?

In the following passage of the Talmud, Rabbi Johanan falls ill. This time it is Rabbi Hanina who visits him. The same question is asked of him. "Are your sufferings welcome to you?" The answer is the same as was stated by Rabbi Hiyya during his time of suffering. The answer is also the same,

"Neither they nor their reward." Here we see that the great Rabbi, who freed his friend from suffering, is unable to free himself. Rabbi Hanina steps in and offers his hand. In doing so, Rabbi Johanan is healed. The question is asked by the Talmud, "Why could not Rabbi Johanan raise himself?" After all, he had healed Hanina. The answer: "The prisoner- even the great healer- cannot free himself from jail."

The juxtaposition of these two events come to tell us several things. Firstly, it makes the reader aware that the art of healing is not the sole property of the individual afflicted. We learn that one can bring about healing for another. We are also taught that one can deny the possibility of healing and be healed by another that continues to believe. And finally, we are taught that a need exists for someone to pray for us and this is not just a convenience.

The Talmud does not teach that an individual is free to give up on Heaven and to be healed. Rather it comes to teach that even the most righteous of Rabbis may not see the reward of their sufferings. In this relationship with illness, it may be impossible to heal. Therefore, one is then able to rely on the help of another to bring about healing. Neither Rabbi, in this case, is held responsible for the intervention between the infirmed and God. The Rabbi-healer is the conduit that brings God's help to the one who is unable to ask.

The categorization of the sufferer as the "prisoner" is an interesting perspective. While it makes their captivity, held by suffering, something that is out of their reach, it states clearly that the individual is there because of an infraction of God's law. Once inside the walls of their suffering, the prisoner can ask for pardon and to be released or can elicit the help of a righteous friend. Pardon is not addressed here. It flows from the discussion in Sanhedrin 101a and 101b. Here is addressed the other possibility, that the suffering is of such a nature that the sufferer is unable to see its rewards. Without a vision of reward, the individual is unable to assist in their own recovery.

Prayer for healing has thus far been discussed with regard to the needs of the infirmed. Healing is requested, by the sufferer or by another Rabbi, in an effort to change the direction of God's decree. If the prayer is one that redirects the heart of the sinner towards God, then the decree is overridden and the person heals. The purpose of prayer in healing is then to be a link between the repentant sinner and God. As has been demonstrated, the prayer can be made by the infirmed or by one on behalf of the infirmed.

However, the one suffering the illness is not the only one affected by the illness. The Rabbis were aware of this factor and addressed it in Eruvin 29b. There it states, "Our rabbis taught: no one should eat an onion on account of the

poisonous fluid it contains. It once happened that Rabbi Hanina ate half an onion and half of its poisonous fluid. He became so ill that he was almost at the point of dying. His colleagues, however, begged for heavenly mercy. He recovered because they needed him at that time."

In this passage we are not faced with the usual rabbinic dilemma of sinner overcome with illness. Presented here is a Rabbi that went against rabbinic teaching and became ill from eating forbidden food. The transgression was one of rabbinic law and not Toraitic. The punishment of suffering, however, appears to be the same. When the rabbi reached the point of death, his contemporaries requested mercy for him. Their request was selfish in nature. It was the request to maintain something that they needed, the Rabbi. Their concern seemed not to be for his suffering to end, rather it was for the betterment of the world. This request was granted, and he survived. The passage states that his survival was dependant on the need of his colleagues and not on his change of heart.

In the passage found in Brachot 5b, the healing was granted even though the sufferer did not request mercy on his own behalf. Healing came because there would have been a change of heart and redirecting towards God if the person had the strength. Without such strength, an intermediary was required. Here, in Eruvin 29b, the one with the illness is not the one upon whose suffering the passage is focused.

Here, there is an extension of suffering.

The colleagues suffer the loss of a great Rabbi, and in their suffering request mercy. It is as if the illness has invaded the body of one member of the community and in doing so has stricken the group. The group then acts as one body and pulls from its place of strength to pray for healing. This is akin to the prayer of an individual for healing.

The illness presented here is a curious one. It comes from eating something that the Rabbis saw as potentially harmful. The Rabbi did not eat the entire onion, rather half and half of its poison. This amount brought him to near death. The Rabbis are clear, in other passages, that stepping off of the path laid down by God will lead to suffering. The transgression was only half, yet the punishment could be as great as a weightier transgression.

In order to change the decree, the Rabbis had to approach God and ask for mercy. The weight of Rabbinic order is then given the weight of Heaven. Man must clear the slate with God whether the transgression was one of Divine or Rabbinic authority. In doing so, the effect of the rabbinic order is judged by God. Like with a Divine ordinance, the execution of a rabbinic ordinance can lead to maintained health. The negation of that decree can lead to illness of other forms of suffering. Once the suffering has begun, the individual or his proxy must pray for mercy from God.

The timing of such a prayer is discussed in Rosh

Hashanah 18b. Here, two alternative answers are given as to the efficacy of prayer. One is based on the intention of the person praying, and the other is based on the timeliness of the prayer. The passage begins with an argument from Rabbi Meir. "Rabbi 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 and the other does not get up, one escapes death and the other does not escape death." here is the set up to the dilemma. It is one that is witnessed over and over again in every day life. It usually ends in the question, "Why Me?" or "Why him?"

Rabbi Meir asks similar questions. He ponders, "Why does one get up and the other does not?" And, "Why does one escape death and the other does not?" He answers the questions with the statement that "ones prayer was answered and the other's was not answered." This conclusion does not end the dilemma, however. And Rabbi Meir is forced to continue with the questioning. He finally gets to the heart of the matter with "Why was one answered and the other not answered?" To this question Rabbi Meir looks to the intention of the person praying for mercy.

If the individual prays with a whole heart, then his prayer is answered. If the prayer is made with less than a whole heart, it is likely that mercy will not be granted. The result depends on the level of commitment, to God, of

the sufferer. The Talmud describes the "whole heart" as "perfect prayer." It is then through perfect prayer that an individual finds God's mercy and healing. The word "Shelaymah" is used in connection with this prayer. This means that the prayer is "perfect" when it is complete.

Rabbi Meir has answered the question in a manner fitting the Rabbi's discussions of prayer and its effectiveness in healing. The turning of the individual towards God must be with a whole heart evidenced by a complete prayer. This answer coincides with the concepts addressed earlier such as prayer directing one towards God, and needing someone to pray for us when we are unable to do it for ourselves. It makes sense that someone else should do the praying when we are too weak or otherwise unable to pray, with complete prayer, for ourselves.

In this passage of Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 18a, there is another answer given to this dilemma. It is presented by Rabbi Eleazar. He states that the two results of prayer differ because they came at different times in the process of decree. The one who recovered, prayed before the final Divine decree was issued. The one that did not recover, prayed after the decree had been issued. His prayer was a prayer cast in vain.

The Rabbis are expressing an interesting truth. They recognize a point in time when prayer is no longer helpful. There exists a point in the Divine time clock that forces a

differentiation between a time when one can affect God's judgement and a point when God will no longer listen. This forces the person who becomes ill to begin the process of turning towards God as soon as possible. This will enable his prayer to be heard before the decree is written in stone. Rather than wallowing in illness, a person who begins to suffer should initiate the process of healing as soon as the need is recognized.

Rabbi Eliezer acknowledges that there is a point of no return in the life of a Jew. There exists a time in a man's life that God will no longer hear prayer for healing and the individual will have to live, or die, with the punishment before him. This time, however, will not be made known to the sufferer. Each man is then obligated to pray up until the time when healing is achieved or death comes. Rabbi Isaac said: "Crying is good for a man whether before the final sentence has been pronounced or after."(Rosh HaShanah 18a)

On first blush, it appears that Rabbi Isaac sees the psychological benefit if pouring forth tears even in the face of sure suffering. What is more likely is that there is some communal benefit in these tears. It could be that the outward crying of the one suffering would lead others to recognize the importance of supplication in the face of sin and the possibility of return to God up until death. It is impossible for an individual to know whether their prayer

has been answered unless healing is achieved during their lifetime. The righteous, however, may suffer until their death, so as to clean the slate before participating in the world to come. It is therefore important to continue praying until the point of death. No one, except for God, really knows when the healing process is complete and one can stop asking for relief until death.

In Ketuboth 104a, is expressed the result of praying beyond death. "On the day that Rabbi died the Rabbis decreed a public fast and offered prayers for heavenly mercy. They, furthermore, announced that whoever said that Rabbi was dead would be stabbed with a sword." Here, the Rabbis are unwilling to let go of their leader and teacher and worried that a statement to that effect would have actual consequences. Through their mourning, they continue to pray for mercy from God. They are, in effect, asking God to reverse a divine decree. This is not a situation of forcing God's hand, rather it is asking God to undo something already decreed.

In this passage, the handmaid of Rabbi also prays. While he is alive, she prays that he remains alive, until the point that she realizes that his pain even follows him to the privy. It is the kind of pain that forces him to relinquish his tefillin, thus relinquishing, even for a minute, a mitzvah that he sought to fulfill at all times. Her prayer takes the form of a battle between the forces of

heaven and of the earth. She prays, at first, that the earthly beings will win and Rabbi will recover. When she is aware that the pain is acute and then he is dead, she prays that the heavenly bodies will win the battle. At some point, the handmaid realizes that her prayers are being countered by the prayers of the Rabbis. She shakes a jar and throws it to the ground. At that moment, the rabbis cease praying and the soul of Rabbi is able to ascend to heaven.

Here, the Rabbis of the Talmud tell us that praying for life after death will impede the process of ascent of the soul. It was only in the brief moment, when the jar was broken and their prayers were interrupted, that the angels were able to claim this soul. As in Eruvin 29b, the prayers of others in need were able to sway the Divine conclusion. Here, however, the decree had has been issued... all human power is marshalled to reverse it... what ensues is a stalemate at the very doorstep of death. The Rabbis are strongly saying that to impede the process at this time is to go against heavenly decree, even while they recognize the power of prayer. Their prayers were able to hold Rabbi's soul back from its eternal rest.

As a final portion of this Chapter, after addressing who and when to pray, it is also important to address the type of prayer that the Rabbis of the Talmud saw as beneficial. On page 32b of Brachot, the rabbis address the question of the length of prayer and its relationship to

being answered. "Rabbi Hanin said in thee name of Rabbi Hanina: If one prays long his prayer does not go unheeded. From where do we learn this? From Moses our master; for it says, 'And I prayed unto the Lord,' and it is written afterwards, 'And the Lord hearkened unto me at that time also." This refers to the prayer of Moses to see the land that the people would enter without him. And his prayer caused him to see Pisgah. Here we learn that the prayer of Moses is answered, even though it is a long prayer.

The Talmud then asks the question, "But is that so? Has not rabbi Hiyya Bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Johanan: If one prays long and looks to the fulfillment of his prayer, in the end he will have vexation of heart, as it says, 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick?"'(Proverbs 13:12) Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba is using this Biblical passage to show that it is not the length of prayer that is important, rather it is the intention of the person praying. If one prays with the expectation of an answer, then the answer will not come and the person will have wasted not only the prayer, but also precious time.

The Talmud then points to a response if the prayer is not answered. It states, "Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hanina says: If a man sees that he prays and is not answered, he should pray again, as it is says, 'Wait for the Lord, be strong and let thy heart take courage and wait for the Lord.'"(Psalms 27:14) One should pray to God and not expect

answers, and if one is not answered he should continue praying.

It is incumbent on the person or persons seeking something from God to use prayer as a vehicle to turn towards God and not as a means to produce a stated result. In the end, the Rabbis see the nature of prayer as both the medium for correcting a sinner and as a way of influencing God. The hope in prayer is that the sinner will choose the path designed by God and that in doing so God will see clear to change the decree.

The time for prayer is also a factor. If the prayer comes before the final Divine decree is issued, there is a chance for recovery. If the request comes after the decree is issued, the prayer will not be answered. Since we are not privy to know if the prayer has been answered, in all cases, we are advised to continue praying until death. At that time, the decree is surely complete and the prayers should stop. Further attempts at resurrection only serve to hold the soul from reaching God.

The prayer itself can be of any length. The prayer should be aimed at correcting the sinner and addressing God. The prayer should not be directed with the intention of being answered. It should be made with a whole heart and can continue as long as the person praying has strength to pray. And finally, the prayer can be offered by the person in need, by someone on behalf of that person, or by people in

the community who rely on that person in some way.

As this and the previous chapter have addressed Rabbinic views on the nature of causes and interventions associated with illness and healing, the following chapters will address Reform views in these areas. An attempt will be made to exhibit concepts that overlap and areas of divergence between the traditional views and those of Reform. At the point of conclusion, I will attempt to point out a bridge between the two views, and to elaborate on the possibility for prayer in Reform practice around healing.

Chapter 3

In the best of all worlds, maybe in the World-to-Come, people will not have needs and God will not have to formulate responses. There will be no use for prayer and no expectation of help from beyond the self. This, however, is not the world in which we live. In our world people are hurt and suffer. In our world people look for answers outside of themselves and, more importantly, expect answers for those questions. In our world when people do not get answers for their questions they turn away from the source of answers. Once they leave, it is very hard for them to return. And because of what they have heard or thought, some people are not even willing to engage with this source in the first place.

The dilemma posed by this state of affairs affects many Jews. It effects us from the time we begin to realize that we have needs until the time we breath our last breath or have our last conscious thought. Orthodox Jews have these concerns. The dilemma is even more pronounced for the Reform Jew.

The Orthodox may struggle with the answers God gives to their prayers, but to question the role of God in the process of prayer is outside orthodox thinking. A Jew who lives with a belief that God intervenes in human affairs, and that God is approached through prayer for intervention, can only question their own merit or the manner in which

they pray when the answer they receive is other than they expect or that God has decreed otherwise for His own purposes. Even the righteous die. This applies to prayers for healing as well as any other needful time. A Modern Jew, on who does not adhere to orthodox theology, has before him a very different set of expectations in the process of prayer and its intended outcome than a traditional Jew. The questions begin with "what is the function of prayer in a world defined as uncertain about God's intervention?" They continue into the realm of "once I do not believe in the involvement of God in the world, what purpose is prayer in my life?" The modern Jew who believes this way, has a difficult road to follow in finding a place for prayer in his life, even in times of great need. The need for healing then, may not create the necessary platform upon which to build a space for prayer. And, in a worse scenario, the person may not have the proper tools for prayer at a time when it is most needed. The obstacles to prayer that exist for the modern Jew may make a move toward prayer, either in a time of crisis or as a regular course of behavior, next to impossible.

The obstacles are many, and after a discussion of their impact on the Modern Jew, I will move into a discussion on overcoming them. Once the foundation for a breakthrough to prayer is laid, I will attempt to describe a viable framework for prayer. I intend to focus on the use of

individual and community prayer, as well as to discuss the basis for creating a language of prayer for healing.

To begin with, the greatest obstacle to prayer may be the attitude Modern Jews have towards prayer. It may appear to some that prayer is either a modern experience of primitive magic or it is a form of personal meditation.[24] In either case, the opinions expressed here do not lead one to expect an interaction with a Deity that can change the circumstances of one's life. The person living under these conceptions of prayer is not likely to engage in it. That is to say, one who expects no response to prayer from outside himself is not likely to experiment with this process to effect healing.

A modern thinker is unlikely to do something, for example participate in prayer, if it will make him look as though he is practicing a tribal rite. This could discredit his standing in the community outside of his prayer community. What this comes to teach is that one who thinks of prayer as only taking place in a public forum may be discouraged from participation. But Judaism does not only advocate prayer with others present, rather it teaches that solo prayer is an important aspect of worship. However, the solo prayer experience that is not directed at influencing a "Force greater that ourselves" also seems futile.

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[24]Jacobs, Lewis, A Jewish Theology, Behrman House, Inc., West Orange, N.J.,1973, p.193.

The conceptualization of prayer as meditation may be more inviting for the modern thinker, however, meditation may better be addressed in other venues that prayer. Prayer is only one option in the world of meditation and the connotation of participation in it may inhibit its practice. Therefore, even though an individual may achieve some internal benefit from the act of group prayer, this does not address the need for healing.

As for individual prayer sessions and their meditative qualities, there are so many options available to the modern meditator that choosing prayer is unlikely. This is because of the stigma associated with prayer and the forgone conclusion that it will not effect any change in the individual's health. What is clear is that an individual that chooses to meditate must begin from a place of trust and contemplation. This is difficult to achieve with negative thoughts about prayer running about one's mind during the prayer experience.

It is clear that with an initial stumbling block to prayer, like popular stigmatization, one would be very cautious about putting his trust in this system of help. However, if he is able to overcome this first obstacle, he will begin to delve into the depths of the dilemma. Here, the Jew begins to wrestle with the theological problems that plague the efficacy of prayer for the modern man. To begin with, there is a language of prayer that may be unfamiliar

to and incompatible with the thinking of the modern Jew.

According to Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, "without contemporary models showing us contemporary prayers, many of us, feeling the conflict, withdraw from prayer."[25] He is pointing to one of the greatest dilemmas of modern Jewish prayer. Our prayer books, those used by the Reform movement, were created without the perspective on modern theologies that allow for their lasting and penetrable use. Even Gates of Healing, published in 1988, employs images of God and God's relationship with human affairs that do not speak to the sensibilities of the modern person seeking spiritual help and guidance. We are witness to this when we consider that the Gates of Prayer, printed in 1975, is already being challenged with a gender sensitive version. This option is being implemented in many synagogues throughout the English speaking world. While gender sensitivity is a theological change, bringing the possibility of prayer closer to the modern Jew, it does not answer the difficulties of Reform Jews who do not or can not pray.

As we move deeper into the questions that hold one back from prayer, we must begin to look at the purpose of prayer and the complications that arise in defining its purpose. If prayer is to bring about healing, one must address the expectations of the person looking for support. Here, we

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[25]Schachter- Shalomi, Reb Zalman, Paradigm Shift, Ed. by Ellen Singer, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, 1993, p.182.

find that the problem raised is the lack of reliability in praying for change.

In Liberal Judaism, written by Eugene Borowitz, is presented a Yiddish proverb about the reliability of prayer. "If praying were reliable, they'd be hiring people to pray."[26] From this we know that even our Yiddish speaking relatives are not certain that in times of need, prayer will always pay off. Therefore, in a world filled with expectations of achieving health bombarding the market, it is no wonder that prayer does not draw the needy. The options associated with practical medicine are much more readily accepted because their results are easily measurable. It may be impossible to know if and when the effects of prayer begin.

Timing in prayer is another obstacle to its use. Group prayer is a mainstay in Jewish tradition. Group prayer necessitates planned times for meeting. The schedule that many find themselves slaves to does not usually leave room for parts of life that are gambles at best. "Besides our work schedules keeping us from our thrice daily attendance at synagogues, so many of us have our own sacred routines for morning and evening that do not quite parallel the surface structure of the regular liturgy."[27] We have set

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[26]Borowitz, Eugene, B.,Liberal Judaism, UAHC, N.Y., N.Y.,1984,p. 431.

[27]Schachter-Shalomi, p.184.

ourselves up in the world to have no room for prayer, and making that room would require some hope of reliability of the outcome of time invested. Making room for public prayer is farther out of reach for many Jews than buying lottery tickets. At least with lottery tickets you are assured even the smallest chance of having your prayers answered. With prayer, it appears that the odds may be too great.

Also, the type of liturgy employed at public worship services does not meet the needs of many of the Jews who could take advantage of it.[28] The language of public prayer has become dated and ineffective for the modern Jew. According to Roland B. Gittlesohn, the "greatest spiritual need of our generation is a new vocabulary for ancient and eternal truths, a concept of religion and God which will really function in our lives and in the lives of our children."[29] Here is raised two separate issues that make the language of prayer difficult for the modern person. The first is the concept of ancient truths and the second is the concept of God and God's role in the healing process.

Answering either of these two issues could generate many works, filling rows of book shelves. However, little is said, in the writings of Reform Jewish thinkers. A place to have addressed this would have been Gates of Understanding,

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[28]Ibid,p.184.

[29]Gates of Understanding, Edited by Lawrence Hoffman, Central Conference of American Rabbis, UAHC, N.Y., N.Y., 1977, p.80.

as an attempt to explain Reform theology as differing from orthodoxy. However, while the "articles represent different conceptions of God... all authors claim to stand within the bounds of Jewish tradition."[30] It is possible that the issues are of a sensitive nature and reporting the views of modern Jewish thought would drive a wedge between us and our orthodox and conservative counterparts. Or, Reform thinkers may, for the most part, buy into traditional views of God and the ancient truths that shape our liturgy and thoughts about prayer. In either case, we find that many of the questions that surround these issues are unresolved, leaving the Jew in need of spiritual connection without a foundation of support. This could be the greatest obstacle to prayer. That is the feeling of aloneness in ideology and theology that makes participation in organized and regular worship appear not relevant.

The ancient truths that need to be addressed, in respect to healing, are focused on the relationship between Man and the Creator of the universe. The nature of this relationship , the expectations of both parties on each other, the role responsibility plays in this relationship, and the nature of possible outcomes all impact how we view the truths about which we speak. These also relate to the way in which we view God and God's role in the healing process.

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[30]Ibid., p.6.

In most of our liturgy, as it is represented in the prayer books of the Reform movement, God is categorized in anthropomorphic terms. This applies to the roles God plays in the universe and in the relationship God shares with us. The other way in which God is represented, is through the telling of attributes describing what God is not. Each of these manners of expression tells the person praying how God is to be addressed and what expectations can be placed on God through prayer.

The first, an anthropromorphizing of God, bespeaks of ancient conjecture about the role of God in the universe and challenges the modern Jew with symbolic language describing God. The second, explaining God by stating what God is not, leads the reader to abstract thought about the nature of God and the effect of this prayer.[31] In either case, the immediate nature of return on investment may deter the person in need from ever approaching this level of thought.

If one is to place his health in the anthropomorphic hands of a God that heals, he must first ascribe to a vision of God as interacting in the world. This God must care about Man, and care enough to focus on the concerns of individuals. This God must have the power to bring about change and must be able to understand the requests of people as they are channeled through prayer. Also, the individual who turns their fate over to a higher power must be willing

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[31]Ibid.,p.50.

to accept the results as they are imposed by the higher power.

If God is described in liturgy by the qualities God does not embody, the person praying will have to make a leap into creating for himself that which God is. Also, the fact that God could be limited by certain characteristics, those which God does not possess, could cause an individual to question the characteristics they wish God to have. If God is not "thus and such", then maybe God can not hear my prayer. And if God can not hear my prayer, then healing will not come from Him. The questions that these points raise rattle the already shaky foundation upon which prayer rests for the modern Jew.

Even the word "prayer" itself, with its historical definitions and connotations, can deter a present day thinker from praying. Toraitic prayer came in two forms. People where expected to make offerings at regular scheduled times. There were also outpourings of the heart that occurred at times of great hardship and great joy. Our understanding of the word prayer began with the Hebrew "Avodah". Avodah means "worship" and it embraces precepts found in the Torah as well as the act of prayer.[32] This definition troubles the modern Jew who is not able to pour out his soul in worship to a force he does not understand. Furthermore, it is a force that he may not be willing to

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[32]Hilchot Tefilah, Chapter 1.

grapple with in understanding. It is one thing for a pious Jew to approach prayer in an effort to gain a more thorough understanding of divine will[33],and it is quite another to ask the ordinary Jew to engage in the same task.

Prayer, in its present form also comes from another Hebrew term,"tefillah". Tefillah has a different definition from avodah. It comes from the root "palal" and means either "to judge" or "to intercede."[34] In either case, the focus of prayer is one of interaction between the person praying and a force outside that person. The expectation, that the word "tefillah" invites, is one in which God views the merit of the Jew and decides whether or not to intervene in their life. This intervention takes the form of invoking judgement or interceding on behalf of the individual based on a supreme standard of loving kindness. In either case, we are back to the dilemma with which we began. That is the conflict between the needs of the Jew with a belief in a God other than one of intercession. The force of prayer is then lost and the draw to its use avoided.

If this were the case all the times, members of the Reform movement would petition for the closing of synagogues, the refashioning of prayer book print shops with more useful machinery, and the abolition of organized times

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[33]Stern, Chaim and Dreyfus, Stanley, A.,p.4.

[34]See I Samuel 2:25 where "yitpalel-lo" is used to mean "intercede for him."

of prayer. But this is not the case, and as the Reform movement looks to increase its exposure to concepts of useful spirituality[35] it will necessarily need to reevaluate its views and use of prayer. Its first efforts should be to explain prayer to its constituency in a manner that agrees with modern thought and experience.

According to the article written by Jacob Petuchowski, and printed in Gates Of Understanding, the concern for prayer is taken seriously because it is a fundamental Jewish practice. The language of prayer may vary or remain static, but the activity of prayer is common to all Jewish communities. It is out of the intention to invite more Jews to participate in this Jewish activity that the Gates of Understanding was drafted. While it addresses many of the concerns posed by Jews seeking Reform spirituality, it is not likely to be read as a tool to illuminate a lay person's vision of what prayer ought to be. However, the message in all of Gates of Understanding is that while "the articles are different perspectives", "the authors claim to stand within the bounds of Jewish tradition, and all see worship as a significant part of life."[36]

With that in mind, we can begin to address some of the

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[35]Consider the lead article in the June, 1992 issue of "Moment" magazine. The title of the article is "The search for Spirituality in Reform Judaism."pp. 29-35. See also the Spring, 1991 issue of "Reform Judaism", which cites some sociological studies of the phenomenon., pp.28-29.

[36]Stern and Dreyfus, p.6.

options available in prayer including language, intention, focus, and time and place considerations. All of this is discussed with the intention of making prayer more accessible to the average Reform Jew. This accessibility hopefully will lead to an ability to use prayer in times of need, both great and small, as a Jewish option in healing.

In addressing language in prayer, there are two distinct aspects upon which to focus. One aspect is that of the specific language of the prayers themselves. The second is the larger context of the language we use to describe the prayer experience and how that differs from the language used in prayer. The latter gets in the way of prayer before the individual prays. It is the language of dispute. It is the conversations about prayer that cause one to challenge their own participation in the prayer experience.

Abraham Cronbach's article in Gates of Understanding addresses the uses of language as they differ from dispute to prayer. He establishes three categories of language. The three are designative, valuative, and dramatistic. The first, designative, is the use of language to supply things with their names. It is the language of belief. According to Cronbach, "not when people pray but when they debate, does religion become identified with believing."[37] Cronbach is addressing one of the main obstacles to prayer. This is the idea that one cannot participate in a behavior in which he

[37]Ibid. p.44.

does not believe.

With this mind set, the person seeking prayer is closing himself off to the other side of religion which is devotional and not argumentative. Cronbach states that it is in the state of argument that a person's beliefs come in conflict with prayer. It is in the realm of scientific knowledge that one's prayerful views of the nature of God and the universe are put to task. With descriptive language, one decides that God does not interact with the affairs of human beings, or that God is incapable of affecting the changes in nature that would bring about healing. Cronbach argues that it is during the use of descriptive language that one forgets the use and benefits of valuative and dramatistic language.

Valuative language is that which allows us to divulge our feelings with reference to things. It is the language that gives voice to our likes and dislikes, our desires and aversions. In reference to healing prayers, valuative language would be our statements of preference for being in another state of health than the one that we are experiencing. It may also be the statements of support for the people who aid in our healing process. Along with valuative language in prayer is dramatistic language.

Dramatistic language, as described by Cronbach, is the set of words used as a substitute for ideas that may otherwise be indescribable. These are the words we use to

picture concepts that are intricate, complex, involved, complicated, abstruse, far-reaching, and generally difficult to understand. When we use dramatistic language in prayer we are giving voice to those concepts that are out of our reach in ordinary thought. For example, we might ask God to send healing at a time when we are unable to frame that which we need. It may be the way we speak to the universe, even when our thought would be that the universe does not have the capacity to listen.

Cronbach is aware that people dispute the existence of God and the power of God and the commitment of God to God's people. He is also aware that our interactions, with words, during a dispute will rally against all that is possible in prayer. And, as the editors of the Gates of Understanding noted, "Though Cronbach was never convinced of the value of ritual, he experienced personally the efficacy of prayer in bringing about the nearness of God."[38] It is through the example of Abraham Cronbach that we realize the value in separating the language we use to describe prayer from the language we use during prayer.

Therefore, the individual seeking a spiritual entrance into the prayer service, can use the more rational doorway of linguistics to dispel his worries rather than some supernatural and unapproachable one. The person in need of healing can enter the worship experience without the

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[38]Ibid,p.44.

expectation that he will leave with the answers to his questions about the nature of the universe and God. Rather, he will have the ability to sit and enter another realm of language that is particular to the prayer service. This, however, is a difficult task especially if the language of the service, in its most superficial reading, conflicts with the thoughts of the person approaching prayer.

The question then is, "what language to use in prayer itself?" The answer is all too expansive for this paper, but in the realm of healing liturgy we will be able to touch on several characteristics inherent in all prayer. In a discussion of the language of prayer, we must also look at the intended use and expectations of prayer. This will enable us to approach language from a point of use and effectiveness rather than relying on lofty, somewhat unreachable, platforms. To begin this discussion, we will look at the language we have been given for prayer.

The language of prayer takes two forms. Prayer is either in Hebrew or in the vernacular of the person praying. Each has its benefits and its drawbacks. Hebrew has the benefit of thousands of years of history and use. It contains prayers that were passed from generation to generation and were found to be of use over the centuries. Hebrew is the language of our Jewish ancestry and of our most sacred texts. While Jews are willing to question the role of God in the healing process, they are less likely to

dismiss the use of Hebrew. Hebrew carries with it mystical connotations and a strength that has endured periodic and mass executions. Hebrew is a ritual, in and of itself. It carries with it all the symbolic and performative power of ritual.

The strength of the Shema, as the last words spoken as the Jews were marched to the gas chambers is a image known to many Jews and one that serves to strengthen their resolve. If for no other reason than the Jew continues no matter what obstacle is placed before him, the Shema has become part and parcel of our liturgy of healing. It is contained in the Gates of Healing, the Reform movement's attempt at consolation during hospital stays, and is made available to the informed by every Jewish hospital chaplin. The Shema is a prayer that is said either by the individual or by the community. It offers connection to history and the strength of that history. The Shema also contains language describing the unique and singular nature of God.

The language of God in prayer has been a difficulty for many people approaching prayer for healing. It is the descriptive language of God that is disturbing to some. God as "Healer" or God as "Protector" are conceptually challenging to people, especially people facing long term and painful illnesses. These problems arise when the language of prayer is that of the vernacular of the individual. It allows the Jew the opportunity to question

the nature of the Supreme Being in a language he understands. Here, understanding can lead to disillusion and disassociation with prayer. What is left, without English prayer, however, is a small vocabulary with which to work.

What the vernacular provides is both valuative and dramatistic language for the individual to frame their hopes and fears about their illness and their desires for acceptance or change of circumstances.[39] This further enables the individual to invest "their thoughts and emotions, their full attention, their devoted selves, in prayer. "Without this investment, states Borowitz, "the Jewish service has lost its meaning."[40] Therefore, at the same time that the individual is searching for support, he is being a part of that which he seeks. This is all achieved through the language that the person praying uses to achieve this goal.

While we may hold that it is a phenomenon of the modern Reform thinker that the investment in prayer is of greater consequence than the belief in prayer, our religious ancestors may have held similarly. "With regard to petitionary prayer, this differs from the magic spell in that the worshiper does not hold that the anticipated result flows automatically on the words. What he is really doing is bringing his desires to God. When deep religious believers

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[39]Ibid, p.7.

[40]Ibid, 58.

pray for something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires. They realize that things may not go as they wish, but they are asking to go on living whatever happens. In prayers of confession and in prayers of petition, the believer is trying to find a meaning and a hope that will deliver him from the elements in his life which threaten to destroy him: in the first case his guilt, and in the second place, his desires."[41]

This quotation from Louis Jacobs comes to teach us many things about prayer. If we continue to focus on the language of prayer, we see that the traditional, religious Jew prays in a language that presents one point of view while he, the person praying, may have a different expectation of the results then are stated in the prayer. This comes with a familiarity of language and of prayer structure. It is only when one has a grasp of the prayer before them that the can transcend the language to a higher purpose. Whether it is Hebrew or any other language, the language of prayer is lost if the person is not able to engage with the text of the prayer. This working with the prayer can range from attempting to gain understanding of its meaning to using the prayer to search farther into one's own soul.

The individual involved in prayer will necessarily move from one realm into another and back again as particular

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[41]Jacobs, p.195.

words and circumstances shape their relationship with the words. Here is where it is possible for the tried and true prayers of our Siddur to put the prayerful person at ease. The familiar language of the text, to one whom it is familiar, may enable him to achieve soul searching. To the not so familiar Jew, ancient prayers can be a stumbling block to this level of focus. To either Jew, the poetics or historicity of the words may spark the prayerful flow or may inhibit its attainment. In either case, it is a combination of the prayer and the person praying that makes the complete experience.

Another point that Jacob's words point to is the purpose of prayer in healing. While I have touched on that purpose, or purposes, already in this paper, It will have to be given more attention as the last chapters unfold. According to the Talmud, (Berachot 6b), prayer is "standing at the highest point of the world." Here, the purpose of prayer is the power it has to uplift towards God. The Rabbis of the Talmud place prayer at the pinnacle of behaviors in reaching God. Prayer is also a behavior overlooked by many individuals. While prayer is that which elevates the individual, it also places a great burden on prayer to get someone to this high place. This may be the Rabbis' requirement for prayer, but it may not be on the mind of the person lying in a sick bed. Their focus may be much more mundane. The creators of the Gates of Prayer had a similar

focus in compiling this prayer book as did the Rabbis of old in regard to the statement above. Samuel Cohon states that "in our books of prayer, as in our general religious thought, the relation of finite man to the infinite God must continue to be placed in the forefront."[42] Cohon points to psalm 126, "Shir HaMaalot", as describing this relationship. As "Shir HaMaalot" is translated to "Song of Ascents", so the rest of our prayer life is described as a process of ascent to God. Cohon goes on to say that "adequately expressed in words, the direction of the human spirit Godward becomes living prayer, lifting us to higher planes of feeling, thinking and doing, and enriching our lives with a new quality."[43]

In all of these attributes of prayer, the process is one of raising the individual Godward, not bringing God to man. This is a different view of the purpose of prayer than that which is expressed elsewhere in Rabbinic teachings. This has been demonstrated earlier in this paper. Instead of prayer being used to bring about a change in the behavior of God, either to change a decree or simply to show mercy, prayer is seen as the vehicle to bring human beings to a higher level of behavior, thought and feeling. These expectations of prayer are more in line with the focus of modern thought about prayer and its instrumental ability in

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[42]Gates of Understanding, p.49.

[43]Ibid.,p.49.

our lives.

In an effort to understand the view of prayer as a move upward from the place we are now, we must look at the process of prayer in relationship to the expectations of the person praying. This will better able us to create a complete picture of prayer including its use of language, its process and our expectations of it. It is through this picture that we build a foundation for a bridge between traditional views of prayer and modern Reform views of prayer. This is done with the end in mind of creating a platform for the creation of a viable liturgy of healing for individuals in the Reform movement.

As has been discussed earlier in this paper, the intention of the person praying plays a major role in the ability of that individual to achieve something out of the prayer experience. However, "traditional Judaism, despite its desire for sincerity, and liberal Judaism, despite its respect for the individual, have given priority to acts over intention. How one actually lives, not the feelings one gets is its ultimate interest."[44] With these mind sets, the ability of the individual to come to prayer is hampered. The opinion that prayer is secondary to acts limits the role prayer can play in the life of any Jew, and the ability of one to approach prayer for healing is less likely. By putting prayer on the back burner, one becomes less and less

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[44]Jacobs, p.429.

accustomed to its use and a lack of familiarity can breed discomfort. The individual must first get to the point were action no longer brings satisfaction or uplifting results before they will turn to prayer as an alternative measure. As an example, one may begin an exercise program, participate in social action programming of visit a health professional.

With all of our popular psychology laid out on the table before us, it is difficult for the individual not to look at their actions, or omissions, as the cause for present sufferings. Sufferings that may be hereditary can be activated by stress. Illness that is deep, may be the result of some unanswered question or unfulfilled dream. Poor life circumstances may be the result of unrealized needs and ineffective relationships. All of these may be true. The problem lies not in the reality of the situation, rather it is in the manner that people choose to resolve these problems. We are all taught to look for solutions in our behavior. Yet the behavior of prayer is not a usual place for a modern Jew to go when seeking help.

The reason people may not approach prayer, other than language and familiarity, is that our expectations of prayer may not mesh with our belief in the possibility of its results. This comes about because, the complications that language and lack of familiarity breed are not overcome by our willingness to seek outside support through this venue.

Prayer does not work the way that therapy and action do. It does not operate under the same principles or expectations of results and people are unwilling to give it a chance.

To begin with, people tend to have the expectation that prayer is done on their behalf by someone else. The role of the Rabbi or Cantor is to pray for them, in their stead. It is surprising to some Jews to discover that prayer is an individualistic act and the leader is there as a guide and not the primary force in the service.[45] This message has been given by the nature of Reform services since its move to create religious institutions in both the cities and the suburbs. Monolithic Temples with unapproachable Rabbinic and Cantorial staff have distanced the Jew from his prayer. The somber mood and hidden choir have further removed the participant from participation. The Reform Jew had become the observer and not the one responsible for his own prayer. It is therefore no wonder that Reform Jews do not look to Jewish tradition for representation of their souls.

While this experience may be uplifting for some, it hardly makes available a forum for handling individual needs and aspirations. It is the abstract vision of prayer that distances one from speaking from their heart. It is far from the emotional outpourings that are expressed in Psalms and Piyutim of generations past. What is missing is the connection of man to his individual needs and their

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[45]Borowitz, p.430.

expression to God.

I find it interesting that I mentioned God here. As I journey through this paper, my quest has been to look at traditional Jewish source material and to look at the Reform experience of prayer, and see if it is possible to bridge the two to create a foundation for Reform Jewish healing liturgy. What I expected to find was a struggle with the traditional views of God and the Reform perspectives on, for no better title, not-God. What I have had to reckon with is a commitment of the Reform movement to struggle with God concepts and to include those concepts in liturgy.

The Gates of Prayer contains in it many service models with different intentional impacts. Service One "is most like the classical siddur in its Hebrew", as well as providing literal English translations.[46] Service Two identifies "human responsibility in relation to our partnership with God."[47] Service Four discuses social justice issues.[48] Service Six is the "equivocal service", and allows for the reader to interpret God in his own terms.[49] The role of God, however, is expressed in traditional terms in all of them. Some have God as King, some with God as Ruler, and some with God as the force in

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[46]Gates of Understanding, p.171.

[47]Ibid., p.172.

[48]Ibid., p.173.

[49]Ibid., p.173.

Nature. Even in a so called "equivocal service", in translation of Hebrew text God is expressed as the Supreme Being to whom our blessings flow. God is also the source of our salvation and healer. In that case, we must look at the force of prayer through the eyes of a believer in these attributes of God.

"Prayer is the expression of man's needs and aspirations, addressed to that great source of help- to the friend whom we suppose to exist behind the phenomena, the friend who is concerned for man's needs and for his high aspirations, and who is resolved to help."[50] Here we have an interpretation of prayer as the outpourings of man to God. In this interpretation, man has the expectation that God is listening to prayer and will take heed and make changes, in our lives, based on that prayer. It presupposes that man is able to formulate his thoughts into prayers and that God understands and identifies with those words. God is portrayed as a "friend". Presumably, a friend knows us well and can relate to us in our own terms. With a friend, we can have a dialogue. This dialogue with God is expressed in responsive readings that call to God and God answers. The language of these readings is phrased so that we understand our words and God's words as well. Moreover, a friend would not let us down and allow our suffering to continue. There is, however, a problem with God as friend.

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[50]Ibid., p.72.

For God to be our friend, God would have to be available to the rest of the world in the same fashion. This concept of God has power in prayer unless one lapses into the thought that this might be impossible. By confusing the questions about God with the prayers to God, the person praying could lose hope in its effectiveness. Also, the friend image loses strength when we think of how we are treated by friends. Friends can also let us down. Our Biblical author stated "God is not a man, that He should lie; nor the son of man, that He should repent: has He said, and shall He not perform? or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"[51] This passage was an attempt to keep us from confusing God's relationship with us and our friend's relationships with us. They may not fulfill their promises to us and other things might get in the way of their focus on us. This image of God, as friend, is incomplete and leaves the person praying in no better shape than when he started.

The point of this interpretation that seems to be helpful is that the behavior of prayer is to express needs and to express them outside of the self. In the case of illness, for the individual with the illness to be able to express his needs and aspirations, may be the height to which prayer can take him. It may be enough to "get it off his chest" and to place the healing process into the hands

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[51]Numbers 23:19.

of someone or something else. Prayer comes into play when someone is preparing to meet with physicians or beginning surgery or after diagnosis. It may be that one prays for recovery, calmness, support, and closure. In the case of terminal illness, the individual may be praying for pain reduction, friendship, strength, ending the suffering, and answers. In either case, the reduction of stress and worry may be brought about by relinquishing tho outcome to some source other than the self. This may free the person to heal in a faster or more relaxed manner. It may also allow the terminally ill person the freedom to die in peace.

Beside the effect of prayer on the psyche, there is the possibility of achieving positive effects from the movement of prayer itself. "From Feldenkrais to Rolfing and Bio-energetics, form jogging to Tai-Chi and calisthenics, the testimony of the practitioners is that there are spiritual effects resulting from conscious and exerting body movement. Many who have watched the Hasidim at prayer have wondered about the function of their rhythmic swaying. The whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi order and the Hasidim share in their appreciation of the body as it becomes reinvigorated in the service of God. Perhaps this is what Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair meant in his statement "The Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead."[52]

All of the physical activities mentioned by Reb Zalman

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[52]Schachter-Shalomi, p.194.

Schachter- Shalomi will produce euphoric states. the mere exertion of the body will lead to increased heart rate and a general feeling of life. What separates prayer from the other bodily movements is the intention and internal dialogue that accompanies prayer. The reasons behind activity during prayer vary depending upon who is asked. However, the status of God as supreme ruler has something to do with the purpose of rising out of one's seat. The swaying, both in direction and fervor, are individual to communities. What is clear, is that the intention of the person praying can be matched by their body movements and vice versa. The effect of compounding behavior with words only adds to the benefits of prayer.

The question still remains however, "what is the intention of the prayer and what is the expected outcome?" Even though there may be great gains through fervent prayer, if the person praying's expectations are left unanswered the results of increased intention can compound the negativity of the result. The person praying may begin to question the effectiveness of the prayer and may go on to question their own effectiveness.

Other than physical and psychic gains, what some are seeking is to be closer to God. What that means is unique to each individual choosing prayer. This process is not always an easy one. Achieving the outcome is not marked, necessarily, by any outward sign. The result may only be a

feeling that remains indescribable. Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, while not a member of the Reform movement, has a view on prayer as attempting to achieve this closeness with God. He states, "we want to be attuned to God, experience a closeness to Him/Her, collaborate with Him/Her as it unfolds His/Her design, become one-d with others who mind as we do, become aligned toward oneness and organicity, to receive the revelation of planetary telepathy with all the other sentient beings who form His/Her embodiment, to be instruments, limbs of God."[53] It is in this statement that we find the hope of those who wish to be closer to God through prayer.

Although the wording of this passage takes a little getting used to, it stresses the main point of aligning oneself with God. It is through that alignment that the mind of God and the mind of the individual are united and an understanding can take place. In the case of healing, the person praying would hope to take advantage of all the wellness that God embodies. And, while this view of the purpose of prayer seems beyond the reach of many Jews, there are those who pray with this hope in mind.

In terms that we as a Movement are more familiar with, Jewish prayer unites us with God, in a way that our daily routine makes impossible. In our routine, we find that the world does not always agree with us. If we could be aligned

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[53]Schachter-Shalomi, p.182.

with God, we would necessarily be in line with the world and the universe. In this state of being, the illness one suffers could be seen in two distinct ways. One, it could be seen as only part of the earthly existence and not in line with the universe and God. And two, it could be seen as already being part of the divine plan. In the first case, the hope of prayer is that becoming part of God would remove the illness. In the second case, the illness could be seen as part of a larger plan and the individual would be better situated to deal with their present state of being.

While trying to come to terms with the language of prayer and the role of God in the process, I have come to the point of discussing alternative language in prayer. The language of prayer poses a great threat to the Reform movement. It is divisive in communities that struggle to create a liturgy that meets the needs of the whole community. In doing so, we have begun to challenge our God concepts. "On the one hand, we wish to be maximally involved with God- to adore, celebrate, be consoled by Him/Her and to give with all our heart, soul and might that which our intuition knows God wants from us... On the other hand, we also intuit that there is another order, one less feudal, not liege and serf, but a collaborative flowing with growth and process.[54] The problem arises when we try to pray to a process. Without language for God that makes sense to us, we

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[54]Schachter- Shalomi, p.182.

would be praying to a force that has no listening for our prayers. Ears are a part of body and body is an image that helps some people pray. It is praying to a "Who" rather than praying to a "What".

The "what", however, can be a very inviting image for the modern Jewish person seeking prayer, according to the concept of religious naturalism which "seeks to explore the possibility of retaining the act of prayer even after the idea of a personal God has been abandoned."[55] This article describes what I feel is the bravest attempt at answering the question of "how to pray without God?" In his description of a Naturalistic approach to prayer, Kohn views prayer as a means of taking the self to its highest point by tapping into the sources of the universe. These are the sources of righteousness in the universe. While this view of prayer does not provide a "Who" to pray to, it does provide an alternative vision of the function of prayer than asking to bring about change.

Kohn goes on to say, "many people find prayer difficult because, having rejected the idea that God is a transcendent person, they feel that prayer cannot be addressed to God, that at best it is a form of talking to oneself. But the term self has more than one meaning. It may be used in the sense of the ego, the source of egoism and selfishness, or

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[55]Kohn, Eugene, "Prayer and the Modern Jew", Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, Volume XVII, 1953, pp.151-238.

in the sense of the soul, the transcendent aspect of the Divine Nature. When we seek Communion with God, it is not important whether we address God in the second or third person. What is important is that we keep our conception of God before us, and that we endeavor to bring our thoughts and our desires into harmony with our idea of God."[56]

In this view of prayer, the individual choice of the person praying is validated. The prayer book as it stands is also validated. What is brought newly is the thought that the words do not define God, rather the individual defines God and holds that definition before him in prayer. In that case, what one expects from God is not defined by the words before him, rather each individual defines their own requirements of God. This, however, poses a problem to the individual with little imagination. Without an ability to step outside of the concrete terms laid out in the text of the prayers, one would have difficulty to make the break and have a full experience.

As for the concept of man as a part of nature rather than a part of God, here is given the opportunity to focus the changes requested on the natural state of things rather than the supernatural. "The recognition that man is organic to the world of Nature implies a twofold relationship between the two. If his physical being can be understood as a part of nature, his mental, spiritual and moral endowments

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[56]Ibid.

similarly must reflect qualities existing outside of him."[57] Therefore, man has the option to pray in order to effect all parts of his self. He can pray for physical, mental, and spiritual health.

It is easier for people to realize their connection with nature than with God because nature is a readily available resource. It does not have the mystique of God, yet it has the power of universal images like God. The difficulty in using the concept of nature in prayer is the fact that we are always trying to tie natural phenomena to science. In doing so, we limit the power of nature in our lives and in our thoughts. Therefore, the problem that is eliminated by praying to the natural rather than the supernatural force, creates another. It may appear to us as a limited power, unable to meet our needs.

Whether we pray to a being or to nature or some other representation of God, we must always keep our relationship to prayer fresh. As prayer gets stale, so does its effectiveness in our lives. This aspect of prayer needs to be balanced against our need for regularity in prayer. It is regular use that gives us the familiarity with prayer which enables us to go beyond the plain meaning of the words. Regularity also keeps us in constant connection with the Source of life. Whatever we define as the Supreme force in the world, that force remains constant and our connection to

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[57]Cohon, p.293.

it should remain constant,[58] Though we may feel that we are not always in need of God's support, our constant attention to the relationship, through prayer, will keep it open for use when we are in need.

The problem arises then as to how to strike a balance between the two. According to Eugene Borowitz, putting a balance between the two would only serve to kill the freshness of prayer.[59] By establishing the rule, the spontaneity in prayer would be diminished. Spontaneity is an issue because maintaining a prayerful lifestyle is so hard that we as human beings need all the help that we can get.

One of the helps built into a Jewish community is communal prayer. The community provides the individual with a larger prayer context then they can maintain alone. This enables the individual, who maintains membership in a Jewish community, to achieve a higher state of spiritual readiness to be accessed when called upon.[60]

People who do not pray regularly tend to see prayer as a break in routine. If that is the case, then it also breaks our view of with what we are presently involved. Prayer comes at a time when the usual measures we attempt in life are not paying off. Prayer breaks our need for mastery over our own lives and the world we manipulate daily. Prayer

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[58]Borowitz, p.431.

[59]Borowitz, p.427.

[60]Borowitz, p.433.

allows us to stop our manipulative behavior and stepping back allows us to see ourselves in relationship to a force greater than ourselves. It allows us the opportunity to see that the ultimate reality is greater than we.[61]

Another aspect of group prayer is the ability we gain to see where we and others share experiences, thoughts and feelings and where we differ. The prayer experience offers language that resonates with some and alienates others. Some may even share the same prayer and view its meaning in very different ways. The prayer service offers the opportunity to join in group prayer and to offer prayers of the heart which are uniquely one's own. Any prayer can be uniquely our own when it moves us in a way that others are not moved. Even when we pray with the ancient words of the psalmists, we may find new meaning for ourselves. We do not know whether the psalmist intended his words to be a canonized text or whether he was simply pouring out his heart. Whatever the intention, many have been incorporated into our liturgy, especially our liturgy of healing.

Prayer, like that found in the psalms, can be seen as the expression of the love of man for God. "Being mystical in character and akin to poetry, it resorts to the pictorial and symbolic. Abstract ideas are clothed in live and pulsating forms. It appeals not alone to the critical philosopher and theologian but also to the humble worshiper.

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[61]Borowitz, p.433.

It is predicated upon the conviction that as sunlight shines for the layman as well as the physicist, so the presence of God is near unto all who reach out after him."[62] This then brings us to the question, "what does one look for in being nearer to God?"

For some, attaining closeness to God means being more in accord with God's will.[63] This, in and of itself, is an illusory term. What it does, however, is to allow the individual to feel apart of God's eternal purpose, to be in line with the natural order of things. For the ill of body or spirit, it can give an inner sense of peace. It is the knowing that one is not suffering in vain, even when the purpose is unknown to the person prating.

For some, prayer is the connectedness to God that is available in times of trouble. It is the dialogue between one who is in need and that which can provide help. Regular prayer will help develop the intimacy required for times of great need. It is a development of the language and expectations available to someone searching for answers or support. It is an anecdote for the one who refuses to attempt relationship with God and cries out in a time of need, "Where is God Now?"[64]

And for some, prayer will offer the opportunity "to

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[62]Gates of Understanding, p.47.

[63]Jacobs, p.193.

[64]Borowitz, p.432.

formulate one's needs and desires and that in itself is a good thing. To an extent one objectifies and experiences the catharsis of voicing one's desires; and perhaps that is even a step toward realizing them."[65] While this may only be an internal use of prayer, it may prove an effective measure. It also may be the draw to prayer that fits the mind-set of modern Reform thinkers.

What it clearly does is to take man's requests out of the cosmic realm and bring them down to earth. In a way, it is showing humility by not asking the world to revolve around the person praying. It shows respect for the functioning of the universe and the small part man plays in that universal experience.

According to Samuel Cohon, each religious era must look afresh at the role of human nature and restudy its limitations and potentialities based on the learning and circumstances of its time.[66] With this knowledge the role of prayer can be reexamined and built to fit present needs. This fitting, however, must be done in light of ancient and well tried traditions. Jewish prayer has a long and somewhat varied tradition. By looking at our past use of prayer, we can be better equipped to answer the questions that arise out of prayer today.

In the context of healing liturgy, we can learn that

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[65]Gates of Understanding, p.109.

[66]Cohon, p.287.

traditional Jewish prayer pictured an anthropocentric view of the world.[67] Man was at the center and the universe. The universe was asked to realign itself for the needs of man. It was the purpose of prayer to direct God's attention away from other matters in the universe and to create a dialogue that ended in the betterment of the individual's life. This could be achieved by the mercy of God or by the individual learning of ways to right his own behavior. Many positives came out of the creation of prayer by our ancestors and in the next chapter, they will be discussed in relationship to modern views of prayer. This will all be directed at prayers for healing.

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[67]Ibid, p.287.

Chapter 4

In an article entitled "Can Modern Man Pray?", Jacob Petuchowski discuses his feelings about lumping all modern thinkers into one mind set. He states that, "there are still to be found many highly educated, sophisticated men who find no fatal objections to prayer, as traditionally conceived."[68] While he is writing from a Jewish perspective that seeks its traditional roots to a greater extent than other Reform thinkers, his point rings true for this Movement as well. It is important to recognize that the views expressed in this paper do not reflect the whole of modern thinking. Nor is it my intention to create a solution to all of the problems faced by the modern thinker's approach to prayer.

Rather, I intended to look at prayer as a possible approach to healing. This is to see its use, for the Reform movement, as another tool for relief of suffering. While there already exist many options for healing liturgy, in this movement, I have seen its lack of use as a driving force for this paper. It was my assumption that most of the options available are not adequately grounded for acceptance and continued use. The amount and types of healing liturgy available changes and grows too rapidly for anyone to get a handle on which to use and why. Picking through liturgies

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[68]Petuchowski, Jacob, J., "Can Modern Man Pray?", Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, Vol. LXXVII, 1967, pp.168-176.

has become as easy as choosing a trashy novel and with similar longevity.

This paper was an attempt at placing before the reader both traditional texts around the issues of healing prayer and some modern insights into the use of and distractions from prayer. Here I will attempt to synthesize the information presented. To begin with, the question "from where does illness come?" was of concern for the rabbis and remains an issue for us today.

The question revolves around the concept of cause. Most people feel that there is some cause for illness and suffering. The individual who sees the cause as manmade may choose the path of practical medicine for healing. Prayer would be of use if the doctor's measures are ineffective. The expectation of results however, may be hampered by the patient's choice to use prayer as a last resort. Last resorts are used when the person's level of expectation is low.

If the ill person views God as the cause of their illness, they may chose to seek resolution of their pain from its source. In doing so, the person praying may be seeking to effect God's judgment and a change in decree, or they may be seeking guidance from God as to how to better their relationship with God. This may take the form of achieving closeness to God through deeds or words. While the results of this measure to access healing may not show as

measurable changes, the person seeking healing through prayer may expect their rewards in the World to Come. This attitude may seem out of line with Reform ideologies, yet the are those out there who hold strongly to these notions.

If one approaches the world with the concept of illness as being God made, they may see it as either Divine punishment or a sign that one should refocus their life. In the first instance, prayer is used as a tool to redirect God's thinking about the individual. Either God should simply show mercy and reverse the decree and heal the individual or should see that the individual has changed and on that account requires a reversal on his merits. These are traditional Jewish views on the nature of healing, yet they lead us into a present usage of prayer.

If an individual is willing to use prayer in healing, and to see God as the source of that healing, they may better equipped themselves in dealing with their illness. By directing the cause of suffering outside the self, the individual may strengthen the self and aid in their own healing process. This is the result of taking blame and placing it outside of the individual responsibility. What is required for healing is the willingness to speak his desires and frustrations, hopes and aspirations in prayer and use his words to move him to a healthier way of being. This may require changed life patterns or thought patterns.

One who holds God responsible for imposing illness may

also, at times, question that imposition. The question,"why bad things happen to good people?" comes to mind. The traditional response that good suffer to clear the slate for the World to come may satisfy the modern Jew. Or, it may lead them deeper into questioning themselves and their understanding of how good they really are. This question could also send the Jew reeling from traditional Judaism into popular culture with its rational thought and myriad of alternative answers.

What traditional Judaism ultimately gives us is the right, the obligation and the freedom to practice healing. It gives us the right to use doctors and the right, and obligation, to access healing through prayer. This is a gift from our historical past and one that we should not take lightly. It is the Talmudic Rabbis who bring forth the Biblical prayer experience and incorporate it into the Judaism of our recent past. And, most importantly, it is out of this tradition that we learn how to pray.

It is based on traditional prayer that we judge the validity and effectiveness of our modern piytonim. We use the model of Biblical prayer, as carried through the generations by the Rabbis, to create our prayer books and our prayer service. It is when we disconnect from that tradition that we are in danger of losing a solid foundation for prayer today. It is in the prayers of our ancestors that we hear the language not everyone has the ability to create.

It is the language of anguish and suffering and of hope and promise.

Language is one of the fundamental components of prayer and in so being, one of the greatest obstacles to prayer. It is out of language that we create the concepts that guide our lives. Language, however, has different uses and conflating those uses can confuse our experience of prayer. The language of discussion and of argument is different from the language of adoration and pain. It is when we bring our beliefs and arguments into prayer that we are challenged to say what we might not believe. When we leave suspicion outside prayer, we may be surprised at its effectiveness.

Effectiveness is another attribute of prayer, or one that we impose upon it, that muddies the experience of prayer. In the realm of healing, people are skeptical of the efficacy of prayer and may use this as a barrier to prayer. The expectations of the person praying need to be in line with their thinking about prayer to measure the effectiveness of that prayer. If one sees prayer as a vehicle for internal enlightenment, then getting the answers to soul searching questions will tell of its effectiveness. For one who seeks better health through their relationship with God, then better health will tell. Some may even be surprised that the results may come in an unexpected form, and one that offers greater reward than anticipated. And some are sure to be disappointed. Whatever the result, we

are told that the intention of the person offering prayer has a lot to do with the outcome.

What we put into prayer effects the outcome. If it is relationship with God we seek, then our heart better be in the prayer. If it is inner insight, then our heart better be in the prayer. And if it is connection with the flowing universe we request, we better be sure our heart is in it. Whatever or whomever we seek to access in prayer, our intention plays a great role in achieving it. The problems arise when we are required, by lack of proof of its conclusion, to continue this level of intention from one prayer session to the next.

There are several tools we have at our disposal that better our chances for sustained intention during prayer. They include regular times for prayer, standard liturgy, and group participation. All of these offer support in achieving the goal of sustained prayer and all of them pose surmountable obstacles to prayer as well.

To begin with, regular prayer schedules have been established by traditional Judaism. They include thrice daily worship[69] in public and many prayer times for home or other private prayer sessions. While this schedule may pose a threat to the overprogrammed suburban service attender, it does offer many options to those who choose to access prayer. Without this varied schedule, people may find that

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[69]Hilchot Tefilah, Chapter 1.

they are unable to attend any services over a long period of time. With sustained inactivity, it will be difficult for the marginal Jew to realign themselves with the prayer experience. When they do end up needing prayer, it will be unfamiliar and may not meet their immediate needs. This can further distance them from prayer.

The liturgy is another issue. While standard and regular liturgy offers the person praying a consistent prayer format, it may not be of the type that appears fresh and inviting. Each and every Jew may have a different view of what prayer language meets their needs. As needs change, so will the options that appeal to that person. The variables become astronomic in number and at any given time, no prayer book stands a chance of meeting that demand. What we learn from traditional Judaism, on this point[70], is that a formal liturgy may become stale at times but when a person is in need it can be very comforting. Even the Reform Jew who is only marginally affiliated with regular prayer can be comforted by the Kaddish. It is its regular use that makes it available to people in times of loss. The Shema also fills this place in times of suffering. Psalms like Psalm 23 work to offer comfort to those Jews whose only connection to

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[70]See Rabbi Eliezer's statement in Mishnah Brachot 4:4: "He who makes his prayer a fixed task, his prayer is no supplication." Also see Rabbah and Rabbi Joseph's response in Brachot 29b on this point. They state that "it is no supplication", refers to "whoever does not insert something fresh into it." This means that the prayer language varies as needs vary.

prayer may be Christianity. In any case, some form of historical, regular and familiar prayer needs to be available to a person in search of healing. And here it may be the familiarity and not the language that brings comfort.

Other prayers that take a lesser role in healing may need substitute translations that meet with modern sensibilities. Issues such as gender, references to God and nature, hope, and responsibility may play a great role in drawing the person in search of healing to prayer. If the majority of the service, or for that matter even a small piece of the liturgy, addresses people where they are, then people can grow into the liturgy. One can be brought around to using more formal liturgies as the depth of the person praying increases. As one seeks the use of prayer on a regular and intentional basis, the superficial features of prayer will take on lesser importance.

And, while I chose not to focus on it in this paper, the psychological benefits of group prayer also aid a person in search of healing. Group identification with a need can show an individual that they are not alone. Members of the group may have words of prayer that others can use to benefit themselves. Also, the prayers of the group may be easier for God to hear. God's focus is then not as fragmented as having to listen to many more individual petitions. In group settings, the person in need may be put in contact with others who offer services in the area of their particular need, and that can be seen as an answer to prayer. Also, the visibility that group prayer provides,

makes possible connections for visitation and prayers offered on behalf of those who need support in their praying.

Prayer offers external support for those in need, and it offers internal support. One may find that prayer heals because God heard him praying and knew that he really meant his words. Prayer may help in healing because it enables an individual to voice his pains and desires. It may simply offer him a safe place to cry out loud. Whatever the connection one makes with prayer, it is certainly an option available to members of the Reform movement.

In conclusion, all that is offered in prayer for those who seek healing is only effective if it is chosen by those in need. Prayer without the person praying is like any other tool that sits idle on a shelf. Prayer is a useful tool for Jews seeking healing. And, we as members of the Reform movement, both professional and lay, have a responsibility to make and keep prayer a viable option for healing. In doing so, we keep the door between our tradition and our future open and accessed.

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