Caring for the Dying: Spiritual Perspectives from Early Modernity

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

2005

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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS APPROVAL FORM

AUTHOR: Michelle D. Pearlman

TITLE: **Caring for the Dying: Spiritual Perspectives from the Early Modern Period**

2/17/2005
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THESIS ABSTRACT

TITLE: Caring for the Dying: Spiritual Perspectives from Early Modernity

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CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS:

The Psalmist asks, "What man can live and not see death" (Psalm 89:49) and yet in our modern world of advanced medical technology, the time of dying is often left to medical professionals. Unfortunately, dying can become a lonely process that takes place behind sterile walls. This cultural taboo extends to liberal Judaism, and also colors our education as Reform rabbinical students. When it comes to death, our education is primarily focused on the mourners, not the dying. We have seminars on how to prepare a eulogy and oversee proper burial customs, but we are taught little about what Jewish sources offer concerning providing spiritual and emotional care for those who are at the end of life. In this thesis, I consider the extensive attention given to the dying process in the *Maavar Yabbok*, (Aaron Ben Moses Berechiah, 1626), and ask if the practices in this liturgical work of early modernity can be adapted to inform modern pastoral care.

LAYOUT:

I. Perspectives on Dying
- Chapter 1. Biblical Perspectives
- Chapter 2. Rabbinic Perspectives
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II. Perspectives on Dying in the *Maavar Yabbok*
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- Chapter 5: Theology of the *Maavar Yabbok*
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- Chapter 9: Torah

III. Caring For the Dying in our Time
- Chapter 10: Current Pastoral Resources
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MATERIALS USED:

This thesis depends on a close reading of the *Maavar Yabbok*. To provide background for Berechia's work, I survey perspectives on the dying in Biblical, Rabbinic, and Medieval sources. In addition, because of the mystical nature of this text, I have also incorporated many background sources on the theology of kabbalah. In addition, many contemporary works on pastoral care are utilized in order to explore the possibility of applying the ideas of the *Maavar Yabbok* in a modern context.

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

In the summer of 2002 after my second year of rabbinical school, I was called to the bedside of a dying man. The family was preparing to remove life support after a long illness, and they wished a rabbi to be present at the bedside. Reform Rabbi's manual in hand, I made my way to the hospital. Though I was only a rabbinic intern, and my experience was limited, what unfolded was one of the most spiritually profound moments of my life.

In my Rabbi's Manual, there were only three and a half pages of end of life liturgy. I fumbled my way through, elongating the limited service with the improvisation of psalms and other liturgical songs. The whirring machines were silenced, and family members wept but I sensed the need to continue my improvisation in speech and song. The man who I had seen upon entering the room, in pain and distress was now at peace. His soul had been released. The family expressed their thanks, but upon leaving, I wondered if perhaps there was something further I could have offered. This thesis was born from that incredible experience. I would like to thank many people for helping me to find my voice on this issue. First, I want to thank Rabbi Neal Gold who sent me to the hospital on that day, with encouragement and warmth. Rabbi Steve Denker, also helped me to process this experience. He has been my mentor and teacher, and is a continuing source of wisdom and counsel for me.

This thesis also grew from class papers written under the guidance of Drs. Sharon Koren, Larry Raphael, and Nancy Weiner. These wonderful professors helped me to integrate my passion for pastoral care issues into my academic work. Nancy Weiner, in particular, has been a constant source of encouragement for me on my pastoral interests. She has provided me with conference opportunities, internships, special reading, and even facilitated an independent study for me in preparation for this paper.

Dr. Alyssa Gray, my thesis advisor, has been an incredible academic motivator. She has helped me to confront the difficulties of working with the *Maavar Yabbok*, a dense kabbalistic text. Dr. Gray patiently helped me as I worked through the theological overlay of the *Maavar Yabbok*. Her encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish texts is astonishing, and her guidance has been a true blessing to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents Barbara and Harvey Pearlman continue to demonstrate that their love is unconditional. They have always supported my academic goals and professional dreams in both word and deed. In addition my husband Drew deserves my undying thanks for his support and patience throughout this process. With the birth of our daughter Madeline, in my fourth year of school, I feared that I may never complete this thesis, let alone graduate. Drew has helped me to realize that I can be a good mother, a good student, and that some day soon, I will be a good rabbi. Our life together is rich and full. In his love he has taught me, that with a wonderful partner the possibilities are endless.

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Introduction

The Psalmist asks, "What man can live and not see death" (Psalm 89:49), and yet in our modern world of advanced medical technology the time of dying is only visible to medical professionals. Because dying can be a lonely process, taking place behind sterile walls, the spiritual dimension is too often ignored.

In American culture, even discussing the subject of dying is taboo. Many people feel that speaking about death has the power to hasten its arrival. This taboo certainly has an impact upon our Reform rabbinical training. We pride ourselves on the ability to facilitate various life cycle events for our congregants. Unfortunately, in discussing the end of life, we are often doing only half the job. We focus on the spiritual well-being of the mourners, and often ignore the dying. We attend seminars on burial customs, eulogies and counseling the bereaved, but we are taught little about how Jewish sources can help us to provide spiritual and emotional care for those who are actively engaged in the process of dying.

In the medieval period there was indeed a Jewish way to die. Medieval manuals created for the sick and dying prescribed *halacha* and customs to ease community members through the profound passage from life to death. Funerary manuals such as the *Maavar Yabbok* (R. Aaron Berechiah of Modena, Mantua, 1626) were meant to facilitate the passage of the dying person's soul from this world to the next. In this thesis, I will provide a background for the *Maavar Yabbok*, by surveying perspectives on death throughout the biblical, rabbinic, and medieval historical periods. I will then concentrate on the liturgy and customs of the *Maavar Yabbok* for the final stage of life. Finally, I will

ask if the halacha and customs prescribed in its pages have any import for modern Reform rabbis ministering to the sick and dying.

Chapter 1. Perspectives on Dying: Biblical

The Good Death: Death as a Natural Occurrence

It is important to understand the biblical view of death as a foundation for later medieval practice. For the most part, our biblical ancestors viewed the dying process as a natural part of life.[1] In the Genesis narratives, the patriarchs are depicted as living full lives before dying of natural causes. Though the dying processes of the first two patriarchs, Abraham (Genesis 25:8) and Isaac (Genesis 35:29), only comprise a few biblical verses, we do learn that they lived long lives before "being gathered to their kin." Jacob's deathbed scene, on the other hand, provides us with a detailed account of his final hours, as he prepares to die happily after being reunited with his son Joseph (Genesis 46:30).

The Talmud (BT *Baba Metzia* 87a) observes that Jacob is the first biblical character to succumb to weakness from an illness preceding his death. He is therefore able to anticipate his own demise. His son Joseph is informed of his father's illness and summoned to his father's bedside (Genesis 47:29-49:33) so that Jacob can begin his end of life preparations.

In the final verse of this section (Genesis 49:33), Jacob finishes his deathbed instructions to his sons and thus is finally ready to surrender to death. The biblical term used for putting one's affairs in order is לצות. This expression and its grammatical variants are used in many other biblical contexts (Genesis 50:16, 2 Samuel 17:23, Isaiah 38:1, and 2 Kings 20:1) where biblical characters are commanding others to heed their

[1] Kent Harold Richards, "Death" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Friedman, ed. (Doubleday: New York, 1966), vol. 2, 188.

death bed wishes. Here in Genesis 49:33, Jacob is clearly putting his affairs in order. Only after doing so is the patriarch able to die in peace.

To carry out his father's final wishes, Joseph is asked to swear with

חסד ואמת
kindness and faithfulness

that he will bury his father's bones in his homeland of Canaan (Genesis 47:29). The seriousness of honoring a deathbed request such as this cannot be overstated. This same חסד ואמת, kindness and faithfulness, is referred to in Exodus 34:6 as an attribute of God. Joseph is not only asked to heed his father's wishes, but to be as steadfast as God in carrying out his father's orders.

And just as his father before him, Joseph makes a similar final request when he reaches the end of his own life. In the tradition of his father Jacob, Joseph asks his brothers not to bury him in Egypt, but to carry his bones to Canaan (Genesis 50:24). Just as Joseph honors his father's final wishes, his request will be honored by the Israelites with חסד ואמת as they carry his bones through the Exodus.

Jacob's deathbed scene provides a biblical model for the steps one must take at the end of life. First we see Jacob beginning to put his affairs in order as he prepares to die. To do this, he must be surrounded by family members. The biblical text stresses that it is important for loved ones to be called to the bedside of those who are dying.

Clearly, Jacob is visibly strengthened by his first visitor. This is evident as he suddenly sits upright in bed after his son Joseph is announced (Genesis 48:2). Later in the story, each of his 12 sons is present in the room as he dies. This biblical model, of a dying man surrounded by his family at the time of death, is expanded upon in the rabbinic period. As we will see, in this later period, each sage was surrounded by his

disciple circle at the time of death.[2] And later still, in the early modern period, in the *Maavar Yabbok*, a full *minyan* is required to be present in the room in the last moments of life.

In addition, the biblical story instructs that dying people should be engaged in a review of their life. Visiting loved ones such as a son, in this case, can help facilitate this process. At the outset, Jacob reviews stories from his life with his son, recounting the source of his unique relationship with YHWH (Genesis 48:3-4ff).

This biblical model also emphasizes the importance of discussing the subject of inheritance. In Genesis 48:5ff Jacob takes Joseph's sons Ephraim and Menasseh as his own. According to Nachum Sarna, his language in this section indicates that he is formally adopting his grandsons, "thereby elevating them to full membership in the Israelite tribal league."[3] In 48:5 he states that the status of Ephraim and Menasseh is equal to that of Reuben and Simeon. The moment that Jacob adopts his grandsons, he thereby grants them inheritance rites equal to the rights of his own sons. In a sense, the patriarch is making a final will and testament. It is clear that Jacob does not to rely on the convention that dictates that his assets will pass to his sons. On the contrary, in this text, he clarifies his wishes by naming his additional heirs.

Unfortunately, many families find the subject of inheritance difficult to discuss. As a result, people often die without making their wishes regarding inheritance known to their families. More often than not, this lack of information can cause tensions in the family following the death of a loved one. For both the dying person and their loved

[2] For a deeper understanding of the importance of the presence of the disciple circle at the end of life in the Rabbinic period, see Chapter 2 of this thesis, "Deathbed Scenes of the Sages: Imparting Wisdom," p. 20.
[3] Nachum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 325.

ones, inheritance is an unwelcome conversation topic. Talking about what will happen after a person's death can make the end seem all too near.

However, engaging in life review and dealing with inheritance is, according to this biblical text, an important Jewish way of preparing for death. It is interesting to note that both life review and inheritance as depicted in this story become important in the practice of writing ethical wills, which becomes prominent in the later medieval and modern periods. The famous memoir of Glückel of Hameln is an example of an ethical will of the early modern period, which survives to this day.[4]

Following this declaration of inheritance, Jacob summons all of his sons for a final meeting (Genesis 49) and confronts each of them with their past deeds. During this confrontation, the dying father makes predictions for the tribal descendants of each son. He blesses all of his sons (Genesis 49:28), although he declares that some of them will not have successful futures. Most notably, he confers, in the presence of all the brothers, his final blessing on the head of his son Joseph. The biblical model here stresses the importance of appointing a successor. It is important that this is done in front of all other concerned parties, so Jacob's wishes are not in dispute after his death. Just as with the deaths of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, the final blessing of Jacob is of great importance to the biblical writer. The tradition of passing authority to the next generation before the time of death is a practice carried into the rabbinic period. It is a prominent feature of the deathbed scenes of great Talmudic sages, and will be explored in the next chapter.

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[4] Glückel of Hameln, *The Life of Glückel of Hameln*, Translated by Beth-Zion Abrahams (London: Horovitz Publishing, 1962).

Finally, in Genesis 49:29-32, Jacob gives specific burial instructions, and requests to be interred in the cave of Machpelah with his ancestors. Only after all of this is settled is the patriarch able to take his last breath. The final burial instructions here enjoy a heightened importance, as they are the patriarch's final words. He gives his sons the exact instructions, requesting that they take his bones to the ancestral burial place (Genesis 49:29-30). Jacob informs his sons that all of their ancestors are buried there, and that the field and the cave have been purchased from the sons of Heth (Genesis 49:32). The patriarch's directions are clear. He wants to be buried with his family. The plot has been purchased, and his sons must follow their father's final instructions.

The Untimely Death: A Theology of Illness and Death as Punishment

Though death after a long life, as in the case of Jacob, is seen as natural in the biblical view, a premature death is viewed as punishment for sin. In Proverbs 5 this point is vividly made as the author forcefully cautions against sinful relations with forbidden women, declaring that such transgressions will lead to death (Proverbs 5:1-23). Following God's righteous path, one chooses life. Engaging in behavior which is abhorrent to God invites death.[5]

This point is further illustrated by the case of King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38). When Hezekiah falls ill, the prophet Isaiah comes to inform him that he will die. Like Jacob, he is also commanded to put his affairs in order. A despondent Hezekiah turns his head towards the wall, but instead of resigning himself to his fate, he appeals to God through prayer. In so doing, he reminds YHWH of his steadfast loyalty. God responds and vows to answer Hezekiah's prayers by healing the monarch. Here the

[5]Richards, 188.

power of prayer for healing is emphasized. Only God causes illness and death in the Bible; thus prayer is the only antidote to illness.

This biblical linkage of sin to illness and death becomes the foundation for the rabbinic, medieval, and kabbalistic theologies which will follow. While in the biblical period, the linkage of sin to sickness only applied for early or unnatural deaths, in the medieval period the link is stronger. All death and illness in the Middle Ages was thought to be a direct result of sin. In later kabbalistic theology, the link between sin and illness pervades all rite and ritual associated with the end of life.

Chapter 2. Rabbinic Perspectives on Dying

The rabbis of late antiquity, authors of classical texts such as the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, share a perspective on dying which is both complicated and nuanced. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the rabbinic view, this section will be divided into for subsections. First I will begin by exploring the rabbinic link between sin and illness. Following this theological discussion, the halachic underpinnings of end of life care will be discussed, focusing on the ethical imperatives to do *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) such as *bikkur cholim* (visiting with the sick). Then the death bed scenes of the talmudic sages will be explicated as they offer the reader an aggadic glimpse of end of life ritual and custom. Lastly, the complicated halachic terms related to end of life care will be explained.

The Theological Link between Sin and Suffering

"There is no suffering without sin,"[6] teaches BT Shabbat 55a. We have already seen that in Biblical theology there is clear link between sin and suffering. The rabbis also understood illness to be punishment for sin. The innovation of this time period, however, is that the drama of sin and punishment for the rabbis is played out in a legalistic framework. The rabbis cast God in the role of the Divine judge. The sick individual is depicted as a man condemned to death. A rabbi or caregiver, who fills the role of pastoral presence, acts as an advocate for the condemned in front of the Divine court.

In the Mishna at Sotah 8b, the principle of measure for measure is stated.

במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו
For each action of a man will be measured ,

[6] This Talmudic text is also quoted by Berechiah. Aaron Ben Moses Berechiah, *Maavar Yabbok.* (Yerushalayim: Ahavat Shalom, 1996), Maamar Aleph, Part 1, 59.

If a person commits a sin, that sin will be measured on high. The Divine will then deliver an appropriate punishment. In this *mishna*, the example of the *sotah*, a woman suspected of adultery, is used. Later in the *gemara*, this principle of measure for measure is elaborated upon and linked to the four forms of capital punishment which can be imposed by the *beit din* or rabbinic court.

Thus illness is linked to capital punishment. The four forms of capital punishment are known as the *arba mitot beit din*. They are: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangulation. In reality, such capital sentences cannot be imposed in the absence of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. However, the *gemara* quotes a *baraita* taught by Rabbi Yosef and Rabbi Chisda stating that the *arba mitot beit* din are still in force. The *gemara* explains that one guilty of a crime deserving of a stoning sentence will meet his end by either falling off a roof or being trampled by a wild beast. A person deserving of a sentence of burning will die by falling into a fire or being bitten by a venomous snake. A candidate for beheading is handed over to authorities outside of the Jewish community for punishment or is killed by bandits. And he who is deserving of strangulation either drowns in a river or is killed by disease.

It is clear that in the estimation of the rabbis, a sinner would be punished properly for his sin. In the absence of their earthly authority to impose such punishment, the rabbis trust that God will take action. Deaths which seem accidental (falling into a fire, suffering a snake bite, etc.), or merely unfortunate, such as disease, are considered as acts of Divine retribution.

This courtroom metaphor is present in a story told in BT Brachot 5b, where the ill Rabbi Yochanan is visited by Rabbi Chanina. When asked by Rabbi Chanina if he

derives benefit from his suffering, Rabbi Yochanan answers in the negative. Rabbi Chanina is asking Rabbi Yochanan if he has become accustomed to his state of illness and all the rewards heightened attention that it affords. Rabbi Yochanan answers clearly, that he is willing to forgo his suffering, relinquishing claim on all that is afforded to him by virtue of his illness. Rabbi Chanina takes Yochanan hand and cures him from his illness. Through his line of questioning, Rabbi Chanina becomes Rabbi Yochanan earthly advocate. Under the aegis of Rabbi Chanina, Rabbi Yochanan's testimony that he has nothing to gain from his illness is thus entered in the realm of the Divine court. Because of this line of questioning, it is clear to the Divine court that Rabbi Yochanan is psychologically and spiritually prepared to have his health restored.

Just prior to this scene in the *gemara*, it is notable that Rabbi Yochanan had helped to cure Rabbi Chiyah ben Abba in the same manner. The *gemara* asks the logical question. If the Yochanan could help to cure Rabbi Chiyah ben Abba, why is he not able to cure himself without Chanina's help? The *gemara* explains that a prisoner is unable to advocate on his own behalf. With an earthly advocate, like Rabbi Chanina, Rabbi Yochanan's testimony can be entered in the realm of the Divine court. Without such an advocate, even the great Rabbi Yochanan is unable to free himself from jail.

Clearly, although Rabbi Yochanan can advocate on behalf of Rabbi Chiyah ben Abba, he cannot serve as his own lawyer in this Divine court. Thus, even a great sage must have an advocate of his own. Later in the medieval period, this idea of advocacy before God will becomes very important. In the focus text of this thesis, *Maavar Yabbok*, the dying person must have an attendant, like Chanina, to hear his confession. This

advocate helps enter the dying person's confession as testimony before the Divine court, as the dying man approaches his final moments, and awaits God's judgment.[7]

Gemilut Chasadim and *Bikkur Cholim* in Rabbinic Tradition

Jewish law places the mitzvah of *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) as a central obligation of Jewish life. In Mishna Avot 1:2, Simeon the Righteous states: "The world stands on three things: On Torah, on the Temple service, and on deeds of loving kindness (*gemilut chasadim*)." This mishna enshrines *g'milut chasadim*, establishing it as one of the three principal pillars of the world. Thus the Jew is obligated to search out ways in which he can be kind to his fellow human beings.

The primacy of *g'milut chasadim* is further supported by examples found in various other rabbinic texts. In the BT Sotah 14a we learn that in doing acts of loving kindness one is acting *imitatio dei*. In this *sugya*, the rabbis focus on the biblical verse "You shall walk after the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 13:5). The rabbis wonder if it is possible to literally follow God. The discussion in the *gemara* clarifies the issue:

> [It means that] you should follow [God by emulating] his virtues...The Holy One Blessed be He, visited the sick...so you too shall you visit the sick. The Holy One, Blessed be He, comforted the mourners...so you too shall comfort the mourners. The Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead ...so too shall you bury the dead.

In caring for the sick, one is engaging in an important mitzvah which emulates God's own behavior. Not only does God visit the sick, but, according to BT Nedarim 40a the Divine presence actually dwells above the bed of all who are ill. These texts clearly establish *bikkur cholim* as an important act in the overall category of mitzvot which are considered acts of lovingkindness.

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[7] This will be fully explored in chapter 8 of this thesis, "The Work of *G'milut Chasadim*: Requesting Mercy on the Sick.

The power of *bikkur cholim* or visiting the sick is also emphasized in many other places in the Talmud. For example, in BT Nedarim 39b, Reish Lakish establishes that the mitzvah of visiting the sick is *d'oraita*. A *mitzvah d'oraita* is a class of *mitzvot* which are drawn from the biblical text. Because of its biblical derivation, a *mitzvah d'oraita* is said to have been enacted by God's divine reasoning and revealed to mankind through Torah. Thus a *mitzvah d'oraita* enjoys higher halachic status than a *mitzvah d'rabannan*, one established through the human reasoning of the rabbis. Here Reish Lakish elevates the status of *bikkur cholim* to *mitzvah d'oraita*, by linking it to the biblical text of Numbers 16:29. This text reads:

אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה ופקדת כל האדם יפקד עליהם
לא יהוה שלחני

If these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind,
it was not the Lord who sent me.

Clearly, the link of *bikkur cholim* to the Numbers text is a weak one. This verse comes from the Korach narrative and has no contextual link to the subject of illness. In this verse Moses is stating that the men of Korach will not die by the fate of all men, but rather they will die because they have done wrong before God. Presumably the "fate of all men" that will not be extended to the men of Korach is a death by natural causes. In contrast, these rebels will be killed by an act of God.

There is no overt mention of *bikkur cholim* here. To Reish Lakish, the root פקד means visitation. He reads the verse as follows: if men die as all men do, then the visitation of all men will be visited upon them. According to this reading, all dying men will be visited by their peers. Clearly, the rabbis believe that the link between this biblical text and *bikkur cholim* is ambiguous, because *gemara* asks for clarification. Rava supports Reish Lakish's reading adding that "to die as all men do" actually means

to become bedridden because of illness prior to death. He goes on to explain that people who are bedridden are visited by others (*bikkur cholim*).

Rava's explanation seems incomplete, which forces Rashi (1040-1105, France) to attempt to strengthen the biblical link by highlighting the following fragment of the verse:

ופקדת כל האדם יפקד עליהם

The root פקד can mean "to visit." Here Rashi reads the verse to say: and the visitation of all man will be visited upon them. Thus Rashi establishes that the "fate of all men" is to be visited as they approach death (*bikkur cholim*).[8] Both Rava and Rashi seem to be trying to strengthen a biblical link which is weak at best. Their efforts are notable because they illustrate the rabbinical impulse to elevate the status of *bikkur cholim* from a *mitzvah d'rabbanan* to the higher level of *mitzvah d'oraita*.

Bikkur cholim, according to rabbinic theology, is a spiritual act. A *baraita* quoted in BT Nedarim 40 confirms the heightened status of *bikkur cholim*. The *baraita* states: "Visiting the sick has no limit." Rav Yosef understands this *baraita* to mean that there is no limit to the reward heaven will give to the one who engages in this mitzvah.

Tractate Nedarim also contains practical details relating to *bikkur cholim*. In reference to the above *baraita* (39b), Abbaye understands "no limit" to imply that a person of high status is required to visit an ill person of lesser status. His reading is that there should be no limit imposed by the social distance between the visitor and the ill person. Rava suggests that this *baraita* eliminates all possible limits on the amount of

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[8] Rashi, *dibbur ha matchil "u'venei adam mvakrin otan"* This interpretation is also borne out in the text of BT Shabbat 12b where Rabbah Bar Hanah reports that R. Elazar would visit the sick and say,

המקום יפקדך בשלום

"May God visit you in Peace"

times a person should engage in *bikkur cholim*. A sick person can be visited even 100 times a day.

Other practical areas addressed include the time of visitation and the seating arrangements in the sick room. In Nedarim 40a we read that one should neither visit a sick person in the first three hours of the day nor in the last three hours. In the first three hours a sick person may seem comfortable, and the visitor may assume that no prayer is necessary, while in late in the day, the sick person's condition may worsen and a visitor could falsely assume that prayer would be hopeless. A visitor should not sit upon the bed or in a chair, but rather on the ground.[9] There is a rabbinic belief that the Shechina, God's presence, dwells over the head of the sick person's bed (BT Shabbat 12b). The Nedarim text seems to caution the visitor against sitting higher than the sick person. Presumably this text, which encourages the visitor to sit on the floor, out of the view of the Shechina, places the ill person in a more prominent physical position than the visitor. The ill person maintains the most prominent place in the room so that the Shechina might look upon him favorably.

In addition, BT Nedarim 39b-40a depicts the visitors engaging in *bikkur cholim* as agents of change. In 39b the *gemara* states,

כל המבקר חולה נוטל אחד מששים בצערו

All who visit a sick person lift away one sixtieth of his suffering.

Though healing is controlled by God, a visitor is thought to have a hand in the process. Rav Dimi affirms the power of this *mitzvah* by declaring that any person who visits the sick causes that person to live. Unfortunately, the *gemara* states that the converse is also

[9] See also BT Shabbat 12b where we learn that the visitor is supposed to sit in front of the sick person rather than on the ground.

true. Any person who fails to visit the sick can be held responsible for that person's death.

Requesting Mercy for Those who are Ill

If healing is in God's hands, how exactly would a human visitor cause the ill person to live or die? The *gemara* explains that the visitor will:

מבקש אליו רחמים
Request mercy upon him

Through prayer, the visitor entreats God to have mercy on the sick person. If a sick person receives no visitors, then they will have no one to entreat God on their behalf. Again, the image here is one of a Divine court. If no one advocates for clemency on behalf of the ill person, according to the *gemara*, the ill person may die (BT Nedarim 40a).

The idea of requesting mercy on behalf of one who is ill is also found in Shabbat 12b. In a discussion of the proper etiquette for visiting a sick person on the Sabbath, Rabbi Jose suggests that the visitor say,

המקום ירחם עליך בתוך חולי ישראל
May God have mercy upon you amongst the sick of Israel.

Here special mercy is requested for the sick person, but it is also important that that person be counted amongst the sick of Israel. Of course, rabbinic theology held that God has a special relationship with the Jewish people. Likewise we have established that God cares deeply for those who are suffering through illness. By extension, this text suggests that a person entered amongst the sick of Israel will be more likely to receive mercy from the Divine.

The spiritual reward for the visitor is addressed in Mishna Peah 1:1.

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא כיבוד אב ואם וגמילות חסדים והבאת שלום בין אדם לחבירו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם:

These are the things the interest of which a person enjoys in this world, while the principle remains for him in the world to come: the honoring of father and mother, acts of *g'millut chasadim*, and acts which bring peace between a man and his fellow, and the study of Torah is equal to them all.

The central idea of this text is expressed in the economic terms of principal and interest. It states that the a person can enjoy benefit from the interest generated by acts of loving kindness in this world, and can still enjoy the benefit from the principal generated by the deed in the world to come. This "interest" is described in metaphor as fruit, or (פירות) which is continually yielded by a tree. The term used for principal is קרן.

This rabbinic idea is fleshed out in BT Nedarim 40a. As an earthly reward for helping the sick person to take stock of his sins before God, the visitor is rewarded with protection against the evil impulse in this world. Also, because the visitor requests mercy upon the sick person, he is also promised relief from his own suffering. As another worldly reward the visitor will be a source of pride to his community, will be protected from enemies, and is also promised many friends. Presumably, with an increased number of friends, the visitor himself will have a greater chance of visitation should future illness strike. In addition, in the world to come, according to the *gemara*, the visitor will be spared from the judgment of *Gehinom.*

Deathbed Scenes of the Sages: Imparting Wisdom

We have already explored the end of life scene of the patriarch Jacob in Genesis (Genesis 47:29-49:33). This study of the deathbed scenes of the talmudic sages will be a progression and expansion of the deathbed customs present in the biblical text. Anthony

J. Salderini has found that while no two Talmudic death bed stories share identical elements, they do have some narrative features in common.[10]

Like the patriarch Jacob, the sages do not die alone. In many cases they are surrounded by their students during their final moments.[11] It is interesting to note that in the rabbinic period the members of the disciple circle often serve as a surrogate family. Against this cultural backdrop, of the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim* grows as the patient reaches the final stage of life.

It is clear that the master's knowledge is still important to his students in spite of his infirmity. In BT Brachot 28b, students visiting their dying master Rabbi Eliezer engage their teacher by asking him to impart some final wisdom.[12] This scene parallels many other bedside moments where students ask for wisdom, and often engage their master in halachic discourse.

The students themselves will soon become rabbis. Thinking like future rabbis, it is possible that they have a pastoral motivation for engaging their teacher in halachic discourse. It is possible that they wish to assure the dying teacher that he is still worthy of their attention and adoration. Often, those who are dying feel that their life is over, even before their day of death arrives. In asking for this final wisdom, the students are assuring their master that his life still has meaning, and that he still is their beloved teacher.

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[10] Anthony J. Salderini. "Last Words and Deathbed Scenes in Rabbinic Literature." *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 68:1 (1977), 30.
[11] Ibid., 28-45.
[12] Ibid., 31.

Most often the student's requests are rewarded. Salderini notes that these final lessons have been "assiduously preserved."[13] Interestingly, he also speculates that halachic pronouncements which became important in later generations may have been retroactively attributed to the important deathbed moment. A teaching imparted as the final words of a dying sage would certainly be elevated in halachic importance.[14]

This is borne out in practical rabbinics as well. It is true that people often remember specific words that their loved one uttered in the final moments of life. Those words are also assiduously preserved and passed on as the parting gift of the dying person.

In Jewish law, the final words of the dying clearly have elevated status. As we saw with the dying patriarch Jacob, the biblical text instructs that even complex demands, such as burial in another geographical location, must be honored. This idea is developed further in the rabbinic period. In BT Gitin 13a, we learn that the last wishes of a dying person must be obeyed as long as they do not contravene Jewish law. Deathbed instructions are given the same force in Jewish law as a legal contract that has been both written and delivered. This "contract status" ensures that words of the dying person are validated, and even elevated to a higher status than the words of one who is well.

The rabbis are careful to insure that the dying person is not prematurely written off. Rather, the dying person is continually afforded a place of respect in Jewish law. This idea is reinforced in the rabbinic literature which focuses on the laws of the *goses*, or moribund patient, which will be examined in detail in the following section.

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[13] Ibid., 35.
[14] Ibid.

As in the biblical case of Jacob, Talmudic scholars such as Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai often give practical instructions for death or burial.[15] In his deathbed scene (BT Brachot 28b) Yochanan warns his students to remove all holy implements from his presence so that they will not be defiled by his corpse.

Like Yochanan, the practical deathbed instructions given by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi are extensive (Ketubot 103a-b). Rabbi, as he was known, held a position of great importance as redactor of the Mishna and patriarch of Judea. His life spanned the latter part of the second century to the beginning of the third century C.E. It is logical that the lengthy account of Rabbi's final wishes would be preserved by the tradition, because this account would help to insure continuity in the community after this great leader's death.

Like Jacob, the Rabbi calls for the presence of his sons. He begins by dealing with personal issues, reminding his sons that they should care for their mother. He also requests that all domestic activities continue as usual following his death. In addition, he gives funeral instructions, specifying that Joseph of Haifa and Simeon of Efrat should oversee his burial.

He then calls all of the sages together for a meeting at his bedside in order that he, again in the tradition of the patriarch Jacob, can name his successors. He names his two sons and Chanina ben Hama as his successors, in front of all their colleagues, in order to insure continuity of authority. As in the Genesis text, all who are concerned with the transition of power are present at this moment to hear the wishes of their dying leader. Because all are present, challenges to the authority of the chosen successors will be limited.

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[15] Ibid, 32.

Rabbi also asked that smaller towns not hold their own funeral lamentations in his honor. Such lamentations were held only in larger towns. It appears here that the sage is trying to engineer his own funeral preparations so that the funeral rites will cause limited upheaval in the daily life of the citizenry. Lamentations can be consolidated and organized in the larger towns. People from the smaller villages can travel to mourn their leader, but with consolidation of the funeral rites, the mourning period will be limited. People will then be free to return to their daily lives.

In limiting the lamentations, Rabbi is expanding upon the biblical model of the Genesis 47-49. Both Jacob and Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi are leaders. However Jacob was the head of a household, while Rabbi rules over all of Judea. Here Rabbi demonstrates that it is incumbent upon a leader to consider the impact of his death not only upon his successors, but also upon the larger community that he serves.

According to Salderini, talmudic sages, like biblical patriarchs, may also impart a blessing before dying.[16] However, there is a difference in the intended results of these blessings. As previously discussed, Jacob bestowed blessings as a departing gift to his sons. Through these blessings Jacob provided each son with a prediction, as they prepared to encounter their futures without their father. In contrast, the end of life scenes of the rabbinic period served to highlight important teachings for the disciple circle. These teachings were intended to help insure continuity in leadership after the death of the sage.

Salderini points to numerous examples, including the passing of authority from Hillel to Yochanan ben Zakkai.[17] In addition to insuring leadership, these final death

[16] Ibid., 29.
[17] Ibid., 44.

scenes often include cautions against heretical teachers who may come to threaten the authority of later rabbis.[18] In the case of Rabbi Yehuda ha Nasi, Jeffrey Rubenstein, observes that "...Rabbi bequeaths the positions of Nasi and sage to his two sons, suggesting that a combination of heredity and testamentary designation determined succession to the highest academic offices."[19] For the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud, such continuity was important because it helped to ensure Jewish survival.

End of life Halacha: Unpacking the Legal Categories

Just as aggadic accounts of the death of the sages were intended to anchor and preserve rabbinic authority, the legal categories created by the rabbis helped to anchor and define the ambiguities of the end of life.

These ambiguities and the questions they provoke are numerous. No human has the power to predict the exact moment of death. Neither do we know what will happen when we die. A dying person may have days or weeks to live. What are the signs that a sick person is near death? What must be done for a patient who is dying? What interventions must not be taken? And finally, what exactly is the definition of death itself? Through their own end of life investigations, the rabbis created the following legal categories in order to clarify this mysterious process.

Mystery, however, is incompatible with halacha. The halachic system fashioned by the rabbis is a system of law which depends on terms that are concretely defined.[20] In defining the halachic terms associated with dying, the rabbis sought to answer these

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[18] Ibid., 45.
[19] Jeffrey Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2003), 96.
[20] Menachem Elon, "The Concreteness of Jewish Legal Terminology." *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, translated by Bernard Auerbach and Melvin J. Sykes (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 1:79.

ambiguous and often difficult questions. In this section, I will explore the halachic terms which fall under the large halachic heading *noteh l'mut*. Translated literally, *noteh l'mut* means one who is leaning towards death. According to the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, this is the overall category used to describe a patient for whom death is approaching.[21]

The following terms are used to further clarify the patient's condition under the larger heading of *noteh l'mut*. One who is *terefah*, or stricken, is considered to have a terminal illness.[22] Though the life of a *terefah* is in danger and death will come in the foreseeable future, it is not imminent.[23] The term *shechiv merah* is used to describe those closer to death, those who are depleted of all energy. A *shechiv merah* is unable to walk to the market and thus is confined to bed. This person knows internally that the end is near.[24]

Perhaps the most detailed halachic category is that of the *goses*. The term *goses* is derived from a linguistic root meaning "to stir." This term refers to the troubled breathing or "death rattle" often characteristic of a dying person. This sound was heard as the stirring of phlegm in the throat.[25]

According to *Massechet Semachot* 1:1-4, a *goses* is like a living person in all respects, and can be fully obligated under halacha. *Semachot* (Rejoicings) is the euphemistic name for the Talmudic treatise *Evel Rabbati.*[26] Sylvie Anne Goldberg writes

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[21] Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem: Machon Schlessinger, 1992), 4:343-344.
[22] Elliot N. Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics*. (Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 1998), 200.
[23] Steinberg, 3:1.
[24] Ibid., 4:386.
[25] Ibid., 4:343
[26] Sylvie Anne Goldberg, Crossing the Jabbok: Illness and Death in Sixteenth through Nineteenth Century Prague (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 13.

that this text "represents one of the first works of mortuary and funerary codification, containing all the laws, customs, and practices dealing with dying, death, burial, and mourning," and agrees with scholar Dov Zlotnick that it may date to the third century.[27] *Semachot* is thus a very important source, useful for defining these often ambiguous halachic categories.

J. David Bleich defines a *goses* as "a moribund patient in imminent danger of death."[28] Death should be expected within 72 hours.[29] The numerous laws surrounding the *goses* find their origin in *Semachot* 1:1-14, where harming a *goses* is considered tantamount to murder. Extreme life-saving measures are prohibited, as are actions which would hasten the process of death. Because the *goses* is compared to a flickering candle, closing the eyes prematurely is like snuffing out person's life, and is therefore considered murderous.[30]

The *Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 339:1ff is also a rich source text for laws pertaining to this category. The Shulhan Arukh is a sixteenth century work. In its pages, Joseph Caro sought to codify Jewish Law, creating an elaborate compendium which deals with all aspects of Jewish life.[31]

As in Massechet Semachot, Caro agrees that a *goses* should not be unnecessarily tied to life, nor be put in danger. The *Shulchan Aruch* adds the following specific

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[27] Goldberg,13.
[28] J. David Bleich. *Judaism and Healing: Halachic Perspectives.* (Ktav Publishing: Hoboken, 1981), 38.
[29] *Shulchan Aruch*, Yoreh Deah 339:2 states that mourning must actually begin 3 days following the designation of the goses.
[30] Mishna Semachot 1:1-4.
[31] Goldberg, 76. For additional information on Joseph Caro and the *Shulchan Aruch* see Menachem Elon. *Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*, translated by Bernard Auerbach and Melvin J. Sykes (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 3:1309-1344. See also Howard Adelman "From Zion Shall Go Forth the Law: On the 50th Anniversary of the Birth of Joseph Caro," *Jewish Book Annual* 45 (1987), 143-157.

prohibitions. The *goses* should not be moved from his bed for any reason, nor should his orifices be closed off. Any straps around the moribund patient should not be loosened. Nothing should be given to him for his stomach, such that it would become sunken, or blocked. Neither a flask of water should be given, nor a globule of salt.

The mourning process must not begin prematurely. The eyes of a *goses* may not be closed until his soul departs. In addition, the *Shulchan Aruch* prohibits early *kriah*, tearing of the mourner's garment. Early lamenting, eulogizing, and recitation of the *tzidduk ha din*, a graveside prayer, is also forbidden. Premature funeral arrangements like placing the body on sand and summoning the town on the behalf of the *goses* are prohibited, as is bringing a coffin into the house and digging the grave prematurely.

While these sources do not provide rationales for the various prohibitions, the prohibition against stopping up body orifices suggests that there should be no effort to cosmetically improve the appearance of the dying person, or heroically stop bleeding. The *goses* must not be given medical treatment that might impede his dying or make him uncomfortable.

Finally, two additional important halachic terms are *chayei sha'ah* (life of the hour) and *yetziat neshama* (departure of the soul). The *Encyclopedia Hilchatit Rifuit* reports that it is difficult to find a clear definition of *chayei sha'ah* in rabbinic literature. Some believe that this category is similar to that of *trefah*, as anyone who has been seriously ill for more than 2 months is considered to be *chayei sha'ah*. Others define it as a period of illness lasting a year or more with a life threatening disease with an unknown cause.[32] Elliot Dorff's modern position on this classification is that *chayei sha'ah*

[32] Steinberg, 4:390.

actually refers to the period of time that a person lives after being diagnosed with a terminal illness.[33]

Yetziat neshema, or the moment when the soul leaves the body, is incredibly difficult to determine in practical application. How is it possible to determine the exact moment of death? A central rabbinic text on this issue is BT Yoma 85a. Here the sages are discussing a building that had collapsed on the Sabbath. If a life can be saved, then the laws of the Sabbath may be suspended. If there is doubt whether the victim is alive or dead, the Talmud instructs the rescuers to probe the rubble. If a person is found alive, he can be removed on the Sabbath, but if he is dead, he is to be left until Shabbat is over. This question helps to define death: "How far do we search in order to know if the victim is dead or alive?" Some say: "Search until you see his nose." Presumably, respiration here is the key function. Others say: "Search up to his heart." To these respondents cardiac function is important. The sugya concludes that life manifests itself primarily through the breath which is channeled through the nose, and grounds its decision in the language of Genesis 7:22,

כל אשר נשמת רוח חיים באפיו

All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life...

As moderns, we know that heart and lung function are inextricably linked, but it is fascinating that our early sages seemed to understand a similar link as well. Fred Rosner points out that medieval medical thought posited that breathing cold air through the nose

[33] Dorf, 203-4.

was thought to cool the heart. The warm air of exhalation was thought to be a kind of exhaust, taking the warm air that had built up around the heart and releasing it.[34]

Others, like Moses Sofer (also known as the *Chatam Sofer*, 1762-1839), embrace an alternate view on the definition of death. Sofer believed that death occurred with the cessation of the breath when the body was still as a stone.[35]

Because of scientific advancement in the modern period, death becomes even more difficult to define. Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to answer this question definitively, the following examples are but a sample of how modern Jewish ethicists attempt to define death. Today, doctors define brain death as "the irreversible cessation of the functions of the neocortex (the upper brain) rather than that of the whole brain." Dorff points out that this means that people who will never regain consciousness are therefore considered dead.[36] Many Orthodox rabbis such as Avram Reisner disagree with the medical community because they claim that "defining death in terms of the absence of intelligence would impugn the sanctity of the vessel that carried God's image."[37]

Jewish tradition depicts the life of the goses as like a flickering candle.[38] For this reason it is Conservative theologian Elliot Dorff's position that death is not defined in an instant but rather through a process of events. He writes, "Life does not begin or

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[34] Fred Rosner. "The Definition of Death in Jewish Law." In *The Definition of Death: Contemporary Controversies*., eds. Stuart J Younger, Robert M. Arnold, and Renie Schapiro. (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1999), 215.
[35] M. Sofer, *Responsa Chatam Sofer,* Yoreh Deah 338.
[36] Dorff, 215.
[37] Dorf, 216.
[38] Dorf, 200.

end at one distinct moment." His argument continues that life begins in stages, and thus ends in stages. The absolute point of death is too difficult to define.[39]

Orthodox ethicist Rabbi J. David Bleich struggles with the same problem. Like Dorff, this scholar does not consider the rabbinic definition of death (cessation of respiration or cardiac function) sufficient. He also allows the consideration of modern scientific factors such as measurement of brain waves to define the cessation of life.[40] No doubt, as our technology progresses, this is an area in which science will continue to inform the modern understanding of Jewish law.

[39] Dorf, 200.
[40] Bleich, 333.

Chapter 3: Medieval Perspectives on Death

Maimonides: Health as a Prerequisite for Enlightenment

In the medieval world, strict adherence to the principles of Jewish law not only had repercussions for the afterlife, but was critically important for a healthy earthly life as well. The great philosopher and halachist Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) was also a practicing physician serving as court doctor to the Sultan of Cairo.[41] In chapter 5 of his *Shemonah Perakim*, a commentary on Mishnah Avot, Maimonides declares that a person should focus his life upon obtaining knowledge of God. A halachic lifestyle, according to Maimonides, allows one to rein in any extraneous impulses which would distract him from pursuing the Divine through scientific, rational, and moral reasoning.[42] For Maimonides, health, obtained in part through proper halachic observance, is a prerequisite for spiritual enlightenment.

Introduction to Kabbalah

With the rise of Kabbalah in the Middle Ages, the link between health and meticulous observance of Jewish law is further strengthened. According to Gershom Scholem, God in Kabbalah is, "the conception of...a whole realm of divinity, which underlies the world of our sense-data and which is present and active in all that exists."[43] The mystical God is a theosophic deity. God emanates from the heavens, and thus energizes each object of creation.[44] In addition the God of the mystics is the object of theurgy. By action on earth, humans can cause a reaction in the Divine realm. In our discussion of rabbinic theology, we did see evidence of theurgy. In the case of Rabbi

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[41] Goldberg, 147.
[42] Moses Maimonides, *Shemonah Perakim: A Treatise on the Soul,* Edited and Translated by Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky (New York: UAHC Press, 1999), 59-61.
[43] Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Schoken Publishing House, 1941), 11.
[44] Ibid., 206.

Yochanan, he needed an advocate to influence God's action so that he could be healed. This rabbinic idea of influencing the heavens is seized upon and elaborated by the kabbalistic thinkers. In this section, I will define some of the basic terms of Kabbalah. These terms will be further developed as they apply to the *Maavar Yabbok* later in this thesis.

God, in the kabbalistic worldview, is described as *Eyn Sof*, or "that which is infinite."[45] Kabbalistic theology is based on neo-Platonic thought. The God of the Neo-Platonist is like an eternal fountain, thus in Kabbalah, the presence of the *Eyn Sof* constantly flows forth into the world.

The problem for the kabbalist is clear. God as *Eyn Sof* is infinite and therefore unfathomable to the human mind. However, the mystic's quest was to apprehend knowledge of the the Divine. To that end, the kabbalist envisioned God's emanations inhabiting a heavenly structure of a tree with 10 limbs. Through this theological conception, they would be able to understand God's influence in the world.

In kabbalistic theology, divine material from the *Eyn Sof* flows into the 10 limbed sefirotic tree[46] into the earthly world. This material from the Godhead is known as the "supernal efflux." Each of the limb of the tree is a *sefira*, or sphere. Kabbalah was understood "as...a technique to draw downwards the supernal efflux from the world of the Sefirot...."[47] The sefirotic tree had its roots in medieval cosmology. Thus Kabbalah was the "science" of its day.[48]

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[45] Ibid., 12.
[46] A diagram of the *sefirot* can be found in the Appendix, p. A-1.
[47] Ibid., 346
[48] Ibid., 357.

Special attention should be paid to the lowest sphere on the sefirotic tree, which is known as *Malchut* or *Shekhinah*. This *sefira* is known as the feminine aspect of God, and stands in opposition the masculine construct of the God of Israel. Scholem traces the idea of Shekhinah back to Gnostic constructions. Gnosticism was an ancient dualistic thought system. Under Gnosticism, there were gods both of light and dark, there were both male and female divine beings. These beings, according to Gnostic teaching, lived in the upper region or pleroma realm.[49] According to Scholem, some gnostics believed the lowest aeon on the edge of the pleroma was called the "lower Sophia." This aeon is known as the daughter of light, and through Jewish mystical tradition develops into the Shechina. The Shechina dwells in the lowest sefirot, she is the gateway *sefira*. Through the Shechina, God's efflux passes into the earthly realm.

The Kabbalistic link between Illness and Sin

According to Kabbalah, human beings, by living according to strict halacha, have the ability to affect the Godhead and arouse the supernal efflux. The kabbalistic view is a mechanistic one of cause and effect. If one transgresses halachic principles and commits a sin, evil flows into the world. That evil could take the form of illness.

Just as in the biblical and rabbinic periods, illness in the Middle Ages was believed to be a sign of divine punishment.[50] Sylvie Anne Goldberg writes that "...illness is often considered just one of the manifestations of demonic agency. For just as illness insinuates itself into a deficient or weakened body, evil spirits penetrate the human body diminished by its misdeeds or by malign forces."[51] In the 16th century, there were numerous medical treatises which contained advice for curing illness. This

[49] Ibid., 230.
[50] Goldberg, 146.
[51] Ibid., 151.

literature combined the innovations of medical science with the rituals of practical kabbalah.[52]

Death and Kabbalah

Just as meticulous attention to halacha had an impact on health, careful observance of religious life was believed by medieval kabbalists to have an effect on the eternal life of the soul.

On prayer and the end of life the Zohar teaches:

> When a person prays in this way, with [appropriate] actions and word, and establishes the union [of above and below], by virtue of his deeds, upper and lower worlds are blessed...[He] has separated himself from the Tree of Life and died near the Tree of Death, which returns its pledge to him, as it is said, "He [Jacob] gathered up his feet into the bed" (Genesis 48:33), as he confessed his sins and prayed on account of them...Now he must be gathered to the Tree of Death and fall saying:..." Now that I have effected unification and performed act and word properly, and confessed on account of my sins, behold I surrender my soul to You completely..."[53]

According to this passage, if one dies with the proper rites and customs prescribed by Jewish law, blessing is triggered in both the upper and lower worlds. That blessing is the supernal efflux which is aroused by the proper actions and enters the world through the sefirot.

Originally, according to the kabbalah of the Zohar, God was one in relationship both with the Divine self and with the rest of creation. Thus, humankind and God at the beginning of creation enjoyed an uninterrupted relationship. Before the fall, Adam did not have an earthly body. In this state, kabbalistic tradition calls him *Adam Ha Kadmon*, primordial man. According to Scholem, "The ethereal shape which enclosed him and which was later transformed into the organs of his body stood in an entirely different

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[52] Ibid., 148.

[53] Zohar 3:120b-121. This translation comes from Lawrence Fine, *Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 240.

relation to its nature than his body does now."[54] Scholem explains that prior to Adam's sin, the *Shechina* was in the lower region. "The wellsprings and the channels through which everything in the higher regions flow into the lower were still active, complete and unhindered, and thus God filled everything above to below.[55] However, according Zoharic kabbalah, Adam's sin broke the channels and God's flow into the earthly realm was halted.[56]

Later, Lurianic Kabbalah interpreted this breaking of the channels to be a fracture of God's being. For Lurianic Kabbalists, this point of fracture was the genesis of the 10 sefirot. Prior to the fall, God's presence in the world was seamless. As a result of the sin of Adam, God was "fractured" into 10 pieces. As stated above, the upper 9 sefirot dwell in the supernal realm and only the lowest *sefira,* the feminine *Shechina*, is thought to dwell in the earthly realm, separated from the rest of the Godhead. And the *Eyn Sof* went into exile, becoming distant from mankind. [57]

While sin alienated God, according to kabbalistic theology, right action, as in the Zohar passage above, can bring God's presence down into the world. Strict halachic observance in this system is extremely important because of its theurgical consequences.

The Possibility for Yichud – Making God Whole

As supernal efflux flows down, the possibility for *yichud*, or unification of the Godhead, arises. This unification of the Godhead constitutes the end of God's "exile." In *yichud,* the *Shechina* is united with all of the other sefirot. With the unity of the

[54] Sholem, 231.
[55] Ibid., 231.
[56] Ibid., 231.
[57] Ibid., 230-231.

Divine there is potential for all of God's creations to be returned to the unity which existed prior to the sin of Adam.

All of this is accomplished in the kabbalistic system through righteous action. According to Gershom Scholem, "Only after the restoration of the original harmony in the act of redemption, when everything shall again occupy the place it originally had in the divine scheme of things, will "God be one and his name be one," in Biblical terms and for all time."[58]

In this theological framework the subjects of death, afterlife, and resurrection become of paramount importance.[59] As emphasized in the Zohar passage, strict halachic adherence at the end of life was believed essential for the messianic unification of the universe. The soul had to depart the body under proper conditions, and after leaving the body, it needed to be protected on its journey by halachic rite.[60] Dying the "good death" in this medieval context was thought to insure an afterlife and eventual resurrection.[61]

The Rise of the Chevra Kaddisha

One of the most remarkable developments of the European Middle Ages was the emergence of the *chevra kaddisha.*[62] In modern Jewish life, the *chevra kaddisha* is known primarily as a burial society. According to Jacob Marcus, the *chevra kaddisha* originated in Jewish Spain. Beginning in the thirteenth century, there were a number of Spanish fraternal organizations that assumed responsibility for a variety of charitable

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[58] Ibid., 232
[59] Ibid., 81.
[60] Jacob Rader Marcus, *Communal Sick-Care in the German Ghetto* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1978), 66.
[61] A more detailed treatment of the concept of *yichud* can be found in Chapter 5 of this thesis.
[62] According to Marcus, the name *chevra kaddisha,* or holy brotherhood was also a general term applied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to almost any type of European Jewish association. Many Jewish communities refered to themselves as *chevra kaddisha.* This term did not only apply to the burial brotherhood which is the focus of this chapter, 250.

activities in the community. Members of these organizations educated the poor, provided dowries for orphaned brides, visited the sick, and buried the dead.[63] Later in 14th and 15th century Spain, such societies began to focus their activities more closely on care of the sick and dying. In the sixteenth century, after the Spanish expulsion, similar groups began to appear in German and Italian lands. These later organizations borrowed much from the organizational model of the Christian religious guild.[64]

Prior to the emergence of the *chevra kaddisha*, the spiritual needs of the sick and dying were left to friends and family members.[65] As stated above, medieval Jews held strongly to the biblical belief that sickness was caused by sin. Thus, confession and repentance through prayer and study was embraced as an antidote to bodily affliction. Before the rise of the *chevra kaddisha*, community support at the end of life was severely limited. For example, up until the sixteenth century, in the Ashkenazic Jewish communities, of the Germanic lands of northwestern Europe, those suffering a loss were entitled only to the services of a community grave digger.[66] Later, the *chevra kaddisha* developed into a corporate entity. In addition to other benevolent activities, its members ministered to the sick and dying, facilitated the last moments of life, and provided proper halachic burial for the dead.

Though the care of the sick and dying did become an important part of the work of the burial societies, Goldberg notes that this responsibility may have been a later addition. She notes that the Prague *Chevra Kaddisha* charters of 1692 and 1702 are the earliest to list *bikkur cholim* as an official function of the brotherhood. Though the

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[63] Ibid., 63.
[64] Ibid., 64.
[65] Ibid., 215.
[66] Goldberg, 75.

Maavar Yabbok was widely used by *chevra kaddisha* members in their work with the sick and dying, the reading of the *Maavar Yabbok* at the bedside is mentioned only in article 27 of the Prague charter. Goldberg observes that up until the latter half of the eighteenth century, the main goal of the burial society was to bury the dead. For the brotherhoods prior to that, ministering to the sick and dying may have been a lesser priority.[67]

What were the contributing historical factors in the rise of the *chevra kaddisha*? Though Goldberg carefully considers the question, in her book *Crossing the Jabbok*, she cautions that no definitive answer can be found.[68] Goldberg acknowledges that there are those who seek to trace the *chevra kaddisha* back to the ancient burial societies of Jerusalem.[69] In fact, the founders of the societies themselves believed themselves to be "following in a path...anchored in the Jewish past."[70]

Likewise the language used by *chevra kaddisha* members is derived from the Bible and the Talmud. In taking care of the sick and dying, members do their work with *hesed shel emet* (true kindness). This term, as mentioned in chapter 1, is found in the biblical text (Gen 47:29 and Exodus 34:6). In addition the *chevra kaddisha* considered their work to be *gemilut chasadim*. As we learned in Chapter 2, *gemilut chasadim* was an important class of mitzvot which was established in the rabbinic period. Therefore, the founders of the *chevra kaddisha* embraced the perennial Jewish impulse to infuse established religious concepts with new meaning.

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[67] Ibid., 105.
[68] Ibid., 83.
[69] Ibid., 82.
[70] Ibid., 82.

However Goldberg disputes those who wish to trace the lineage of the *chevra kaddisha* back to the burial societies of ancient Jerusalem.[71] In contrast, she hypothesizes that the rise of the *chevra kaddis*ha was due to specific social conditions. Though there was considerable influence from the Christian guild system, the reality of epidemics in this time period also contributed to the rise of the *chevra kaddisha.*[72] Many communicable diseases swept across Europe, leaving rotting corpses in their wake. Goldberg points that the corpses became a public health hazard. In addition, those who were responsible for grave digging in the Jewish community were often uneducated about Jewish laws pertaining to burial.[73]

The practical mandate of the burial society according to Goldberg was "on the one hand to make sure that all members of the community can be buried decently and according to prescribed practice, and, on the other, to oversee the education of members of the burial society in matters of funerary ritual."[74] Goldberg's conclusion is compelling:

> It seems clear that in previous times the last rites had been left to the individual initiative of families as much as to the good will of professional gravediggers. The transformation of the social fabric of the community wrought by the *chevra kaddisha's* erection of a hierarchical structure would have many consequences, not the least of which was the emergence of an effective moral power exercised by the group over the individual. But we can be sensitive as well to the evident intention to endow the Jewish community with the same categories and institutions as its environment and at the same time to the constant care ...to situate this society solidly in a tradition that would be specifically Jewish....[75]

The proliferation of the *chevra kaddisha* in German and Italian lands, and its mandate to be "specifically Jewish" inspired a flurry of liturgical creativity. This creativity was collected in numerous medieval funerary manuals. This genre of literature,

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[71] Ibid., 83.
[72] Ibid., 85.
[73] Ibid., 84
[74] Ibid., 84
[75] Ibid., 85.

which had not existed in detailed form before the rise of the *chevra kaddisha,* was on the rise between the 16th and 18th century.[76] While many of these manuals were published in special editions incorporating local customs, the authors sought overall to standardize halachic observance at the end of life. A prime example of this literature is the focus text of this thesis, The *Maavar Yabbok*, which was authored by Rabbi Aaron Berechiah of Modena, Italy, in 1626.[77]

It should be noted that although the *Maavar Yabbok* was published in the 17th century, and Berechiah devotes many pages to the care of the sick and dying, the *chevra kaddisha* societies were at first primarily burial societies. In her studies of the Prague Chevra Kaddisha and its charter texts, Goldberg observes that the directive to read *Maavar Yabbok* to the dying was a practice that became normative only in the middle of the 18th century.

Chevra Kaddisha and Kabbalah

Notable too is the interesting intersection between the *chevra kaddisha* organizations and kabbalah. In explaining this intersection, it is important to recall the Spanish origins of the *chevra kaddisha*. Goldberg suggests that rise of *chevra kaddisha* organizations may have been linked to the spread of kabbalistic ideas.[78] Jacob Marcus illuminates this theory with the following explanation:

> Now there were two influences to bring about the adoption of the brotherhood form: the idea of the brotherhood brought from Spain and the new emphasis on the liturgy of death stemming from kabbalistic circles in Palestine. Spain gave basic organizational form and social content. Palestine in a supplementary sense, supplied spiritual content. The two ideas met and merged in Italy and the new death-bed liturgy was introduced to into the workings of the societies.[79]

[76] Ibid., 86.
[77] Marcus, 227.
[78] Goldberg, 86-92.
[79] Marcus, 67.

The author of the *Maavar Yabbok*, Berechiah, was indeed a kabbalist. Not only was he exposed to the kabbalah of Spain described above, but according to Moshe Idel, the Italian Berechiah was also heavily influenced by the Safedian masters. His scholarship can be linked to that of Moshe Cordovero and Isaac Luria.[80]

In *chevra kaddisha* organizations, members were often known as *gomlei chasadim* or those who do kindness. As caretakers of the sick and dying in a kabbalistic context, their task was extremely important. In helping people to die this "good death" the *gomlei chasadim* were not merely accomplishing a good deed on earth, but they were arousing chesed, or kindness to flow down from above. In enabling the ill to strictly observe the end of life *halacha*, they became instruments of theurgy, believing that their actions would ultimately have eschatological benefits.

[80] Moshe Idel, "Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660," *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by David Ruderman, (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 352.

II. The Maavar Yabbok

Chapter 4: Introduction to Maavar Yabbok

Title and Publication History

The title *Maavar Yabbok* is a literary allusion to Genesis 32:23. In this biblical passage, Jacob struggles with his divine adversary at the Yabbok River near Penuel. The Yabbok River takes on a new significance under Kabbalah. There is a teaching that after death the soul will depart on a final crossing across the purifying Yabbok River, which will blaze like fire. The soul is purified in the crossing as it moves closer and closer to the *tsror ha chayim*, the eternal bond of life.[81] Like the Yabbok river, the term *tsror ha chayim* also has a biblical origin (I Samuel 25:29) in the story of David and Abigail. Abigail tells David that his life is bound in the *"tsror ha chayim,"* the bundle of the living, with God. Because of this, David will be protected from any harm. Later kabbalists understood the *tsror ha chayim* to be the kabbalistic sphere to which the human soul returns after death. In summary, as discussed above, the soul makes its crossing across the Yabbok, finally returning to the *tsror ha chayim,* where it will eventually unite with the Divine.[82] .

According to Marcus, *Maavar Yabbok* was in use from its publication in Mantua in 1626 until around 1800.[83] Because of its ungainly size, a smaller digest form of the work, *Kitzur Maavar Yabbok*, was published after the original. *Kitzur Maavar Yabbok*

[81] Goldberg, 87.
[82] Ibid., 87.
[83] Marcus, 229.

became the standard funerary manual in locales through out Italian and German lands, including Prague, under various Hebrew names.[84]

Content

The original *Maavar Yabbok* is a detailed manual intended for use by individuals and their caregivers prior to, and following, death. It is also a work which is infused with kabbalistic theology. Sylvie Anne Goldberg writes that, "*Maavar Yabbok* deviates from the funerary ritual with its kabbalistic interpretations (and accompanying customs) and represents a kind of Lurianic breviary of death and the beliefs associated with it...."[85] It was specifically intended for use by members of the community *chevra kaddisha.*[86]

Throughout this extensive work, Berechiah covers the spectrum of important end of life topics, leading the reader through the dying process from sickness to burial. It is clear that the author was well acquainted with a wide variety of textual sources. The overall manual speaks to two audiences at once. The overall manual and its various commentaries are aimed a reader who is literate in Jewish sources. It was intended to inform the work of the members of the *chevra kaddisha,* who would be visiting the sick and dying.

The liturgical sections in the *Maavar Yabbok* are intended for use by the common person. Death does not discriminate. Thus prayer sections included in the volume are intended for use by dying people, both educated and uneducated alike.

There is much evidence that the nonliturgical sections of the manual were intended for the well-educated reader. Though text citations are often given in the pages of the *Maavar Yabbok*, there are many instances where allusion is made but texts are not

[84] Ibid., 229-30.
[85] Goldberg, 103.
[86] Ibid., 104.

cited. It is clear that in some cases the author presupposes familiarity with these missing texts. In addition, there are instances when the author suggests a prayer text, but does not include the full prayer; rather he cites the work and leaves it to the reader to find the complete text. For example, in his deathbed confessional service, or *seder ha viddui*, Berechiah cites the confessional service from the *Torat Ha Adam* of Nachmanides (1194-1270).[87] This prayer is not included, but presumably it would have been well known and accessible to the user of the *Maavar Yabbok*. Because of its importance in the historical development of the bedside viddui (see Appendix A-2 for the full text),[88] I will further explore the importance this text in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Though Berechiah's overall work, as stated above, presupposes a high level of Judaic knowledge, he also seeks to make the liturgical sections of the *Maavar Yabbok* accessible to all. His liturgical sections contain a variety of different features intended for ease of use and increased understanding. Sylvie Anne Goldberg observes that the *Maavar Yabbok* resembles the *vaiber shrift* genre of literature also characteristic of the same period. The *vaiber shrift* was also known as "women's writing" because women were not required to read Hebrew. As in the *vaiber shrift* genre, all liturgical and scriptural sections of the *Maavar Yabbok* contain vowel points. This helped to make the prayer texts designed for recitation accessible to the masses. In addition, the liturgical sections of the *Maavar Yabbok* contain detailed stage directions help to clarify each ritual for the non-educated user.[89]

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[87] Berechiah, p. 96.

[88] Moses ben Nachman, also known as Ramban, was a scholar of Bible, Talmud, Philosophy, and Kabbalah, in the Middle Ages. In his *Torat Ha Adam*, Nachmanides includes a compendium of end of life halacha. "Torat Ha Adam," *Kitvei HaRabenu Moshe ben Nachman*, Edited by Charles Chavel, (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha Rav Kook, 1963) vol.2.

[89] Goldberg, 103

Structure

This section will serve to highlight some of the important structural features of the *Maavar Yabbok*. Berechiah creates a service, or *seder* for each important juncture in the death and burial process. The *sedarim* typically contain study passages and liturgy which are accompanied by detailed *halachic* instructions.

As stated above, the instructional passages often contain textual references, drawn from a wide variety of biblical and rabbinic sources, as well as sources from Jewish mystical tradition. These instructional passages often act as stage directions.

These instructional passages also contain useful reference notes which enable the reader to find pertinent commentary in Berechiah's kabbalistic *maamarim*. Typically, the *maamar* in *Maavar Yabbok* is a non-linear mystical explication of an end of life topic. A collection of *maamarim* serves as an explanatory preface to the liturgical sections of the Maavar Yabbok. In addition, there are also explanatory *maamarim* which follow the liturgical material. In a sense Berechia's liturgy is sandwiched between extensive commentary sections. These sections are important because they help the reader to understand the kabbalistic significance of each rite and ritual. In each *maamar* Berechiah covers a number of different themes. The notes in the halachic instructions are integral, because they enable to reader to easily find the pertinent commentary. The following is a short outline of the sections of the *Maavar Yabbok* which are relevant to the process of dying.

I. Introduction
II. *Siftei Tzedek* (Lips of the Righteous): Commentary
III. 8 Private Services: For the Seriously Ill Person

IV. Halachic Instructions for the Visitor

V. *Seder Ha Viddui:* The Confessional Service

IV. Additional Resources for the End of Life in the *Maavar Yabbok*

I-II. Introduction and *Siftei Tzedek*

At the beginning of the work, Berechiah offers an introduction detailing his reasons for creating the manual. He then follows his introduction with a *ma'amar* entitled *Siftei Tzedek*, or Lips of Righteousness. *Siftei Tzedek* explains issues concerning the seriously ill person.

III. 8 Private Services: For the Seriously Ill Person

Immediately following *Siftei Tzedek*, Berechiah provides a service of psalms and prayers for the seriously ill person to recite. Steven Moss notes that each of the eight services here is comprised of thirty-six verses of text. Each service contains six Torah verses, twelve from the Books of the Prophets, and eighteen from the Writings. Moss notes that the number thirty-six is the numeric equivalent to double חי. The word חי has a numeric value of 18 and means life.[90] The symbolic structure of this section is significant, because the seriously ill person is pleading with God for the return of health and the continuation of his life.

IV-V. Halachic Instructions for the Visitor and the *Seder Ha Viddui*

Detailed halachic instructions for ***bikkur cholim***, visiting the sick, are next. These instructions serve as detailed preface for the confessional service. This section reminds

[90] Steven A. Moss, "The Attitude Toward Sickness, Dying, and Death as Expressed in the Liturgical Works *Maavor Yabok* and *Sefer Ha Hayim*," Rabbinic Thesis (New York: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), 32.

the visitor of the various halachic preparations necessary for his work with the seriously ill person. This is then followed by the main *Seder ha Viddui*. The confessional service itself is a lengthy liturgical section which also contains a set of detailed halachic instructions.

VI. Additional Resources for the End of Life in the *Maavar Yabbok*

After the *Seder ha Viddui*, the author provides additional Torah passages which should be recited by those in attendance when death is imminent. This section includes prayers intended for the exact moment when the soul departs the body.

The final part of the book contains a number of services detailing after death procedures, from the washing of the body to the interment. These chapters are also accompanied by explanatory *maamarim*.

In the following pages of this section, I will explore the rite and ritual surrounding the dying process in the *Maavar Yabbok*. I will begin by discussing the origins of the customs or ideas, and will also focus on Berechiah's rationale for their inclusion in the work.

Chapter 5: Theology of the *Maavar Yabbok*

The Theology of Exile

It is impossible to analyze the *Maavar Yabbok* without first understanding its unique philosophical overlay. The themes of separation from God and reunification with the Divine are present in almost every aspect of the work. In this chapter I will examine the historical factors that contributed to the popularity of these themes in kabbalah in general. This will be followed by an analysis of the same themes in the text of the *Maavar Yabbok*.

Separation and exile were themes of great practical interest for the kabbalist. According to Goldberg, the *chevra kaddisha* was rooted in "the orientations and injuctions of the rabbis and thinkers of the communities who had experienced or witnessed the expulsion of the Spanish Jews...." To these Jews, the cruel reality of the Spanish expulsion was interpreted as "the night that must precede redemption."[91] In order to cope with their predicament, the early kabbalists cast the expulsion as a prelude to an ultimate redemptive moment, the coming of the Messiah. As a result of this troubling historical backdrop, the historical reality of separation and exile is played out in the spiritual realm.[92] According to Scholem, "Redemption depended on the deeds of Israel, and on the fulfillment of its historic destiny. The coming of the redeemer would testify to the completion of the restoration but would not cause it."[93] The dream of ultimate eschatological homecoming became enshrined in the kabbalistic doctrines of

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[91] Goldberg, 91.
[92] Ibid., 91.
[93] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: The New York Times Book Company,1974), 336.

d'vekut (cleaving to God) and *yichud* (reuniting the Godhead). Returning home from spiritual exile would only be possible through the people's earthly actions.

Kabbalistic theology teaches that man is separated from God. Before the fall of Adam, Man and God existed in a united form. But, as Scholem points out,"sin always destroys a union."[94] Thus man was exiled from God as a consequence of Adam's sin. Because of this exile, man could no longer be a part of the celestial body of God and was thus consigned to live an earthly life in a corporeal body.

The goal of the mystic, however, is to be close to God. Yearning to live at one with the divine presence,[95] the kabbalists developed the doctrine of *d'vekut*. Under this belief system, the mystic is constantly chasing the lost intimacy of that primordial relationship, longing to some day be reunited with God for eternity. According to Scholem, "the task of Kabbalah is to help guide the soul back to its native home in the Godhead." In the carly Kabbalah of Provence the doctrine of *d'vekut* was understood both as an ideal to be pursued constantly in daily life, as well as the ultimate goal of the mystic.[96]

This spiritual yearning certainly informs the deathbed liturgy of Berechiah. One of the goals of this work is that through its rite and ritual, the soul may be granted eternal life, living on in continuous attachment to the Divine presence.

In addition to *d'vekut,* the other important theological goal of the *Maavar Yabbok* is *yichud*. As discussed previously, just as God is separated from Man, God is also separated from the Divine self. In addition to the kabbalistic legend of the breaking of

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[94] Sholem, *Major Trends*, 232.
[95] Ibid., 229.
[96] Sholem, *Kabbalah*, 175.

the channels,[97] Scholem also relates the Lurianic variation on that story. According to Lurianic Kabbalah, at the time of creation, God contracted inward so that the world could be established. This act of contraction is known as *zimzum*. After the contraction, God's light radiated out from the Divine self in emanation. God's light radiated out into 'vessels.' According to Scholem, "at first this takes place still hylically, in the vessel called, "primordial air" but subsequently it assumes a clearer form in the vessel called "primordial man," or *adam ha kadmon*"[98].

Thus as stated earlier, man, or *adam* was one with God.[99] According to Scholem the 10 sefirot were first established as smaller vessels in the larger vessel of "primordial man."[100] Though there are many different interpretations of why the vessels broke, one compelling Lurianic teaching is that as a result of Adam's sin Israel was exiled from God and the holy sparks were scattered.[101] Amongst the many elements contained in these sparks were both the Shechina and the soul of Adam. This kabbalistic interpretation also claims that with Adam's descendants, the sparks of holiness became more and more diffuse. Israel, according to this Lurianic tradition, has the responsibility for gathering the sparks and thus restoring the Godhead in *yichud*. This mission is known as *tikkun*. According to Scholem, the historical reality of the exile becomes not only "a punishment and a trial but a mission as well."[102]

Thus kabbalists such as Berechiah who were heavily influenced by Lurianic myth believed that they were extremely close to the time of redemption. They believed that

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[97] See pages 35-36 of this thesis.
[98] Ibid., 130.
[99] Ibid., 128-130.
[100] Ibid., 137.
[101] Ibid., 167.
[102] Ibid., 167.

each successive generation gathered the sparks to contribute to the *tikkun* of God. In addition, they believed that their task was becoming more difficult because the time of exile had drawn near its end. In this context, they viewed their historic situation as a series of "special ordeals that will occur on the eve of redemption."[103]

According to Scholem, the theme of exile is further "mirrored in the kabbalistic doctrine of metempsychosis, which won immense popularity by stressing the various stages of the soul's exile."[104] Again, theology imitates life. To reflect the horror of living in exile, kabbalists developed the theology of the outcast soul. There is an idea in Kabbalah that after death the soul is broken into three parts. In life, the sections are united, but after death, they are separated. The *nefesh*, or the corporeal soul, remains tied to the body as it hovers over the grave after death. Another part of the soul, known as the *ruach* was thought to make a slow advance towards paradise. The third part, the *neshema*, which is the very essence of the soul returns immediately to the *Shechina*, its source.[105] Though *neshama* returns to immediately after death, and the *ruach* advances towards paradise, the *nefesh* remains in exile. If all of the parts of the soul can be returned to God, then *d'vekut*, or unification of the soul with God can be achieved.

Yichud, Tikkun, and D'vekut

From the very beginning of this work, Berechiah stresses the importance of *yichud*, *tikkun*, and *d'vekut*. In his introduction, he writes that the *yud* in *yabbok* stands for *yichud*. He continues by explaining that unification is possible through confession, prayer, and repentance. In addition, the *bet*, in Yabbok, symbolizes the blessing of soul and body which comes through the act of *tikkun*, or repairing the Godhead. The final

[103] Ibid.,167.
[104] Ibid., 255.
[105] Goldberg, 87.

letter in *yabbok*, the *kuf*, symbolizes *kedusha* or sanctification. This sanctification is earned by the person who recites the proper end of life liturgy, and also extends to the sick and dying who may only be able to passively hear the prescribed prayers.[106]

This text teaches that the death bed ritual of confession and prayer which lead to repentance bring about *yichud* in the heavenly realm. When the Godhead is repaired through this *yichud*, a blessing is offered to the soul and body of those who have helped to unite the divine. In addition, for the sick person's soul will ascend to heaven as a result of this ritual, and experience the holiness of God. This holiness comes through *d'vekut*, as the soul of the dead person cleaves to the Divine presence.

The importance of *yichud* is further emphasized in the third section of *Siftei Tzedek*.[107] Berechiah writes:

> And every person that dies on his bed is able to give himself eternity, by dying in *yichud* with God and his *Shechinah*. It is in the detail of his prayers, and his *mitzvot*, and the detail of *Shema Israel*, and in *Sim Shalom* for heavenly *yichud*, and by a prostration to present his *nefesh* in completion of the *yichud* of the Divine couple.

Here, the ideas in Berechiah's introduction are fleshed out. First, a person gains eternal life by attending to the detail of prayers, specifically *Shema Yisrael* and *Sim Shalom*. We have already discussed the mystical ideal of *d'vekut*. The primary tool to apprehend God's presence for the mystic was prayer. According to Scholem, "Kabbalah regarded prayer as the ascent of man to the upper worlds, a spiritual peregrination among the supernal realms that sought to integrate itself into their hierarchical structure and to contribute its share toward restoring what had been flawed there."[108] Likewise, in this text, Berechiah teaches that prayer is a path to restoring unity in the heavens.

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[106] Berechiah, 18.
[107] Ibid., 62.
[108] Sholem, *Kabbalah*, 177.

Logically, *Shema Yisrael* is a natural choice for *yichud* because the main theme of the prayer is God's unity. In a gloss on this prayer, Berechiah states that saying it at the time of death as part of the *Seder Ha Viddui* helps to unite the disparate names of God. *YHWH, Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh*, etc).[109] The kabbalistic belief that God is in pieces and is in need of *tikkun* applies to all of the disparate names of God as well. With the achievement of *yichud*, God will be one and his name will be one, figuratively as well as literally. In mentioning *Sim Shalom,* Berechiah may be stressing the importance of continuing to ask for God's mercy, which is a major theme of this prayer text.

We have already discussed at length the theurgic value that the Kabbalists assigned to meticulous practice of the *mitzvot.* Scholem adds that "...every commandment has its mystical aspect whose observance creates a bond between the world of man and the world of the *Sefirot.*" Here Berechiah is reminding the reader of the incredible power of the mitzvot to effect change in the heavens, and advance the cause of *tikkun.* Through prayer, *mitzvot*, and laying bare his soul in repentance, the Divine exile may finally be ended and the heavenly *yichud* will finally be induced. In this text, according to the cosmology of this text, *yichud* is a cosmic sexual coupling of the *sefira* of *Shechina* with her bridegroom *Tiferet.*

Innovation of Bedside Minyan

Amongst Berechiah's innovations in the *Maavar Yabbok* is the instruction to gather a *minyan* for the recitation of the *seder ha viddui.* Though there is precedent in biblical and rabbinic literature for gathering friends, family, and disciples to the bedside in the final days, nowhere is it mentioned that a person's final confession must be

[109] Berechiah, 194.

witnessed by a quorum. To be sure, gathering a *minyan* at the bedside makes good pastoral sense. A person dying in that community that uses this funerary manual would be surrounded by a group of his peers in his final moments. He most certainly would not die alone. But pastoral benefit was not Berechiah's reason to include this innovative instruction. Rather *minyan* is suggested here because of its Kabbalistic link to the doctrine of *yichud*.

In traditional Judaism, ten men who are gathered for prayer form a complete quorum, or minyan. In BT Brachot 6a the rabbis state that when ten men pray together the Divine presence of the *Shechina* is with them. They elaborate on this idea later in the same sugya, teaching that the *Shechina* actually arrives at the place of worship before the worshippers, in anticipation of the *minyan*.

Kabbalah adds an extra layer of interpretation to the *minyan*. According to the Zohar (Numbers 126a), when all ten men are present, the men of the *minyan* "form something complete." The Shechina has awaited their arrival, and in forming the *minyan* they are the first to be sanctified by her holy presence.[110]

In his essay, "The Meaning of the Minyan," K. Kogan comments on this Zoharic text. "The ten men symbolize the complete heavenly realm of ten sefirot which also make up the body of the *Adam Kadmon* (primordial man)..." He goes on to say that the men of the minyan are blessed with God's presence because together they complete an earthly representation of the Godhead.[111]

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[110] Trans H. Sperling and J. Abelson, The Zohar (London: Soncino Press, 1934) 5:184-85.
[111] K. Kogan, "The Meaning of the Minyan" *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader*, edited by David Blumenthal (New York: Ktav, 1978), 146-148.

But of course, each earthly action in Kabbalah has a cosmic consequence. The Zoharic text continues:

> Observe that the moment the body is made complete here below a supernal holiness comes and enters that body, and so the lower world is in truth transformed after the pattern of the upper world.[112]

With the completion of the *minyan*, the lower world is transformed to resemble the upper world. The earthly representation of the Godhead is complete, and God's presence, in the guise of the *Shechina* enters into the *minyan* room.

The kabbalistic language of *yichud* is sexual in nature. True unity happens when the heavenly Shechina is entered, or has intercourse with her bridegroom *Malchut*. Here in the lower realm, the *Shechina* enters to be united with the *minyan*. Thus the *Shechina* is joined with the body of the earthly Israel.

Kogan takes his analysis to the next logical step. If there is symbolic union on earth, the same symbolic union or *yichud* is taking place in the heavens. With the completion of the *minyan*, the text tells us that "Israel then is at its most complete and holiest." A symbolic representation of *yichud* has taken place on earth. The symbolism of the *minyan* sets the stage for the union of the heavens that will take place after the soul departs on its journey to the supernal realm.[113]

This kabbalistic interpretation informs the rite of the *Maavar Yabbok*. In his halachic instructions accompanying his *Seder Ha Viddui*, Berechiah requires that the service be witnessed not by one visitor, but by an entire *minyan*.[114] Berechiah writes that with the completion of a *minyan*, holiness is wrapped around the group. His description

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[112] Sperling, 185.
[113] Kogan, 146-148.
[114] Berechiah, 96.

becomes colorful as he describes the souls of the ten men in bloom as a result of their participation in the quorum. With the blossoming of their souls, the holiness which surrounds these ten men acts, in our terms, as a Divine forcefield. Because of this force field, all charges against the sick individual are deflected. The text goes on to teach that because the *Shechina* dwells amongst the *minyan*, all charges from Satan, the prosecutor, will be deflected away.

In chapter 19 of *Siftei Tzedek*, Berechiah elaborates on the importance of the *minyan*. Each place in which a *minyan* is gathered can be called a *Beit Haknesset*, a synagogue, literally a house of entering. Thus God may enter into this holy space, which has been created at the bedside of the dying person.

Berechiah is clearly drawing on this kabbalistic interpretation of the *minyan*. He describes the souls of the men in blossom. One can picture each of the 10 men bathed in a circular aura of light. The sefirotic tree is in bloom. Berechiah's use of light imagery continues as he depicts the efflux from the heavens entering the room in the form of holy light emanations from the 10 *sefirot*. And he closes with an allusion to the exile theme, "Those who wander are united there."[115]

[115] Ibid., 158-9.

Chapter 6: Illness and Suffering as Judgment in the *Maavar Yabbok*

Another strong theological theme in the *Maavar Yabbok* is the idea that illness and suffering are evidence of the severe judgment of the Divine. In the medieval context, according to Jacob Marcus, "God was the source of all sickness and the ultimate healer of all disease."[116] God is the ultimate physician, and God is the ultimate judge. According to Shabbat 55a, a text quoted by Berechiah in his first *maamar*, there is no suffering without sin.[117]

While he considered sin a punishment for misdeeds, Berechiah also embraced the belief that healing was a blessing from God for the righteous. In his second *maamar*, Berechiah offers a story that he attributes to the time of the Temple. He teaches that when people would visit the sick, they would immediately know who would be blessed with life and who would be cursed with death. A *cohen*, or priest, could look at a man in an instant and see if he was righteous and would be granted life, or evil, and condemned to die. The physical sign of a person's righteousness would be the word "*HaShem*," a reference to the Divine name, engraved on the sick person's face. This fantastic sign would appear engraved on the righteous person's face, and would then disappear quickly.[118] Presumably, the person with the mark of God upon him would live because of his righteousness, but someone lacking God's mark would die as a punishment for his his sinful behavior.

In his first *ma'amar*, Berechiah cautions the sick person against blaming an accidental cause for his illness. Food or drink, according to the text, does not cause illness. Rather, Berechiah advises, the patient must admit that his illness was caused by

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[116] Marcus, 90.
[117] Berechiah, 59.
[118] Ibid., 61.

sin.[119] Even if he was coerced into sin by others, he must not shirk responsibility. Though we will examine the confession at length in a later chapter, it is important here to note that the seriously ill person is instructed to confess his guilt before God. Through confession, the seriously ill person assumes complete responsibility for his sin.

Personal accountability for illness is key in Kabbalah, for according to this theology, an accidental occurrence is impossible. For each action on earth, there is a reaction or response in the heavenly realm. If a mitzvah is done on earth, then it arouses the flow of blessing from on high. An earthly sin, however, has the power to bring evil into the world. In the words of Gershom Scholem, "Sin is that which brings evil to life."[120] Such theology gave birth to the medieval understanding that the sick individual was in the clutches of evil forces. Disease was believed to be evidence of demonic possession.[121]

If disease is a punishment for sin, death is a final sentence delivered by God. Because only God can be the ultimate judge, Berechiah warns the visitor not to absolve the seriously ill person from any vow he has made. Furthermore, he cautions that even if the visitor absolves a sick person from a vow, God's ministering angels will still have the power to prosecute the seriously ill person in the heavenly realm.[122] A visitor does not have any juridical power. The seriously ill person must make peace with God. Absolution is in the jurisdiction of the Divine.

Though God has the ultimate power to restore health or to bring on death, kabbalists believed that certain practices could persuade God to soften or even reverse the

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[119] Berechiah, 62.
[120] Gershom Sholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 78.
[121] Goldberg, 151.
[122] Berechiah, page 62.

decree. In the *Maavar Yabbok*, the giving of *tzedakah* is an example of such a practice. The idea that *tzedakah* can overturn a death sentence can be traced to the biblical text of Proverbs 10:2:[123]

לא יוילו אוצרות רשע וצדקה תציל ממות

Ill-gotten wealth is of no avail, But righteousness saves from death.

Here, wealth gained from wickedness is not profitable, but righteousness *(tzedakah)* has the power to save one from death. The word *tzedakah* in this verse is reinterpreted later in the Talmud. In Rosh Hashanah 16b Rabbi Yitzchak teaches that there are four things that can cancel God's decree: *tzedakah*, crying out, changing one's name and changing one's action. In the Rosh Hashanah text, *tzedakah* is understood not as righteousness, but as a monetary contribution that has the power to save a condemned person. The rabbis of the Talmud bring the Proverbs verse as a prooftext for their interpretation.

In the *Maavar Yabbok*, the halacha of giving *tzedakah* takes on an additional layer of meaning. In the introduction to Berechiah's *Seder ha Viddui*, the seriously ill person is instructed to contribute to *tzedakah* in specific increments. The minimum number of *prutot* (coins)[124] a man must contribute is 26. In gematria, 26 is equal to the divine name YHWH. The next increment is 91 coins, as the text states that 65 *prutot* must be added to the original 26. In gematria, 65 is the numerical equivalent of the divine name *Adonai*. With 91 coins, *YHWH* is united with the Divine name of *Adonai*. Finally, the seriously ill person is instructed to add another 21 prutot to the *tzedakah* pot, 21 being the numerical

[123] See also BT Shabbat 156b, In the Shabbat text an astrologer predicts the death of a Jew. The man saves his own life through an act of *tzedakah*.

[124] According to Marcus Jastrow, these were small coins, the equivalent of a penny. *A Dictionary of the Targumim* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 1219.

equivalent of the divine name Eheyeh. With the grand total contribution of 112 *prutot,* the three Divine names, *YHWH, Adonai, and Eheyeh* are united. [125]

In a sense, this act of *tzedakah* can be interpreted as a symbolic act of *yichud.* The different names of God symbolize a Godhead that is in pieces and must be united.

Marcus, noting the prevalence of this custom amongst medieval Jews, calls the practice of giving *tzedakah* for healing purposes an example of "practical kabbalah." According to Gershom Scholem, practical kabbalah practices were magical customs thought to induce theurgy.[126] In his book, *Communal Sick-Care in the German Ghetto,* Marcus details the many creative variations on this *tzedakah* practice. He refers to this magical use of *tzedaka* as "*pidyon ha nefesh*" or the "ransom of the soul." [127]

[125] Berechiah, 96.
[126] Sholem, *Kabbalah,* 182.
[127] Marcus, 224-227.

Chapter 7: The *Viddui*: Deathbed Confession

Historical Development of the *Viddui*

If the soul cannot be ransomed, and the decree of death stands, then a condemned person must move towards repentance by reciting a prayer of confession, or *viddui*. According to Gershom Scholem, "Death, repentance and rebirth were the three great events of human life by which the new Kabbalah sought to place man in blissful union with God."[128]

Classically, there are two different forms of the viddui. The communal *viddui* is said on Yom Kippur, while the bedside *viddui* serves as a final confession before death. Both of these confessional prayers developed separately and have distinct texts. However, one of Berechiah's great innovations in the *Maavar Yabbok* is that he transports the congregational text of the Yom Kippur confession into the intimate space of the deathbed *viddui*.

Though the two forms of *viddui* are conflated in the *Maavar Yabbok* liturgy, it is useful to examine the separate development of each prayer. The Yom Kippur *viddui* has its origins in the confession that the High Priest performs on behalf of the community in Leviticus 16:21. In this verse, the Aaron lays both of his hands on the head of a live goat and confesses over it all the transgressions of the Israelite people. The goat is then sent off into the wilderness for Azazel and thus the sins of the community are cast out. This ritual was practiced only by the high priest in the Temple as part of the yearly biblical Yom Kippur observance described in Leviticus 16:29-34.[129]

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[128] Scholem, *MajorTrends*, 249.
[129] Elbogen, 125

A confessional prayer for the High Holidays replacing the scapegoat service can be found in later sources. According to Ismar Elbogen, the insertion of the *viddui* in the *Amidah* of Yom Kippur can be traced to tannaitic times (20 to 200 CE). By the amoraic period in the third century, the text of the Yom Kippur *viddui* appears in a fixed form. BT Yoma 87b records variations on the confessional prayer for Yom Kippur which may have been in common use.[130]

The communal *viddui* offered on Yom Kippur develops into a lengthy liturgical insertion into the *Amidah* prayer (see Appendix A-2). The verbs of this *viddui* appear in the first person plural. An example of the language of the Ashamnu section is as follows:

אָשַׁמְנוּ, בָּגַדְנוּ, גָּזַלְנוּ

"We have sinned, we have transgressed, we have stolen..."

It is important to note that here, each member of the community, regardless of his or her stature or record of sin, takes responsibility for the collective sin of the community.

In contrast to the communal nature of the Yom Kippur confession, the final confession at the death bed is intended as an intimate communication between the dying person and God. As such, it is said in the first person singular.

The practice of reciting a confession at the time of death has its origins in the Mishna. According to Mishna Sanhedrin 6:2, all people who are to be executed for capital crimes must confess their sins before they are put to death. This text goes on to state that all who confess before dying will have a share in the world to come. According

[130] Elbogen 125-126.

to Maimonides, the condemned person reserves his place in the world to come through the act of confession, regardless of the severity of his crime.[131]

In addition, in addition BT Shabbat 32a[132] states that those who are *noteh l'mut* are also required by halacha make a confession. This is a direct allusion to the Mishna in Sanhedrin 43b, according to Rashi.[133]

Later, this free form end of life confession evolved into a fixed prayer. This prayer was first preserved as the *Seder Ha Viddui* of the Ramban in his 13th century work, *Torat ha-Adam* .[134] This short prayer also appears as the *viddui* formula in Joseph Caro's *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 338:1),[135] and may have been included in the *sifrei minhagim*, Books of Customs, used in various European Jewish communities.[136] In fact, until the innovative *Maavar Yabbok*, the 39 word text of Ramban's *Seder Ha Viddui* was the only bedside *viddui* formula in use.[137]

Because the time of death cannot be predicted, the *Shulchan Aruch* teaches that the *viddui* must be said regularly by those who are in the category of *noteh l'mut*. Even if a patient is not physically or psychologically ready to die, the prayer is encouraged with the reminder that many people confess and do not die, just as many die without saying the *viddui* (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 338:1). If a person cannot say the prayer aloud, he or she may say it silently. Additionally, there is a shortened form of the prayer

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[131] Mishna Torah Hilchot Teshuva 1:1

[132] The Baraita text states that the one who is *noteh l'mut* should be told by those around him to confess because all who are condemned to die must confess. Again, this idea comes directly from the Mishna in Sanhedrin 43b and 44b where those who are condemned by a court to death are made to confess their sins.

[133] Rashi to Shabbat 32a, s.v. *ha mumatim mitvadin.*

[134]Stacy Laveson, "Deathbed Confession: Being there When it Happens." Rabbinic Thesis (New York: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1993), 29 see also Goldberg, 101. This Seder Ha Viddui Text can be found in the Appendix, A-2.

[135] Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 338:1.

[136] Goldberg, 101.

[137] Laveson ,63.

for those unable to say the longer version. The prayer may also be lengthened according to the will of the individual and can be extended to be as long as the penitential prayer for Yom Kippur. In addition to a place in the world to come, the *Shulchan Aruch* adds that life may be prolonged as a reward for uttering the *viddui*.[138]

The final two points above are important as we prepare to examine the *viddui* of the *Maavar Yabbok*. Already in the *Shulchan Aruch*, we have the Yom Kippur confessional prayer mentioned in relationship to the bedside *viddui*. Certainly, Caro was not suggesting that the Yom Kippur *viddui* be used at the bedside; however, he did refer to the Yom Kippur text to establish the maximum length for an elaborated bedside confession. Perhaps this mention of the two prayers side by side was a source of inspiration for Berechiah as he brought the two liturgies together. In addition, the idea that life may be prolonged as a reward for saying the *viddui* is one that Berechiah embraces in the *Maavar Yabbok*. In the theological context described in chapter 5, disease was a punishment for sin. With proper recitation of the *viddui*, there is the possibility that God may be persuaded to release the sick person from his death sentence. A specific reference to this theme will be explored in the following textual analysis on Berechiah's *Seder Ha Viddui*.

Moving from Caro to the kabbalistic context, the *viddui* becomes infused with eschatological consequences. The goal of the Kabbalist is to achieve a reunification of the Godhead. Through earthly acts, the Kabbalist hopes to end God's exile from the Divine self. As a positive consequence of this reunification, the hope is that man will also be released from spiritual exile and reunite with his creator. When the Kabbalist

[138] Ibid. See also Shabbat 32a, in which R. Yitzchak son of R. Yehudah states that one should always pray not to become ill. However, if illness overtakes him, he can appeal to the heavenly court. Through good deeds he may receive credit for the merit of his actions and may be set free.

recites the *viddui* prayer, according to Goldberg, he is taking a step to shorten his exile from God.[139]

Because the exact time of death is impossible to predict, Goldberg adds that it was the practice of a select group of sixteenth century Kabbalists to confess to each other on a daily basis. She notes that this was an innovation, for up until this time, the only confession offered was during annual communal confessional rite of Yom Kippur. Though this small group made confession an important part of their daily worship, this custom did not become standard practice. Individual confession, as we have seen, became customary only at the deathbed.[140]

Goldberg also discusses the *viddui* and its important relationship to the doctrine of *gilgul*, the transmigration of souls. Man's spiritual exile is the cause for *gilgul*. Originally, Adam's soul was believed to have contained the souls of all future men. After his sin these souls were separated out and distributed, and later reincarnated in order to atone for Adam's original sin. However, the process is further complicated, for, in each incarnation, new sins are committed. Careful attention must thus be paid to atonement in order to end the cycle. If *teshuvah*, or atonement, is accomplished the soul has a chance to be reunited with God, and will be released from this endless cycle.[141]

Berechiah's Seder Ha Viddui

In the earlier works of *Torat Ha Adam* and *Shulchan Aruch*, the confessional service appears as a simple prayer.[142] However in *Maavar Yabbok*, the *Seder Ha Viddui* is a large collection of traditional prayers brought together from various contexts in order

[139] Goldberg, 88.
[140] Goldberg, 89-90.
[141] Goldberg, 89.
[142] Yoreh Deah 338:2. Again, the Torat Ha Adam formula can be found in the Appendix, A-2.

to form a new confessional liturgy. Not only does Berechiah provide a complete formal confessional service, but this service is prefaced by detailed study sessions and instructions for personal penitential prayer. The expansive nature of the *Maavar Yabbok* liturgy in comparison with earlier works is evidence of the primacy of repentance in the kabbalistic system. Because repentance was a central theological concern, the user of this kabbalistic manual is instructed on the importance of *viddui* and the finer points of the customs which surround it.

Though the formal *Seder Ha Viddui* in the *Maavar Yabbok* must be said in the presence of a visitor, Berechiah suggests that a private form of penitential prayer be recited by the seriously ill person. This private recitation must take place on a regular basis and should be accompanied by ongoing Torah study.[143] In an explanatory *maamar*, Berechiah points out that Torah study is a purification ritual or sacrifice to God which will help to cleanse the sick person's soul.[144]

Structurally, the main *Seder ha Viddui* is prefaced by eight *sedarim* of selected study texts. Each study *seder* contains five psalm verses, as well as a three other biblical selections, one each from the three sections of the Hebrew bible, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Each of these eight study *sedarim* are bracketed with a set of prayers which ask for God's blessing in healing.

Following the study *sedarim*, Berechiah's instructions state that the seriously ill person must regularly add the *viddui* as an insertion after the third prayer of the *amidah*, as is the custom on Yom Kippur. With this instruction, Berechiah initially brings the Yom Kippur *viddui* into the realm of the deathbed confession. His interesting innovation

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[143] Berechiah, 96. For a discussion of the importance of Torah study, see Chapter 9.
[144] Berechiah, 327.

insures that the sick person is engaged in confession each time daily prayers are uttered. Though the text of the *amidah* insertion prayer is not provided, it is logical to assume that the seriously ill person would be well acquainted with the exact Yom Kippur formulation.[145] Essentially, Berechiah takes a well known liturgy from the public realm of the synagogue, and transplants it into a new, more private bedside context.

Preparations for the *Seder Ha Viddu*

From the stage directions at the beginning of the formal *seder ha viddui,* it is clear that this service must be facilitated by another person.[146]

The instructions begin with a citation of the text in Shabbat 32a requiring the visitor to inform the choleh that he must confess his sins. The formality of informing him that he must confess is important. Mishna Sanhedrin 6:2 states "*Omrim lo hitvadeh,*" "They say to him, "Confess!" The *Maavar Yabbok* imports the Talmudic wording exactly.[147] The sick person must offer a confession, but there must also be an authority figure present to command him to do so.

The instructions then continue with citations from many different halachic sources such as the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Torat Ha Adam*. The visitor must inform the choleh that stating his deathbed confession will not necessarily result in death. "Many confess and live and many do not confess and still die.[148] Many who are well enough to go to the market place also confess. On the merit of their confession they shall live."[149] Here, Berechiah is emphasizing that the *viddui* itself may actually have healing power. Though

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[145] For the complete text of the Yom Kippur *viddui,* please see the Appendix, A-3.
[146] The complete text of Berechiah's *Seder Ha Viddui* can be found in the Appendix, A-4.
[147] This language is also present in Shabbat 32a, and the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 338:1.
[148] This language is found in SA Yoreh Deah 338:1.
[149] The above quote is attributed by Berechiah to *Massechet Semachot*, and also appears in *Torat Ha Adam* with the same attribution. In the text of *Semachot* that survives however, this quote does not appear. It is possible that this passage was in a version of *Semachot* that was lost.

some disagree, and posit that this language may be an "exhortation, a rhetorical flourish stated to demonstrate the great power of confession,"[150] Berechiah actually reinforces this idea in his deathbed liturgy. With proper recitation of the *viddui,* a person can help to heal his own body.

However, Berechiah does not offer the gravely ill person any guarantees that he will be returned to health. Berechiah explains that it is not words that bring on death or keep one alive, rather the power is in one's actions and deeds. The true power does not reside in mere words. Perhaps a person's deeds will be counted and he will be returned to life, or perhaps a person's sins will weigh against him regardless of the confession, and death will be his punishment.[151]

Deeds are what truly matter to God. Berechiah highlights the importance of mitzvot by suggesting acts which may improve the sick person's standing with God. As we have already seen, the act of giving *tzedakah* was believed to have life sustaining properties. In this section Berechiah advises the sick person in order that he may win a reprieve from the Divine. Before the *choleh* offers the familiar formula, he must wash his hands, wrap himself in his *tzitzit,* and give *tzedakah.*[152] The *choleh* is informed that these preparatory practices insure that the *viddui* will be well received by God. Berechiah even recommends the proper time of day for the recitation of the prayer. It was believed that God was most forgiving in the morning, because that was the time of the "*shelitat ha chesed*" when a God's compassion would be dominant.[153]

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[150] Laveson, 60
[151] Berechiah, 96.
[152] The issue of *tzedakah* is discussed more fully in Chapter 5.
[153] Berechiah, 96.

Now that the seriously ill person has prepared to offer the confessional through selected mitzvot, he is now ready to encounter the formal liturgical section of the *Seder Ha Viddui*. Here, Berechiah expands the Ramban's formula to include private study by the critically ill person, recitation of the Yom Kippur devotional prayer, as well as mitzvot intended to redeem the soul.

In his role, Berechiah is largely an editor. Berechiah demonstrates his originality as he compiles a new bedside liturgy, drawing on a number of disparate textual sources to create something new and useful for his community. In this section, he draws on many existing prayer formulas, adjusts or expands them, and reorganizes them to fit this new context.

First Berechiah instructs the seriously ill person to recite the all important *Seder Ha Viddui* text of the Ramban. Interestingly, he does not include the text of this short prayer here. It is logical to assume that it was well known by the populace, and its inclusion was unnecessary.

The Liturgy of the *Seder Ha Viddui*

As Berechiah's service begins, he instructs that Psalm 4 be recited. According to the instructions in this section, this psalm, in which David asks God to have mercy on him and hear his prayer of distress, is intended to help the reader to open his heart. Berechiah states that the heart must be broken down because of the sins of the individual. This Psalm is used to aid the *kavanah*, or spiritual intention of the penitent person.

The next three prayers that follow draw on the *viddui* liturgy from Yom Kippur.[154] From the first words of prayer number one to the end of prayer number three, Berechiah uses the Yom Kippur *viddui* as a superstructure which he expands to express his liturgical

[154] The following numbers refer to the example of the *Seder Ha Viddui* listed in Appendix, A-4.

ideas. He imports the entire *amidah* of Yom Kippur, unfolding the liturgy throughout these first three prayers. Not only does Berechiah make changes to the classical Yom Kippur text, he also inserts liturgical selections from other sources as well. Each of the first three blessings, therefore, consist of prayers from the Yom Kippur *viddui*, but also contain other elements from the *Torat Ha Adam* of Ramban, and excerpts from the daily prayer service as well.

Of course, unlike the communal Yom Kippur *viddui*, the bedside confession is an intimate prayer. This intimate communication between man and God necessitates that its language be expressed in the first person singular. As stated previously, this necessitates a noticeable change from the first person plural of the Yom Kippur *amidah*. Throughout this section, when Berechiah imports the prayers of the Yom Kippur *viddui*, he must change the language from the first person plural to the first person singular accommodate more personal communication.

Blessing 1

The first example of such a transformation is the *Ashamnu*, which is written in acrostic form. The *Ashamnu* occurs close to the beginning of the Yom Kippur *viddui*, and thus is amongst the opening elements of this liturgical section. In the *Ashamnu*, one sin is enumerated and assigned to each letter of the *aleph bet*. In his adaptation of this prayer, Berechiah not only makes the necessary grammatical changes, but also expands the acrostic. In his adaptation, three sins are stated for each letter of the aleph bet.[155]

Blessing 2

[155] See figure a in Appendix, A-4.

Moving to the example of the second blessing, Berechiah progresses from the role of adaptor to the role of innovator. Here in the midst of the unfolding Yom Kippur *amidah*, Berechiah inserts an overt plea for clemency in front of the Divine judge.[156]

This plea for leniency emphasizes Berechiah's belief that proper recitation of the *viddui* could bring healing. The first line of this blessing is a composite of many sources. It reads:

> Master of all of the Universe, it is well known before your holy throne that my healing is in your hand and my death is in your hand. May it be your will, Adonai my God and God of my ancestors, that I will not die from this illness.

Here, Berechiah is stating clearly the theology that God is the ultimate judge and only God can provide a stay of execution. This reference to God as "Master of all the Universe" is well known in liturgical sources. The language of the second part of the blessing comes from the section of the morning service known as *birchot ha shachar*, or morning blessings (*asher yatzar*). The final fragment of the first part of the blessing comes directly from Ramban's *Seder Ha Viddui* formula.[157] Berechiah combines these three elements to create a new blessing in which he helps the seriously ill person to express his hope for clemency.

With the overarching form of the Yom Kippur *viddui* framing this section, it is interesting that Berechiah quotes directly from the well known bedside *viddui* of the Ramban at this point. Though Berechiah has already advised the seriously ill person to pray the Ramban formula in full, in the midst of the confession of specific sins, he includes an additional fragment of this prayer.

> *May my body be an altar of atonement and may my soul, be a purification sacrifice, and may my death be an atonement for all of my sins, my transgressions, and my crimes that I have committed*

[156] See figure b in Appendix, A-4.
[157] See figure c in Appendix, A-4.

from that day until this day. And may you give me a portion with the righteous, in the Garden of Eden and may I merit the world to come which lies in store for the righteous.[158]

As stated above, the critically ill individual has already recited this prayer, so what is the point of inserting it once again in the midst of the second blessing? Here Berechiah is emphasizing that God is the ultimate decisor. In a sense, the critically ill person here is covering all bases. If his rendering of the *viddui* is not pleasing to God, and does not result in a reprieve, here he is submitting a request so that his death may be understood as an offering of absolution.

Likewise, in the Mishna in Sanhedrin 43b, one who cannot say the *viddui* is instructed to say:

תהא מיתתי כפרה על כל עוונותי

"Let my death be an atonement for all of my sins."

Here again, if the recitation of the *viddui* is not sufficient for absolution, the seriously ill person has made the proper request that his death serve as the final act of atonement. Here, Berechiah helps the seriously ill person to move past asking for forgiveness, and towards acceptance, as he acknowledges that death may come soon. This goal of the kabbalist was to obtain eternal life through the purifying process of *viddui* and death. Berechiah is careful to insure that the seriously ill person is covered from every angle so that he can be a candidate for a portion in the world to come.

The final part of this second blessing is a composite of verses from a number of different sources. There is a quote from the end of the *Aleinu* prayer (...God is the God of the heaven above and earth below, there is none else),[159] as well as quotes from the *Shema* which in the Torah service (Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai Is One,

[158] Berechiah, 98. The language in this quote which equates the body to an altar of atonement can be found in BT Brachot 5b.
[159] See figure d in Appendix, A-4.

Blessed is God's glorious kingdom forever and ever.)[160] In addition, there are quotes from the closing moments of the *Neila* service of Yom Kippur (God is Elohim!),[161] from the end of the *Adon Olam* (He (God) was, is, and will be),[162] from the Torah service (God reigned, God reigns, God will reign forever and ever),[163] and from *Bayom Hahu* which appears at the end of each prayer service (On that day God shall be One, and his name shall be One).[164] While at first glance this may just seem like a random collection of disparate liturgical sources, there is an overarching thematic reason that Berechiah has chosen these verses. Each of these sections has to do with some aspect of God's being. From the declaration of the unity of God of the *Shema* passage, to the eternity of the Divine in the prayer *Bayom Ha Hu,* each of these passages emphasizes the strength of God's rule whether in this world or in the world to come.

The final verse of the second blessing is a *chatima* which puts these seemingly random liturgical statements about God into context for Berechiah.[165] A *chatima* is a closing verse of a prayer that begins with a standard blessing formula such as,

ברוך אתה יי.....
Blessed are you Adonai...

and closes with a verse which summarizes the major theme of the entire blessing. For this *chatima* in Blessing 2, Berechia imports the exact language from Psalm 41:14:

ברוך יהוה אלוהי ישראל מעולם ועד העולם
Blessed is YHWH the God of Israel from eternity to eternity.

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[160] See figure e in Appendix, A-4.
[161] See figure f in Appendix, A-4.
[162] See figure g in Appendix, A-4.
[163] See figure h in Appendix, A-4.
[164] See figure i in Appendix, A-4.
[165] See figure j in Appendix, A-4.

The use of this Psalm 41:14 as a *chatima* is also discussed in Mishna Brachot 9:5. The Mishna teaches that all blessings in the temple concluded with these words. The words of Psalm 41:14 were used in the Temple to establish that God's rule extends from this world into the eschatalogical future of the world to come. Here with the use of this particular blessing as a *chatima*, the dying person is assured that God's presence will accompany him as he makes the transition over the Jabbok river. He must leave this world, but because of his purification efforts, he can rely on God's steadfast rule. After death, his soul will be welcomed into the world to come.

Blessing 3 and 4

Although the third blessing of this group also contains elements of the Yom Kippur *viddui,* it also introduces a theme that will be picked up in the blessing number 4. Here Berechiah quotes the section in the Yom Kippur *viddui* in which the penitent asks for absolution for the sins which are worthy of the capital sentences of the *arbah mitot beit din.* As discussed in Chapter 2, the earthly courts could no longer impose the sentences of stoning, burning, beheading and strangulation. However, the rabbis believed that such punishment would be enacted by the heavenly courts. In this part of the liturgy, the gravely ill person seeks to escape these further punishments in the world to come.[166]

This theme of the *arba mitot beit* din is expanded in blessing 4. As he does in many other places in this work, Berechiah takes an old idea and enlarges it in order to create something new. In this section he writes:

> May it be your will *Adonai*, God of my fathers, by the merit of Abraham and of Issac and of Israel your servant, that this *viddui* will be pleasing to you, as if I had been stoned, and burned, beheaded and strangled, according to Torah and Halacha of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem...[167]

[166] See figure k in Appendix, A-4.
[167] Berechiah, 99.

Elaborating on the Yom Kippur text in blessing 3, Berechiah takes the power of the *viddui* to a new extreme. Not only does it have healing power, and the ability to atone for sin, but it now has the power to substitute for even the harshest of divine sentences. In the kabbalistic system, the seriously ill person must do everything within his power to make sure that his soul is pure so that he may merit the world to come. Here Berechiah is creating new liturgy to accomplish that ultimate cleansing of the soul. The ill person must here go to the extreme of assuming that he is guilty of the most heinous of crimes before God. Only by making this comprehensive confession, can he be assured that his sins will be completely washed away.

Blessing 5-6

Ending this liturgical section are blessings which deal further with the purification of the soul. In blessing 5 Berechiah mentions *nefesh, ruach,* and *neshamah,* which are technical terms in kabbalah denoting the 3 different levels of the soul. Blessing 6 is focused around the theme of forgiveness.

According to Scholem, the *nefesh* was thought to be the lowest level of the soul, that which gives life to the body. The *ruach* was believed to be the next level up, and was known as the "vital soul." And the *neshamah* was the highest level, or "rational soul." If a person had perfected the soul by learning the secrets of Torah and living a life of *mitzvot,* then the disparate parts of the soul would become united, and everlasting life would be possible. Scholem explains, "Everyone is born with a *nefesh,* but whether or not he will succeed in bringing down his own *ruach* and *neshamah* from the treasure house of souls...depends on his own choice and spiritual development."[168] The united

[168] Gershom Sholem, On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 218.

soul ascends to heaven after death, where it can be united with its creator. Without all three of its elements: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*, it is unable to ascend. Likewise, without God's forgiveness in the kabbalistic context, eternal life is impossible.

Final Moments of Life

Following an additional blessing, Psalm 121 is recited, reinforcing the idea that all help comes from God alone. In the final moments of life, the seriously ill person prays again for healing, and blessing. "Heal me God and I will be healed. Save me God and I will be saved." This is followed by Yhiyu L'ratzon and the Priestly Benediction to close out the liturgy. Berechiah offers the dying individual or those in attendance the choice of reciting verses of Torah, *Yigdal,* and *Adon Olam.* His final words should be:

רבונו של עולם יהי רצון מלפניך שיהיה שלום מנוחתי

Master of the universe, may it be your will that there will be peace in my rest.

Chapter 8: The Work of G'milut Chasadim: Requesting Mercy on the Sick

Because they believed that healing was God's work, the Jews of the Middle Ages and those like Berechiah who adhered to their beliefs, understood those who cared for the sick and dying to be working in the service of the Divine. Berechiah's expansive *Seder ha Viddui* is an end of life liturgy which draws heavily on knowledge of classical sources and demands extreme attention to detail. For these reasons the service is designed to be facilitated by a well-trained visitor. Each word in the service was intended to help aid the departure of the soul; thus end of life attendants were needed to insure that this liturgy was precisely rendered.

The caregiver in the world of the *Maavar Yabbok* was not only responsible for the spiritual well being of the dying person. First, as established in Chapter 2, in the rabbinic period the visitor is seen as a spiritual advocate who will the Divine on behalf of the seriously ill person. As stated earlier by doing acts of *gemilut chasadim*, such as *bikkur cholim*, kabbalists believed that they were helping to reunite the Divine. The end of life caregiver is not only offering pastoral services to the dying person, but through his work, is also helping to insure the eschatological future. Such a kabbalistic theological framework demands that individuals be attended to at the end of life. The members of the medieval *chevra kaddisha* believed that they were helping dying people to make the transition from this world to the next.

The influence of classical rabbinic sources on Berechiah can be seen clearly in the halachic instructions that immediately precede the *Seder ha Viddui*. Upon entering the sick room, the caregiver begins by offering prayer for the seriously ill person, asking God

to heal and save the sick person (see appendix for full prayer text). The instructions for this prayer are as follows:

כשהולך האדם לבקר החולה יבקש רחמים עליו בפסוק אלו

When a person comes to visit the *choleh*, he will request mercy upon him with this verse:[169]

Notice here that Berechiah's instructions describe praying on behalf of the sick person as requesting mercy upon him. His choice of language is not coincidental, but a direct allusion to BT Nedarim 40a where the gemara explains that the that the visitor will:

מבקש אליו רחמים

Request mercy upon him

With the preservation of this rabbinic language, Berechiah is helping the care giver to carry out the directive given in the *gemara*.

Of course, in order to request mercy from the Divine, the caregiver must pray on behalf of the seriously ill person. According to a gloss on the *Shulchan Aruch*, a person who visits the sick but does not pray on his behalf has not completely fulfilled the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim*.[170] Elaborating on this theme, Berechiah cites rabbinic tradition, teaching that the words of prayer in the mouth of the visitor are sweetened. With these sweet words of the seriously ill person will be included amongst the sick of Israel.[171]

The idea that one will be included amongst the sick of Israel can be found in the liturgy preceding the *Seder ha Viddui*. Here Berechiah includes a special prayer for the learned person, or בעל תורה who is ill. This prayer contains the following phrase:

ירחם עליך עם כל חולי עמו ישראל

[169] Berechiah, 96.
[170] R. Moses Isserles' gloss to Shulhan Arukh, YD 335:4." Isserles notes that he is glossing the Shulhan Arukh based on the Bet Yosef in the name of the Nachmanides.
[171] Berechiah, 59.

May mercy be upon you amongst all the sick of the People Israel.

This text is a direct allusion to the prayer text of Rabbi Jose of BT Shabbat 12b which was explained in Chapter 2.

Spiritual reward

Berechiah is also greatly influenced by the rabbis in his belief that spiritual reward can be obtained through the doing of mitzvot such as *gemilut chasadim*. In his first *maamar* he writes.

> O God, Adonai, who enlightens us and makes us holy by his *mitzvot* and commands us. Through [the *mitzvot*] there will be goodness all our days and through them there will be strength in their potential. For the ***keren kayemet*** (the principle remains for him) in the world to come and its fruits will be consumed by a person in...this world.[172]

In this *maamar*, Berechiah draws on the ideas in Mishna Peah 1:1 which were introduced earlier.[173] He picks up on the symbolic language of the mishna. Just as in the mishna, the fruit of the mitzvah, the interest on the investment of *gemilut chasadim*, will be eaten in this world. The principal of the investment of *gemilut chasadim* will be available in the world to come.

Then Berechiah adds a layer of kabbalistic thought as he expands the metaphoric language of this rabbinic text. The first *maamar* text continues,

> And the interpretation of the words הקרן and פירות will be the abundant flow that will flow upon Malchut in the secret of the returning light and the straight light at the time of this mitzvah....

For Berechiah, the words "principal" and "interest" which are found in the Mishna Peah, are products of God's abundant flow. This flow is depicted here as an emanation of Divine light.

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[172] Berechiah, 59.
[173] See discussion above.

As mentioned previously[174] the light metaphor came to kabbalah by way of Gnosticism. According to Scholem, "The *Shechinah*, as the last of the sefirot, becomes the "daughter" who, although her home is the 'form of light' must wander into far lands."[175] In this dualist theology, the supernal realm is that of light, the lower realm is that of darkness.

This light metaphor is a twist on the Mishna. As stated previously, in Mishna Peah 1:1 the legal word meaning principal is הקרן. In this kabbalistic gloss, Berechiah is playing on this word using its alternate definition of a ray of light. He imagines both the interest and the principal which spring from acts of *gemilut chasadim* to result from emanations of divine light. The interest from such action, flows through the lowest sefira, *Malchut*, and enters into our world. Through this light emanation, the interest, depicted as fruit (פירות) in the Mishna, are nourished by this light and thus planted in the world.

. Berechiah extends his light metaphor as he describes light returning to the heavens. An earthly act of *gemilut chasadim* causes God's light, which emanates from the heavens according to kabbalah, to be reflected back into the supernal realm. The metaphor of light now works in two directions. Blessing as light emanates from the heavens, but can also be reflected back up. As in the Mishna, the light that is reflected back to the heavens is established as the principal on the investment, eternal life, to be enjoyed only in the world to come.

[174] See page 34.
[175] Sholem, 230.

Instructions for the Caregiver

Further on in this section of the first *maamar*, Berechiah points out that the end of life caregiver is not only doing an act of kindness, but must also act as an earthly judge. The belief here is that the caregiver's strict attention to detail will help insure that the ill person receives justice from the Divine. God, as in rabbinic theology, is seen as the ultimate judge, a jurist who decides who may live and who may die.

Supernal efflux is caused to flow into the world because of human action. Thus, an act of *hesed*, or kindness, on earth will arouse the flow from the sphere of H*esed* in the sefirotic realm. In the rabbinic period (BT Sotah 14a) a caregiver was seen to be acting *imitatio dei*. Those imitating the Divine judge here on earth will arouse flow from sphere of *Din*. *Din* is the sphere of judgment on the sefirotic tree and is located alongside *Hesed*.[176] Berechiah writes:

> As a person does kindness (*Hesed*) with those created, the flow comes from the side of *Hesed*, if he does this from the strength of his *Gevurot* (might), there will be an abundant flow from *Hesed* and from *Gevurah* and these are *gemilut chasadim*, acts of lovingkindess.[177]

According to Berechiah, if one only employs kindness at the bedside of a dying person, then only the blessing of kindness will flow into the world. However, because the kabbalistic goal is to arouse flow from the Godhead from the highest *sefira* possible, the caregiver must employs strictness when caring for the dying, insuring that each halachic detail is fulfilled. Thus the higher flow from *Din* is aroused, which combines with kindness in the sphere of *Hesed*. Together they will flow down through the lower sefirot and they will enter the world.

[176] See the diagram of the sefirotic tree in Appendix, A-1.
[177] Berechiah, 59. See Appendix, A-5.

It is important to add that the Kabbalists are also interested in maintaining balance in the Godhead. One kabbalistic perspective on evil is that it results from an imbalance in the sefirotic realm. Causing judgment to flow counterbalances *Hesed.* Thus harmony is maintained in the world.

In addition to serving as earthly judge, Berechiah instructs the caregiver to carry out his duties with a heart that is hurting.[178] Though it may seem on the surface that Berechiah is encouraging his caregivers to empathize with the sick, it is also quite possible that this instruction is derived from the text in BT Nedarim 39b. As discussed earlier, the Nedarim text states that one who visits a sick person lifts away one sixtieth of that person's suffering. The verb נוטל can also mean to carry.[179] In lifting away the suffering of the sick, Berechiah's caregiver actually carries some of the pain of the person who is ill. The visitor here absorbs 1/60th of the suffering of the seriously ill person and carries it with him as he does his work.

Berechiah is well aware of the Nedarim 39b text since he references it directly on page 60 of the first *maamar.* He connects it to the biblical story of the ill Jacob in Genesis 48. In Genesis 48:2 the ill Jacob is told of the visit of his son Joseph. He summons his strength and is able to sit up in bed. In gematria, Berechiah teaches that bed (מטה) has the numerical value of 59. As a result of Joseph's visit, the biblical text shows Jacob sitting up on the bed. According to Berechiah, the action of sitting on the bed symbolizes fifty-nine sixtieths of Jacob's illness. The additional one sixtieth of Jacob's illness is held by his son Joseph, the visitor.

[178] Berechiah, 59. See Appendix, A-5.
[179] Jastrow, 900.

Chapter 9: Torah

Torah in Jewish Tradition

The mitzvah of studying Torah holds a powerful position in rabbinic tradition. It is the mitzvah that is equal to the performance of the totality of a group of other important mitzvot. This group includes, *g'millut chasadim, bikkur cholim*, burial of the dead, honoring one's father and mother, and many others. In the words of the morning liturgy, *Elu d'varim*:

תלמוד תורה כנגד כלם

And the study of Torah is equal to them all, because it leads to them all[180]

Furthermore, BT Brachot 5a teaches that through the power of Talmud Torah men can be healed. In this text, Shimeon ben Lakish declares that suffering will depart from anyone who is engaged in Torah study. But unfortunately, the sugya teaches, that the converse is also true. Passing up the opportunity to study will surely lead to distress. According to David Kraemer, author of *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature,* the protective power of torah study was so ingrained in the rabbinic mind that even the smallest school child understood its power.[181]

Though the meaning of the word "Torah" can be limited to describing the five first books of the Hebrew Bible, it can also be expanded to mean the entire Hebrew Bible. In the case of *talmud torah*, the rabbinic meaning of this word encompasses the entire corpus of Written and Oral law.

We have already discussed the mystical preoccupation with details of halacha. This preoccupation with halacha was accompanied by a hyper-concentration on the

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[180] Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Gates of Prayer.* (New York: CCAR Press, 1978), 53. The source text for this liturgy is Mishna Peah 1:1.

[181] David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literatue* (New York: Oxford Univerisity Press, 1995), 189.

written law of the Torah. According to Scholem, the mystical imagination was fascinated by the nature and symbolic meaning found in each word of the Pentateuch.

According to Scholem, "A large part of the literature of the Kabbalah consists of commentaries on the Pentateuch, the Five Scrolls, and the Book of Psalms, and the Zohar itself was written as a commentary on the Pentateuch, Ruth, and the Song of Songs."[182] Though the later books of the bible were certainly studied by the mystics, the author of the Zohar seeks to establish the first five books as having superior status to any later works.

As we have observed, in kabbalah, every earthly thing has hidden and symbolic meaning. The traditional power of the Torah was that it contains God's words of revelation to the Jewish people. A traditional rendering of the possible levels of meaning in the rabbinic text is revealed by the Hebrew acronym of *pardes*. The biblical text, according to this understanding, can be understood on four levels: *pshat*, the simple meaning of the text, *drash*, the explication of the text, *remez*, the allegorical level of the text, and *sod*, the secret meaning of the text.

While rabbinic tradition holds that there are 70 faces of the torah, kabbalistic tradition posits that the number of possible readings may be as many as 600,000, the number of people believed to have been present at Mount Sinai. The hyper-concentration of the mystic enables him to interpret each word of the Torah on a symbolic level. Therefore the mystical imagination is obsessed with the *sod*, or secret level of the text. In understanding the secret meanings of the words, the mystic searches for a hidden window to a deeper spiritual place.[183] To that end, each biblical character and event in the

[182] Sholem, *Kabbalah*, 169.
[183] Ibid., 168.

Pentatuch has a symbolic connection to the world of the sefirot. For the mystic, interpreting scripture can have theurgic consequences.[184] Torah study becomes a tool for deep mystical exploration.

In addition to the symbolic secrets contained in the Torah, the mystics believed that the Torah itself was a magical document. There was a belief that the totality of all of the letters of the Torah spelled out the mystical name of God.[185] Mystics would often meditate on the magical names of God, and their permutations of these names as a form of prayer. This was an established custom which predated the Zohar, and was later popular in kabbalistic circles. According to Scholem, "From the magical belief that the Torah was composed of God's Holy Names, it was but a short step to the mystical belief that the entire Torah was in fact nothing else than the Great Name of God Himself."[186] Therefore in reciting the words of the Torah, the mystic was meditating on the Divine name. Torah study therefore, becomes prayer in the mouth of the mystic.

Torah in the Maavar Yabbok

Berechiah demonstrates the importance of Torah in the *Maavar Yabbok* in a number of ways. First he includes numerous study passages throughout his manual for the sick and dying. At the beginning of his manual, Berechiah provides the seriously ill person with eight *sedarim*. These *sedarim* are study services, one of which should be read on each day of his illness. Though each service is comprised of different study verses, the prayers which open and close these services are identical.

At the introduction to each *seder* a prayer is recited which asks God for mercy, and ends with the following words:

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[184] Ibid., 172-3.
[185] Ibid., 170.
[186] Ibid., 170.

> *Adonai* will save me and we will sing songs to God all the days of our lives in the house of God. Do not forsake me O, Lord my God and do not be far from me. Help me *Adonai*, my salvation.[187]

The songs which the seriously ill person sings for salvation are the biblical selections which follow. In the text from BT Brachot 5a, studying Torah has the power to end suffering. Here, healing can come with the recitation of biblical verses.[188]

It would be logical to expect a listing of Psalm texts next. Berechiah does not disappoint, and even goes much further. First he provides five verses from the book of Psalms. He then progresses on to selections from each of the sections from the Hebrew bible, *Torah*, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Berechiah keeps the texts very short, and they are carefully pointed to facilitate proper pronunciation. In fact, each short passage of biblical texts can be read as a liturgical service. As in the creation of the *Seder Ha Viddui*,[189] Berechiah compiles this prayer service out of existing materials. In the *Seder Ha Viddui*, he assembled a service of liturgical fragments. Here, Berechiah assembles a service for the private use of the seriously ill person out of a collection of biblical excerpts. The idea that Torah can serve as liturgy is a reflection of a kabbalistic belief discussed above.[190] The biblical text itself was thought to be a meditation on God's name. Reading the text aloud with perfect enunciation would be understood to have a powerful meditative and theurgic result for the mystic.

The importance of Torah is also addressed at length in one of Berechiah's commentary entitled *Atar Anan Ha'ktoret* (A Rich Cloud of Incense). The name of this commentary is drawn from Ezekiel 8:11, in which the Israelites are offering improper

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[187] Berechiah, 79.
[188] A link between singing and Torah was established in the Talmud. In BT Hagigah 12b, Reish Lakish interprets the "song" of Psalm 42:9 as Torah.
[189] See Chapter 7, *Berechia's Seder Ha Viddui.*
[190] See page 86.

sacrifices to God. In *Atar Anan Ha'Ktoret*, Berechiah explains that the proper sacrifice can be achieved through Torah study. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the kabbalists thought of Torah study as a form of prayer. In rabbinic tradition prayer was viewed as the successor to Temple sacrifices. Thus the commentary *Atar Anan Ha'Ktoret* is based on the following syllogism:

> Torah is equal to prayer.
> Prayer is equal to sacrifice.
> Thus interacting with the Torah is equal to sacrifice.

In this commentary, Berechiah explains that the proper sacrifice through Torah study will serve to unite God in *yichud*.

The particulars of the link between Torah study and interaction with God are also explored. Berechiah states that, at the time of Torah study, that divine light, an emanation from God, is revealed.[191] In a kabbalistic myth detailing the creation of the Torah we learn that the letters of the Torah were actually created from God's Divine light.[192] This revelation of light from the heavens appeared and thus the letters which were created from that light were brought together in the creation of the Torah. From the creation myth we know that God's light shone at the time of the revelation of Torah. Berechiah's text tells us that the divine light will shine again when we encounter God through the letters of the Torah text. Thus, each act of study for the mystic is a path to divine revelation.

Berechiah also uses this light imagery to link Torah study with sacrifice. Berechiah states in *Atar Anan Ha Katoret* that that through the single act of engaging with the Torah, man fulfills all of the requisite sacrifices to the Divine.

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[191] Berechiah, 327.
[192] Sholem, *Kabbalah*,173.

The text later relates the theurgy of burning incense to the theurgy of Torah study. When our biblical ancestors burned incense, their hope was for the pleasant aroma to ascend and positively influence God. Berechiah's text teaches that smoke is kindled below, but is also received in the heavens. Thus the earthly flame of the Torah sacrifice is ignited when we engage in text study. The smoke from our sacrifice thus ascends to our Creator.[193]

There is also a personal benefit to the sacrifice of Torah study. A man who is fully engaged in Torah, Berechiah teaches in *Atar Anan Ha K'toret*, is one who gives all of his energies to support the *middot,* which here is another way of referencing the *sefirot* or expanses of the heavenly realm. He will be rewarded with strength and security for all three parts of his soul, *nishmat, ruach,* and *nefesh.* As discussed in the section on kabbalistic theology, in life, the three parts of the soul are united in life, but after death, they are separated. Through torah study, all of the parts of the soul can be returned to God, and *d'vekut* is possible.[194]

Berechiah also teaches that the sacrifice of Torah study can aide in the process of *teshuvah*[195]. In the biblical period, people offered sin offerings at the holy temple in order to attone for their sins. Using the language of sacrifice, Berechiah explains that Torah study can be a sin offering which will bring about teshuvah. Through this process all of the charges of guilt will be removed and God's spirit enters the soul of the seriously ill person.

In order to obtain the great *yichud* that all kabbalists seek, Berechiah explains, purification must take place. He equates Torah study with a refiner's fire. This action

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[193] Berechiah, 327.
[194] Berechiah, 328.
[195] Ibid.

serves to "whiten and refines his [the sick person's] soul."[196] Thus a small service of sacrifice in the form of Torah study must take place in the morning and at night. To reinforce his point that sacrifice cleanses the soul, Berechiah quotes Leviticus 16:19:

> והוה עליו מן הדם באצבעו שבע פעמים וטהרו וקדשו מטמאת בני ישראל
> **And the rest of the blood he shall sprinkle on it with his finger seven times. Thus he shall cleanse it of the uncleanness of the Israelites and consecrate it.**

Here a blood sacrifice is offered to God in order to purify the Israelites, bringing them closer to holiness.

[196] Berechiah, 328.

III. Caring For the Dying in our Time

Chapter 10: Current Pastoral Resources

Much attention has been brought to the issue of psycho-spiritual health of the dying patient since the publication of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' groundbreaking volume *On Death and Dying* in 1969. In this book, Kubler-Ross proposes that the process of death unfolds through five psychological stages: Denial and Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.[197] Her now classic research has revolutionized end of life care, and as a result, we now understand that dying is a spiritual process.

Kubler-Ross herself writes, "I have always wondered why the Jews as a people have not written more about death and dying."[198] Indeed since she wrote these words in 1974, many Jewish books on death have been published. Unfortunately, however, most deal with the period following death, and skip the dying process altogether. As a result, modern pastoral care providers are still grasping for Jewish rite and ritual that will help to make the process a spiritual one for the dying person and for their family.

What factors account for the lack of Jewish resources on the dying process? Firstly the lack of resources may be linked to fact that Jewish chaplains have yet to establish a way of providing overall pastoral care in a manner that is uniquely Jewish. According to Dayle Friedman, until the publication of her book *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, there was "....little practical literature or theory to guide caregivers in the work of Jewish pastoral care...."

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[197] Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, (New York: Macmillian, 1969).
[198] Jack Riemer, *Jewish Reflections on Death*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 2.

Yet, she characterizes the demand for care steeped in the tradition of Jewish spirituality as "intensifying day by day."[199]

Friedman also observes that Jewish chaplains have yet to develop an overall approach to pastoral care that is uniquely Jewish. A recent conference "Caring in the Face of Serious Illness and Loss" sponsored by the UJA Federation of New York (January 19, 2005) brought together clergy, mental health care workers, and medical professionals to dialogue on important end of life issues from the Jewish perspective. Even at this Jewish conference, the keynote speaker was a spiritual caregiver who spoke about the import of theological teachings from the Buddhist tradition. Perhaps some day soon, organizers of conferences such as this will have access to Jewish experts who can help caregivers to develop a uniquely Jewish approach to end of life care. With this in mind, it is easy to understand why many Jewish practitioners feel more comfortable approaching end of life issues using secular psychological language like that of Kubler-Ross or the theological language drawn from other faith traditions..

In addition, the education of Jewish pastoral caregivers may be a factor. Most Jewish chaplains are graduates of Clinical Pastoral Education programs (CPE). The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education defines CPE as

> ... an interfaith professional education for ministry. It brings theological students and ministers of all faiths (pastors, priests, rabbis, imams and others) into supervised encounter with persons in crisis. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs to whom they minister. From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry.[200]

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[199] Dayle A. Friedman, "Introduction," *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), xiii.

[200] Drawn from the current website of The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. "What is Clinical Pastoral Education?" www.acpe.edu/faq.htm.

This interfaith approach to pastoral care was originally developed by Christian clergy, and is often a prerequisite to ordination and investiture at many Jewish seminaries. According to Friedman, those who get CPE training acquire, "...skills and perspective unavailable to most of those who have not trained in this way...." However, because of the Christian origins of the discipline, the Jewish clergy trained in this way "...have not yet had the opportunity to articulate this enterprise in a Jewish idiom, or to search out our tradition for its wisdom and practical guidance." [201]

A further contributing factor is elucidated by Amy Eilberg in her essay, "Walking in the Valley of the Shadow: Caring for the Dying and their Loved Ones."[202] Eilberg notes that there is a strong popular belief amongst Jews that life should be preserved at all costs. She writes that in working with hospice patients, she has observed that "...many nontraditional Jewish families, not particularly observant or literate in classical Jewish text, are convinced that Jewish law teaches that one should never give up on life."[203] It is true that Judaism does stress the imperative, "*U'vcharta b'chayim,*" (Numbers 30:19), "you must choose life," but the tradition, as we have seen throughout this thesis, also acknowledges that each of us must someday face our own death. And there is indeed a Jewish way of dying.

Why have modern Jews been slow to come to terms with their own mortality? Eilberg continues, "Like everyone else, Jews struggle with denial, fear, grief, and uncertainty in the face of death. Yet for us these personal feelings are also interwoven with national feelings, a passion for life that lies deep within the Jewish psyche, in our

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[201] Friedman, xv.
[202] Amy Eilberg, "Walking in the Valley of the Shadow: Caring for the Dying and Their Loved Ones" *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources,* edited by Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 317-341.
[203] Friedman, 337.

collective consciousness, shaped and reinforced throughout Jewish history."[204] Eliberg's comments demonstrate that although the imperative to choose life is an element of our collective Jewish consciousness, it is also possible to use this imperative as a psychological crutch. This psychological crutch allows us to be comfortable with our paucity of end of life liturgy. If we do not create new rituals to help ourselves and our congregants face death, we will remain firmly ensconced in denial.

Rabbis Manuals

Unfortunately, the modern liturgical resources available to Jewish clergy are insufficient. Surveying the rabbinic manuals of the different streams of Judaism, it is clear that there is no comprehensive liturgical source for the end of life. Though we now know that death is a spiritual process which can unfold over the process of months, weeks, or days our current end of life resources focus only on the moment of death. Though all of the manuals surveyed for this thesis contained a confessional service, across the board, the confessional service was short. None of the sources offered a complete deathbed service, as in the Maavar Yabbok. Rather, most included only a few brief prayers. Not surprisingly, the Rabbi's manuals written from the Conservative and Orthodox perspectives have the most to offer liturgically.

The following is a listing of the manuals surveyed representing four philosophical perspectives. From the Orthodox perspective *Hamadrikh* (1939), and *The RCA Lifecycle Madrikh* (2000) were examined. In addition, two manuals published by the Rabbinical Assembly, *L'kutei T'fillah* (1965), *Moreh Derech* (1998) which are publications of the Conservative movement were also surveyed. Additionally, the Reform Rabbi's Manual

[204] Friedman 337.

(1988) was consulted as was the *Rabbi's Manual* which is published by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (1997).

Each of the Orthodox and Conservative manuals contained a service in which the sick individual may adopt a new name. Although not found in the *Maavar Yabbok*, this practice does have its origins in the Talmud. According to BT Rosh Hashannah 16b, four things cause an evil decree against a man to be cancelled; they are *tzedakah*, prayer, adding a name, and changing action. Traditionally, to add a name, a person would open the bible to a random page and add the name of the nearest Biblical patriarch. When one recites a prayer on behalf of an ill person, the old name would be mentioned first followed by the new name.[205]

Though most of the modern manuals surveyed contained a short confessional service, the *Reconstructionist Rabbi's Manual* is the exception. This publication contains no liturgical resources for the end of life.[206] As stated above, the confessional services in other manuals were very brief. The Reform Rabbi's manual devotes only three and a half short pages to the end of life. These pages focus exclusively on the bedside confession.[207] The confession is offered in both Hebrew and English versions which can be recited by the sick individual or by a visitor on his or her behalf. The many Reform rabbis I have consulted for this thesis report that they almost never offer *viddui* to the dying patient. If *viddui* is offered, it is usually recited in the Reform context, by the rabbi over the body of an unconscious patient who is near death.

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[205] Hyman E. Goldin. Hamadrikh: The Rabbi's Guide: A Manual of Jewish Religious Rituals Ceremonies and Customs. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1939), 103.

[206] In a December 2004 phone conversation with Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association president Rabbi Richard Hirsch, I was informed that a new manual is currently underway, and that end of life ritual will be included in the new publication.

[207] David Polish and W.Gunther Plaut, eds., *The Rabbi's Manual* (New York: CCAR Press, 1988), 106-109.

Some influence of the Maavar Yabbok can be observed in the modern manuals and their treatment of the confessional prayer. In the Orthodox *HaMadrikh*, the editor links the bedside *viddui* to that of Yom Kippur. In a footnote, we learn, "If the invalid desires to make a lengthy confession, he is permitted to do so. He may adopt the confession recited on the Day of Atonement, commencing with the "*Ashamnu, 'Al Het*" to the end...." The use of the Yom Kippur liturgy harkens back to Berechiah's innovation in which he conflated the Yom Kippur *viddui* and the bedside *viddui*.[208] The *RCA Lifecycle Madrikh* includes the practice of giving *tzedakah* just prior to the recitation of the *viddui*. Like the Maavar Yabbok, the editors of this manual recommend that the coins be donated in symbolic increments of 26, 91, or 112 coins.[209]

Ideally, modern rabbinical manuals should provide pastoral caregivers with a comprehensive collection of appropriate end of life resources. Each patient has a different spiritual and physical prognosis. Dying is spiritual process that can unfold over a long period of time. With larger resources, a chaplain would have more options to offer the end of life patient as this complicated process progresses. The materials in the existing manuals are inadequate and do not reflect the spiritual gravity of this pivotal lifecycle event.

[208] See Chapter 7 Berechia's *Seder Ha Viddui*.
[209] See page 60.

Chapter 11: Towards the Formation of an End of Life Liturgy

Berechiah understood the need for extensive end of life resources. This is evident in the uniquely nuanced end of life manual he has created. Unfortunately, because of its difficult theological overlay, we cannot reclaim the entire *Maavar Yabbok* to serve our modern needs. However, understanding Berechiah's work is important because it can help us to move toward the development of our own end of life ritual sourcebook. Such a book would be an invaluable resource to the Jewish caregivers who work daily to help dying people and their families deal with the spiritual issues which emerge from the dying process.

It is my hope that in some small way, this thesis will be a contribution toward the formation of an end of life liturgy. Though the creation of a something as detailed as the *Maavar Yabbok* is beyond the scope of this work, I am looking forward to revisiting this subject in the future. Toward that goal, in this final section, I will highlight some of the ideas contained in the *Maavar Yabbok* and discuss how these ideas might be adapted for inclusion in a future end of life resource book.

Incorporating Berechia's Theology of Divine Punishment

Most moderns deny the basic theological premise of *Maavar Yabbok*, which states that illness is a result of Divine judgment. As science has proven, illness can result from genetic pre-disposition, environmental influences, or occur as part of the natural breakdown of the body in old age. In his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner espouses a modern theology concerning illness which many find extremely comforting. His theology allows for randomness in the universe. Sometimes illness is just a matter of coincidence or bad luck. Kushner's system denies

the Divine punishment paradigm, declaring that illness is either a natural process, or, in exceptional cases, a product of the randomness of the natural world. Sometimes accidents of nature take place. God has no role in these accidents, and victims certainly bear none of the blame.

Even though the traditional causal nexus between illness and sin is unsatisfying to most moderns, many patients, when faced with the challenge of serious illness, may still believe that they have done something to cause their own suffering. It is important that this question not be dismissed by the pastoral caregiver as illogical or unhealthy. There may be an important psychological subtext beneath it.

When a patient asks, "Why is God punishing me with this illness?," the pastoral caregiver can question the patient's motivation for his statement, asking the patient if there is a specific reason why he or she believes that God may be sending punishment. The guilt that is expressed in the initial question may be the result of unresolved issues. If a patient is haunted by a shameful incident from the past, spiritual healing would necessitate that the caregiver help the patient work through any unresolved issues so that he may move toward reconciliation and spiritual wholeness. Amy Eilberg calls this process "finishing business." She teaches that engaging in this difficult work helps the ill person to begin to make peace with God and Judaism in advance of their death.[210]

In addition to the theological reconciliation, a patient may need to ask for forgiveness from another person, or from himself. A person who expresses a theology of Divine punishment may be struggling with an unresolved dispute with a close family member which must be settled.

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[210] Eilberg, 325-326.

In addition the theological link between sin and suffering may enter into the theology of a person who has made poor lifestyle choices. Lifestyle choices, such as smoking, overeating, or engaging in unprotected sex are all linked with disease. Though the caregiver must not place blame on the patient, the seriously ill person may still be struggling with some guilt issues related to unhealthy lifestyle choices. Just as it is important to encourage reconciliation with God and other people, it is also important for the patient to forgive herself for any role she may have played in her own illness.

Importance of the *Viddui*

Though the elaborate *Seder Ha Viddui* is the central end of life ritual in the *Maavar Yabbok*, the existence of a Jewish deathbed confession surprises many modern Jews. Unfortunately, confession is often equated with the rites and rituals of the Catholic Church, and does not sound very "Jewish" to the uneducated layperson. As stated previously, many Reform rabbis choose not to recite the *viddui* with their end of life patients. Perhaps they worry that the deathbed confession difficult for the patient and family to accept. A rabbi may worry that the patient and family will see him as an agent death. The act of offering a final confession may be misinterpreted. Some may think that speaking of death in the hospital room eliminates all hope, bringing the unwelcome message that the end is near. In addition, some may assume that offering a final confession could have the power to hasten death's arrival.

This fear of *viddui* is not a new phenomenon. Rather, this fear was anticipated in the *Shulchan Aruch*. As stated in Chapter 7 of this thesis, in Caro cautions that the *viddui* should be prefaced by a reminder to those present that many people confess and do not die (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 338:1). This caution makes good sense from a pastoral

perspective. It reminds the caregiver that it is important to take into account the fragile emotional state of the dying person and any family members or friends who may be present. Unfortunately, while this caution is preserved in the *Maavar Yabbok*, it has been lost from most modern rabbi's manuals.

The confessional service itself is important on many levels to the dying person. First of all, the recitation of the deathbed *viddui* is mandated by halacha. Although it is often omitted in the Reform context, it is a rabbinic commandment, and should if at all possible, be part of the end of life ritual of every Jew.

In addition, *viddui* has many spiritual benefits. First and foremost, confessing is a way to begin the important end of life process of *teshuvah*, looking inward and making peace with one's life history. In BT Shabbat 153a, Rabbi Eliezar teaches that we must engage in *teshuvah* one day before we die. Eilberg writes that end of life caregivers should be careful to "encourage people to use the time they have to apologize, to turn, to seek forgiveness. We may offer classical understandings of the *teshuvah* process; we may encourage people to pick up the phone; occasionally, we may even tell stories of reconciliation that we have witnessed at the end of life. It is sometimes enough for us simply to hold the conviction that extraordinary moments of transformation can and do happen right up to the end."[211]

The link between confession and *teshuvah*, as demonstrated in Chapter 7 of this thesis, is very strong in the *Maavar Yabbok*. The pastoral care giver can use the *Seder Ha Viddui* not only as a liturgical text, but also as a counseling tool. Through a

[211] Amy Eilberg, "Walking in the Valley of the Shadow: Caring for the Dying and Their Loved Ones," *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 331.

discussion of *teshuvah* in preparation for confession, the patient can begin to examine his life, taking an important step toward coming to terms with his own mortality.

Often a patient will feel that death is imminent but family members will be unable to face the reality of the impending loss. In an example from my own pastoral experience, I visited a dying elderly woman whose daughter was at her bedside. When I came into the room, the daughter immediately began to tell me about the improving condition of her mother. As she explained the progress that her mother was making, I could see tears welling up in the elderly woman's eyes. After the younger woman left the room, I asked the elderly woman what was upsetting her. She told me that though her daughter wanted her to live, she truly was dying. She explained her feelings of guilt that she would not be able to fulfill her daughter's wishes. She felt that she was failing her daughter.

In this case, offering the dying woman a bedside *viddui* could have had a very powerful effect. Through the ritual of confession, this dying woman could verbally admit to the reality of her own death. The *viddui* could also, in this case, provide a way of dealing with the woman's unexpressed guilt feelings. Of course, here, the *viddui* would have to be offered in the private counseling setting, and not in the presence of the woman's daughter.

In Kubler-Ross' stage theory, acceptance is the goal of all end of life work. In reference to the dying patient in this final stage she writes:

> He will have been able to express his previous feelings, his envy for the living and the healthy, his anger at those who do not have to face their end so soon. He will have mourned the impending loss of so many meaningful people and places and he will contemplate his coming end with a certain degree of quiet expectation.[212]

[212] Kubler-Ross 112.

Though mental health professionals acknowledge that not every dying person is able to reach the stage of acceptance, it is an important goal for the dying person. Life review and reconciliation can be integrated by the chaplain into the context of *teshuvah* at the end of life. Laveson writes, "The deathbed confession enables us to savor and accept, rather than endure and avoid, that sacred moment when our body hovers between life and death and our souls achieve eternal harmony."[213]

In addition, the deathbed confession allows the dying person to make a final declaration of faith.[214] Faith sustains those in crisis. Sometimes, those who lapse in their faith find their way back to Judaism in difficult moments.

The deathbed confession of Berechiah is filled with familiar liturgical statements of faith, such as the *Shema* which helps to affirm the dying person's belief in God, as well as God's eternal presence in the universe. According to Audrey Gordon, the confession "...and the recitation of the *Shema* in the last moments before death help to affirm faith in God precisely when it is most challenged... and help the dying person focus on these most familiar rituals of his life just at the moment when he enters the most mysterious and unknowable experience of his life."[215] Berechiah's *Seder Ha Viddui* is effective because it is a tapestry of familiar liturgical phrases woven together. As Gordon suggests, at a time of crisis, affirming one's faith through familiar liturgical phrases helps to make those in crisis feel more secure.

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[213] Laveson, 116.
[214] Laveson on page 100.
[215] Audrey Gordon "The Psychological Wisdom of the Law" p. 96 this is in Jewish Reflections on Death 95-104

Resources for the Private Use of the Seriously Ill Person

The example of the elderly woman and her daughter in the previous section illustrates the importance of private spiritual work. Not only is it important for this emotional work to take place in dialogue with another person, it is also important that the sick person have liturgical resources so that he may begin to deal with some of these issues in a private way.

In the *Maavar Yabbok*, Berechiah includes 8 full services for the private prayer of those who are extremely ill. The "Self Help" sections of bookstores are filled with books which provide advice on individual paths of exploration into psychological and spiritual issues. In addition, recently Jewish publishers have begun to publish guided journals and other self directed spiritual books for a lay audience.[216] Patients like the elderly woman described above, often spend a lot of time alone in their hospital beds. Many may be motivated to explore some of these spiritual issues privately. While there are a few Jewish resources for professional counselors, in my research I did not find a single resource designed to be used by the sick individual herself. A guided *teshuvah* journal incorporating liturgy for private use would be a wonderful end of life resource.

Role of the Visitor

Though individual spirituality is acknowledged in the *Maavar Yabbok*, the text makes it clear that a person must not be left alone to die. The role of the visitor is of the utmost importance. According to Berechiah, the main job of the visitor is to pray for mercy on behalf of the sick individual. However, prayer can be a difficult issue for the modern pastoral care giver.

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[216] For example, see Anne Brenner's *Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001).

We, as Americans place a great emphasis on personal religious rights. A pastoral caregiver has to find a way to offer a prayer to the sick person such that the offer of prayer is seen as a personal choice, and is not the result of coercion

Though the rabbis valued prayer, there is a caution against forcing prayer upon the sick person in a judgmental manner. In the *midrashic* collection *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* we read:

> Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai used to visit the sick. He once met a man who was swollen and afflicted with intestinal disease, uttering blasphemies against God. Rabbi Shimon said: "Worthless one! Pray rather for mercy for yourself!" The patient replied: "May God remove these sufferings from me and place them upon you (Avot d'Rabbi Natan 4:1)"[217]

Unlike the visitor in the Maavar Yabbok who is instructed to combine both judgment (*din*) and kindess (*chesed*), Rabbi Shimon's statement to the ill person is an expression of pure judgment. The patient, who is forced to pray, composes a perverse prayer which emerges from his mouth in the form of a curse.

As stated above, many Jews find it difficult to accept God in the role of divine judge. Thus the role of the visitor as judge is no longer appropriate. However, even though the role of the visitor must change, the visitor herself is no less important than in Berechiah's time.

Dayle Friedman's modern understanding portrays the visitor as spiritual caregiver. Friedman writes that goal of the caregiver should be *hitlavut ruchanit,* or spiritual accompanying. She points out that acts of caring and simple presence with those in need have always been core tasks for Jewish leaders, along with their priestly, teaching, and prophetic roles."[218] Here the caregiver accompanies the sick person on their spiritual journey, following closely behind.

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[217] Avot d'Rabbi Natan 4:1.
[218] Friedman,x.

The spiritual demands for the end of life are immense. Dying is difficult work which taxes both an individual's body and psyche. A dying person is on a path no living person has ever walked. Thus the dying person serves as leader and the visitor is a companion. The visitor's role is to remain present and listen attentively. Flexibility in this role is important, and prayer should be offered, but when welcomed by the ill person. Above all, in the modern paradigm, the visitor establishes a relationship with the sick person and adapts her care to the patient's needs.

Community Involvement

The world of an active person can suddenly shrink as a result of serious illness. Often a sick person's day revolves around health care and is dominated by doctor's visits and tests. Because of pain or weakness, the patient may be confined to home or hospital bed. In this situation, many ill people report that they feel defined by their illness. A sick woman may no longer derive her identity from her achievements in the business world, rather she may become known as "the woman who is dying from cancer." To complicate matters, family members and friends are often forced to confront their own potential loss when they visit. Often friends and relatives just disappear. This may leave the sick person feeling very isolated and alone.

Jewish tradition is very explicit that the dying person be treated like one who is still living.[219] It is clear that the dying person in the *Maavar Yabbok* is still treated as a member of the community. Like the rabbinic sages, passing on their final teachings to their students, the person on his deathbed still has a contribution to make to the community. In the *Maavar Yabbok*, the sick individual is encouraged to give *tzedakah*.

[219] See discussion of the term "gosess" on page 26.

In the modern context, giving *tzedakah* at the end of life can demonstrate symbolically that the dying person still has something valuable to contribute to society.

In the modern context, the deathbed visitor is almost always a member of the family or a member of the clergy. In the classical *chevra kaddisha* model, however, visitors were not professional clergy members, but ordinary members of the community. In addition, Berechiah calls for the presence of a *minyan* around the death bed. Not only is the dying person still a full member of the community, he dies in the midst of the community, surrounded by his peers.

This community involvement is important not only to the dying person, but also to the visitors as well. As Berechiah points out, people who engage in the mitzvah of *g'millut chasadim* derive much benefit from their service. Though most modern Jews do not subscribe believe that their earthly actions bring blessings from God, it is true that caring for one who can give the caregiver a immense sense of personal satisfaction. The community itself is strengthened when people other than the clergy engage in the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim.*

In addition, it can be beneficial for friends and family members to witness the dying moments of a loved one. Audrey Gordon writes that when you observe the death of one you love, you cannot deny that they are gone.[220] This experience gives a loved one a sense of closure. Anecdotally, many people report that they have felt honored by having been in the room when someone has died. What at first seems a daunting task, in retrospect is viewed as a privileged moment not to be missed. In addition, many people

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[220] Audrey Gordon, "The Psychological Wisdom of the Law," *Jewish Reflections on Death,* Edited by Jack Riemer (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

often feel helpless in when someone in their family is terminally ill. Remaining present for the dying person in his last moment is a concrete action. In a situation where a loved one has no control, he can choose to be present, and not to retreat. Accompanying the dying person in his last moments of life is an act reflective of both the caregiver's love and courage.

Conclusion

Abraham Joshua Heschel teaches that "Life's ultimate meaning remains obscured unless it is reflected in the face of death."[221] Though death is a mystery yet to unfold for each of us, it is important that we not shy away from discussing its underlying meaning. In order to do this, we must face the mysterious challenges bound up in the final moments of life. Luckily, as we have seen, traditional sources can help to provide grounding in this uncertain time. Unfortunately, as a community, we have yet to tap into the rich pastoral resources that Jewish tradition offers. The materials referenced in this thesis are but a small sampling.

However, Heschel teaches that through honest contemplation of the end of life, it is possible for us to learn more about ourselves as a living people. Throughout Berechiah's work one theme was consistent: dying with spiritual awareness helps to bring the dying person and those who attend that person closer to God. We can insist that our loved ones to die in community, not alone, and that their spiritual needs, as well as their physical needs are taken into account. Engaging in this important work, our personal character will be strengthened, as will our Jewish faith.

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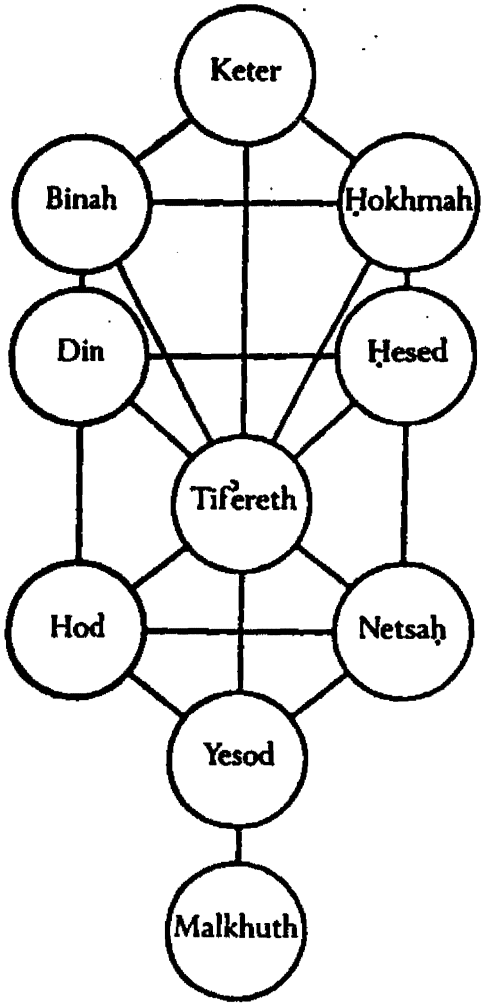
[221] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Death as Homecoming," *Jewish Reflections on Death*, edited by Jack Riemer (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 58.

Diagram of the Sefirot



From Gershom Scholem *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 44.

The *Viddui* Formula of the Ramban

מודה אני לפנך ה' אלוהי ואלהי שרפואתי בידך ומיתתי בידך.
יהי רצון מלפניך שתרפאני רפואה שלמה.
ואם אמות תהא מיתתי כפרה על כל עונות וחטאים ופשעים.
שחטאתי שעויתי ושפשעתי לפנך, ותן חלקי בגן עדן,
וזכני לעוה"ב הצפון לצדיקים.

Moses Nachmanides, "Torat Ha Adam," *Kitvei HaRabenu Moshe ben Nachman,* Edited by Charles Chavel, (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha Rav Kook, 1963) vol.2, 47.

The Yom Kippur *Viddui*

מנחה לערב יום כפור

בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים, בְּרָכָה וְשָׁלוֹם וּפַרְנָסָה טוֹבָה, נִזָּכֵר וְנִכָּתֵב לְפָנֶיךָ, אֲנַחְנוּ וְכָל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וּלְשָׁלוֹם. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, עוֹשֵׂה הַשָּׁלוֹם.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, תָּבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ, וְאַל תִּתְעַלַּם מִתְּחִנָּתֵנוּ; שֶׁאֵין אֲנַחְנוּ עַזֵּי פָנִים וּקְשֵׁי עֹרֶף לוֹמַר לְפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, צַדִּיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא חָטָאנוּ; אֲבָל אֲנַחְנוּ חָטָאנוּ.

אָשַׁמְנוּ, בָּגַדְנוּ, גָּזַלְנוּ, דִּבַּרְנוּ דֹפִי; הֶעֱוִינוּ, וְהִרְשָׁעְנוּ, זַדְנוּ, חָמַסְנוּ, טָפַלְנוּ שֶׁקֶר; יָעַצְנוּ רָע, כִּזַּבְנוּ, לַצְנוּ, מָרַדְנוּ, נָאַצְנוּ; סָרַרְנוּ, עָוִינוּ, פָּשַׁעְנוּ, צָרַרְנוּ, קִשִּׁינוּ עֹרֶף; רָשָׁעְנוּ, שִׁחַתְנוּ, תָּעִינוּ, תִּעְתָּעְנוּ.

סַרְנוּ מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וּמִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים, וְלֹא שָׁוָה לָנוּ. וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק עַל כָּל הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ, כִּי אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ וַאֲנַחְנוּ הִרְשָׁעְנוּ. מַה נֹּאמַר לְפָנֶיךָ יוֹשֵׁב מָרוֹם, וּמַה נְּסַפֵּר לְפָנֶיךָ שׁוֹכֵן שְׁחָקִים, הֲלֹא כָּל הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת וְהַנִּגְלוֹת אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ.

אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ רָזֵי עוֹלָם, וְתַעֲלוּמוֹת סִתְרֵי כָל חָי. אַתָּה חוֹפֵשׂ כָּל חַדְרֵי בָטֶן, וּבוֹחֵן כְּלָיוֹת וָלֵב. אֵין דָּבָר נֶעְלָם מִמֶּךָּ, וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ. וּבְכֵן יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתִּסְלַח לָנוּ עַל כָּל חַטֹּאתֵינוּ, וְתִמְחַל לָנוּ עַל כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ, וּתְכַפֵּר־לָנוּ עַל כָּל פִּשָׁעֵינוּ.

עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאֹנֶס וּבְרָצוֹן,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאִמּוּץ הַלֵּב.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בִּבְלִי דֵעַת,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בִּבְטוּי שְׂפָתָיִם.

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עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בִּגְלוּי עֲרָיוֹת,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בַּגָּלוּי וּבַסָּתֶר.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֵעָת וּבְמִרְמָה,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדִבּוּר פֶּה.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּהוֹנָאַת רֵעַ,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּהַרְהוֹר הַלֵּב.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּוִעִּדַת זְנוּת,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּוִדּוּי פֶּה.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּזִלְזוּל הוֹרִים וּמוֹרִים
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּזָדוֹן וּבִשְׁגָגָה.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּחֹזֶק יָד,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּחִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטֻמְאַת שְׂפָתַיִם,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטִפְשׁוּת פֶּה.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּיֵצֶר הָרָע,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּיוֹדְעִים וּבְלֹא יוֹדְעִים,
וְעַל כֻּלָּם, אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֶּר
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּכַחַשׁ וּבְכָזָב,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּכַפַּת שֹׁחַד.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּלָצוֹן,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בִּלְשׁוֹן הָרָע.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּמַשָּׂא וּבְמַתָּן,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּמַאֲכָל וּבְמִשְׁתֶּה.

עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּנָשֶׁךְ וּבְמַרְבִּית,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּנְטִיַּת גָּרוֹן.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׂיחַ שִׂפְתוֹתֵינוּ,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׁקּוּר עָיִן.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּעֵינַיִם רָמוֹת,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּעַזּוּת מֵצַח.
וְעַל כֻּלָּם, אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֶּר־לָנוּ.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּפִרִיקַת עֹל,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּפְלִילוּת.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּצְדִיַּת רֵעַ,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּצָרוּת עָיִן.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּקַלּוּת רֹאשׁ,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּקְשִׁיוּת עֹרֶף.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרִיצַת רַגְלַיִם לָהָרַע,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרְכִילוּת.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׂבְוּעַת שָׁוְא,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׂנְאַת חִנָּם.
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתְשׁוּמֶת יָד,
וְעַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתִמְהוֹן לֵבָב.
וְעַל כֻּלָּם, אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֶּר־לָנוּ.

וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹלָה.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם חַטָּאת.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם קָרְבָּן עוֹלָה וְיוֹרֵד.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם אָשָׁם וַדַּאי וְאָשָׁם תָּלוּי.

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וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם מַכַּת מַרְדּוּת.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם מַלְקוּת אַרְבָּעִים.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם מִיתָה בִּידֵי שָׁמָיִם.
וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם כָּרֵת וַעֲרִירִי.

וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאָנוּ חַיָּבִים עֲלֵיהֶם אַרְבַּע מִיתוֹת בֵּית דִּין
סְקִילָה, שְׂרֵפָה, הֶרֶג, וְחֶנֶק. עַל מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה וְעַל מִצְוַת ל
תַּעֲשֶׂה, בֵּין שֵׁשׁ בָּהּ קוּם עֲשֵׂה, וּבֵין שְׁאֵין בָּהּ קוּם עֲשֵׂה, א
הַגְּלוּיִם לָנוּ וְאֶת שֶׁאֵינָם גְּלוּיִם לָנוּ. אֶת הַגְּלוּיִם לָנוּ כְּ
אָמַרְנוּם לְפָנֶיךָ, וְהוֹדַעְנוּ לְךָ עֲלֵיהֶם; וְאֶת שְׁאֵינָם גְּלוּיִם לָ
לְפָנֶיךָ הֵם גְּלוּיִם וִידוּעִים, כַּדָּבָר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הַנִּסְתָּרֹת ל
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְהַנְּגְלֹת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד עוֹלָם, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דִּבְ
הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת. כִּי אַתָּה סָלְחָן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּמְחֻלָּן לְשִׁבְטֵי יְשׁ
בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר, וּמִבַּלְעָדֶיךָ אֵין לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ מוֹחֵל וְסוֹלֵחַ אֶ
אָתָּה.

אֱלֹהַי, עַד שֶׁלֹּא נוֹצַרְתִּי אֵינִי כְּדַאי, וְעַכְשָׁו שֶׁנּוֹצַרְתִּי כְּא
לֹא נוֹצַרְתִּי; עָפָר אֲנִי בְּחַיָּי, קַל וָחֹמֶר בְּמִיתָתִי; הֲרֵי אֲ
לְפָנֶיךָ כִּכְלִי מָלֵא בּוּשָׁה וּכְלִמָּה. יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹ
וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, שֶׁלֹּא אֶחֱטָא עוֹד; וּמַה שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ מָ
בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים, אֲבָל לֹא עַל יְדֵי יִסּוּרִים וַחֲלָיִם רָעִ

Philip Birnbaum, ed., *High Holyday Prayer Book*. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1951), 475-481.

The Seder Ha Viddui of the *Maavar Yabbok*

Blessing III

Blessing II

Blessing IV

Aaron ben Moses Berechia, *Maavar Yabbok* (Yerushalayim: Ahavat Shalom, 1996), 96-99

Blessing III Blessing V

בתלמוד בהלכות באגדות וסתרי תורה וחקיה ומשפטיה, ופתח לבי וכליותי להבין ולהאזין פקודיך ולשמר מצותיך ותזכני ללמד וללמד להבין ולהורות לשמר ולעשות מעתה ועד עולם ותרעה גבולי בתלמידים בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא וזכות הרבים יתגלגל על ידי לעולם ועד וכון מחשבתי לעבד לפניך באמת ובאהבה וביראה וברעדה ובאימה ועיני יאירו ועפעפי יישירו, ונשמתי תיחדך ונפשי תפאר אותך אף רוחי בקרבי ישחר לשמך ואלך באור הנשמה הטהורה אל טול פני המנורה ובגדי ישע תלבישני ובצעיף צדקה תעטרני ורצוי תקבלני ואנחל שני עולמים יחדו יהיו תמים, וטרם תלקח נפשי מגופי יהיה תלמודי סדור ושגור בפי ולא אבוש בשערי פלטריך וחנני לנעם רזי התורה הקדומה ויתיחד שמך בי להיות מעטה תהלה ונזר תפארה ואזכה לטיל בתענוג חצריך ולראות בטובת בחיריך לעמד לשרת כל הימים לפניך ורוח נכון תחדש בקרבי ועיני תראינה ירושלים וציון וההוד והנצח ונוה אפריון ונוה אש להבה הדבק בחשק האהבה וחיי העולם הבא והעלני בתשובה אל מעון הטוב שאין לו קצבה ואמטר באהבה רבה ותהיה שמה בצרור החיים צרורה נשמה שנתת בי טהורה:

אנא נורא קדוש תרבה מחילתך: פשעינו סלחה תגלגל מדותיך: פתחי סליחה פתח סעד ישע מנחך: דרש יורשי ועודיך נא סמך יחד מחנותיך: יחיד השקיפה והבט שכינתך: ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ בהגלות מלכותך: וכל הנשמה תהלל יה הללויה: אני תפלתי לך יהוה עת רצון אלהים ברב חסדך עניני באמת ישעך: מי אל כמוך נושא עון ועובר על פשע לשארית נחלתו לא החזיק לעד אפו כי חפץ חסד הוא: ישוב ירחמנו יכבש עונותינו ותשליך במצולות ים כל חטאתם: תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם אשר נשבעת לאבותינו מימי קדם:

ויכוין לי״ג מדות של אריך אנפין כנדרש בספר פרדס:

יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהי ואלהי אבותי שלא אחטא עוד ואשר חטאתי מרוק ברחמיך הרבים אבל לא על ידי יסורים וחלים רעים ותשליכם במצולות ים במקום אשר לא יזכרו ולא יפקדו ולא יעלו על לב מעתה ועד עולם כל חטאתי וכל חטאת עמך בית ישראל: והוא רחום יכפר עון ולא ישחית והרבה להשיב אפו ולא יעיר כל חמתו ג׳ פעמים: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהוה צורי וגואלי: עושה שלום במרומיו הוא ברחמיו הרבים יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל אמן:

אחר כך יאמר עם החולה:

קכא שיר למעלות אשא עיני אל ההרים מאין יבא עזרי: עזרי מעם יהוה עשה שמים וארץ: **והעומדים עליו יבקשו עליו וחותמים עם תשלום המזמור. וכן יעשה ג׳ פעמים:** אל יתן למוט רגלך אל ינום שמרך: הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל: יהוה שמרך יהוה צלך על יד ימינך: יומם השמש לא יככה וירח בלילה: יהוה ישמרך מכל רע ישמר את נפשך: יהוה ישמר צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם:

ואחר כך יאמר:

מי אל כמוך נושא עון ועובר על פשע לשארית נחלתו לא החזיק לעד אפו כי חפץ

חסד הוא: ישוב ירחמנו יכבש עונותינו ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאתם: תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם אשר נשבעת לאבותינו מימי קדם: בידך אפקיד רוחי פדיתה אותי יהוה אל אמת: יסרני יהוה אך במשפט אל באפך פן תמעיטני: בטוב תלין ותקרין ברחמים: אל נא רפא נא לי ג׳ פעמים: רפאני יהוה וארפא הושיעני ואושעה כי תהלתי אתה נ״פ: אל תעזבני יהוה אלהי אל תרחק ממני: חושה לעזרתי יהוה תשועתי: לישועתך קויתי יהוה: יהוה לישועתך קויתי: קויתי יהוה לישועתך: לפורקנך סברית יהוה: יהוה לפורקנך סברית: סברית יהוה לפורקנך: יברכך יהוה וישמרך: יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך: ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך יהוה צורי וגואלי:

כוונת קצת פסוקים אלו הם בפרק י״ט מאמר א׳:

והמודה אותו יעשה לו התרת קללות, ויברכהו כדדרש (רמי) [ר׳ פנחס] בר חמא בב״ב פרק ח׳ [קט״ז ע״א] על פסוק חמת מלך מלאכי מות ואיש חכם יכפרנה.

ואם ירצה החולה לומר אל מלך וכפרט אם הוא תלמיד חכם מתוקן ומקובל יאמר תחלה אתאנו על שמך. ויש שלמים וכן רבים מקרין אותו אדון עולם עד סופו. ויש מקרין אותו יגדל, ומפרשים לו כל אחד מי״ג עקרים אם צריך הוא לכך, והחולה יודה בפיו ובלבבו על כל אחד מהם, והכל לפי ישוב דעתו של חולה, וטוב מעט בכוונה מהרבות שלא בכוונה:

ואם בר מינן השעה דחוקה לו יזקוף עשר אצבעות כלפי מעלה ויכוין ליחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה. באור סיבת הסיבות ועילת העילות המחיה את הכל בסוד עליית נשמתו ויאמר:

Final Moments

רבונו של עולם יהי רצון מלפניך שיהיה שלום מנוחתי:

ויכוין בשם יתברך ויחודו וכמעמד הר סיני הגדול והנורא:

בפרק ל״ה שם כוונה נאותה לעומד בשעת יציאת נשמה:

בפרק ל״ו יתבאר שם מה יכוין המפקיד נשמתו ביד אל ע״י פסוקים אלו:

בשנת מות המלך עזיהו ואראה את אדני ישב על כסא רם ונשא ושוליו מלאים את ההיכל: שרפים עמדים ממעל לו שש כנפים שש כנפים לאחד בשתים יכסה פניו ובשתים יכסה רגליו ובשתים יעופף: וקרא זה אל זה ואמר קדוש קדוש קדוש יהוה צבאות מלא כל הארץ כבודו: **ועיין שם בסוב העיון.**

פרק כ״ה יש בו טעמים לשימת עין על האדם כשעת מיתתו.

ובפרק כ״ו יש טעם למה נהגו לפתוח החלונות במקום הגוסס, והרבה דברים השייכים לענין זה: טוב שלא לעמוד לרגלי המטה של גוסס יען כי מלאך המות הוא כנגדו וחרבו שלופה בידו עיין פ״ו מאמר ג׳:

עוד צריך ליזהר שבעת המות לא ישאר שום אבר חוץ למטה וטעם לזה עיין שם.

בפרק ל״ז ובפרק ל״ח מאמר א׳ בו כוונת שבח אנא בכח וכו׳. עוד עיין מזה בפרק כ״ד מאמר ה׳:

בפרק ל״ט בו כוונת יחוד שמע ישראל ובשכמל״ו בשעת מיתה ויחוד שעושה הצדיק בנשמתו בעת

שפתי צדק

מאמר א ממפר מעב"ד יב"ק

יהא רעוא, דאימא מלתא, דתתקבל ברעוא, קדם מלכא רמא, וקדם ישראל עם סגולה.

פרק ראשון

אל ה' ויאר לנו וקדשנו במצותיו וצונו בהם לטוב לנו כל הימים, ובהם יש בכחם יתר שאת ויתר עז בקצתם, כי הקרן קיימת להם לעולם הבא ופירותיהם אוכל האדם בעולם הנשמות הנקרא עולם הזה. ופי' קרן ופירות הוא, כי הקרן יהיה השפע שנשפע על המלכות בסוד אור חוזר ואור ישר בעת עשיית המצוה ההיא כאשר יתבאר לקמן, ואחר כך אותו האור נעשה פירות, שהוא כזרע הארץ שגדל ועושה פירות וזרע וחוזר ועושה פירות, וכן אותו האור הקדוש נזרע בארץ העליונה ושם מגדל צמחים ופירות.

ובכלל המצות אלו יש גמילות חסדים, ירצה השפעת החסד ממקומו, וגם החסד שבמדת הגבורה, ולכן הם חסדים בלשון רבים, ובהיות האדם עושה חסד עם הבריות משפיע מצד החסד, ואם עושה בהם בכחו וגבורתו ישפיעם מחסד שבגבורה, וזהו גמילות חסדים.

ומצוה זו היא עם החיים ועם המתים ובגופו של אדם וגם בממונו, והיא שקולה כזכות אבות, ואמרינן בויקרא רבה פרשה ל"ו [ה] על פסוק [ישעיה נד, י] כי ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטינה, אם ראית זכות אבות שמטה וזכות אמהות שנתמוטטה לך והטפל בחסדים, ועיין בירושלמי דסוטה פרק קמא [הלכה י] גודל מצות גמילות חסדים, וכן בגמרין שם [יד ע"א] ובמציעא [ל ע"ב] ובשבת פרק מפנין [קכז ע"א].

וביקור חולים גם כן היא מצוה שיש לה קרן ופירות, ובאר סודה לקמן. ואמרו פרק אין בין המודר [נדרים לט ע"ב] ובירושלמי דפאה [פ"א ה"א] כי ביקור חולים מצוה על הכל, ובפרק הנזכר נתבארו שעות הביקור, ועוד אמרו ז"ל בסוטה [יד ע"א] הקב"ה מבקר חולים וקובר מתים.

ובפרק קמא דשבת [יב ע"ב] כתוב שכל המבקר את החולה צריך לבקש עליו רחמים ויהא בכאב לב, והביקור בלי בקשת רחמים אינו מקיים המצוה, ורבנן קשישי דמתניתין ודברייתא בפיהם המתיקו מילין כי צריך לכלול החולה בתוך חולי עמו ישראל, וגם שאין יסורין בלא חטא אליבא דמאן [שבת נה ע"א], מכל מקום גזר דין דרבים נקרע מה שאין כן גזר דין דיחיד, מלבד כי יפה צעקה לאדם בין קודם גזר דין וכו' [ראש השנה טז ע"א].

וביום שבת דנהירו דעתיקא אתגליא, והנהגת הרחמים רבים מתפשטן בעולם, מכח ז' מדרגות הכסא, שהוא עולם הבריאה הנכלל בשם אכתריאל יה ה' צבאות, המחלבש בתוכם האצילות הקדוש בשבעה היכלות, כנתבאר שמם בתקונים הנרמזים בז' אותיות אהי"ה יה"ו, ולהם ז' שמות הוי"ה אל יהו"ד נקוד חירי"ק סגו"ל חירי"ק אלהי"ם הוי"ה הוי"ה אדנ"י כנתבאר בפקודין מאלה הדברים פקודא כ"ד [זוהר יתרו צב ע"א], ביום הקדוש ההוא כל שכן שצריך להתפלל על החולה בלשון רבים משום דהוי כצרכי רבים שמותר לשאול אותם בשבת, כרם אסור לזעוק עליו בשבת כמו שאמרו [שבת יב ע"א] שבת היא מלזעוק, כי זעקה הוא גדולה מעשר לשונות של תפלה, והיא היות האדם מתפלל עד שקצרה יד לשונו שיצעק מכאב לב כי היא במקום אסיפת המחשבה הנרמז בכתר עליון, ותכלית התפלה הוא שיעלה הצעקה מהלב, ולזה אמרו [ראש השנה טז ע"ב] שקורעת גזר דינו של אדם כל ימיו, עוד אמרו [זוהר שמות כ ע"א] גדולה זעקה שמושלת על מדת הדין של מעלה, עוד [שם] גדולה זעקה שמושלת בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, עוד [שם] בשבילה נוחל העולם הזה והעולם הבא, כי היא מבטלת אפילו מדת הדין הקשה, ודיני הבינה מתמתקים על ידה ומחזרת האם על הבנים, והרבה סגולות יש לה להיות מגעת כח התעוררותה לכתר עליון, ולכן אין לזעוק בשבר מכאב לב על החולה, אך בחול חובה להצטעו בצער החולה ולהתפלל עליו ער כי יגיע לידי הצעקה, ובזה יזכה לחזות בנועם ה' שהיא בינה ולבקר בהיכלו שהיא מלכות, הנה שכרו אתו בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא סוד בינה ומלכות.

וכתוב במדרש רבה [ויקרא לד, א] שאף על פי שאינו בן גילו של חולה המבקר אותו מכל מקום מרויח לו. ובפרק אין בין המודר [נדרים לט ע"ב] אמר ריש לקיש רמז לביקור חולים מן התורה מנין דכתיב [במדבר טז, כט] אם כמות כל האדם ימותון אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם. ושמעתי כי מסמיכים נטילת ששים מחליו למי שהוא בן גילו [נדרים לט ע"ב], לפסוק ויתחזק ישראל וישב על המטה [בראשית מח, ב], המט"ה בגימטריא נ"ט, כי בבא יוסף שהיה ודאי בן גילו של אביו, שויו אקונין שלו דומה לו, ועוד כל מה שאירע ליעקב אירע ליוסף, מלבד כי מרכבתו במרכבת המשנה אשר לו, מדי בואו לבקר את אביו אז התחזק ישראל מחליו וישב על נ"ט חלקים ממנו בגימטריא המט"ה, וזה יותר צודק ממה שאמרו [עי' שבת צ ע"ב רש"י ד"ה שיתין] ששים לאו דוקא, אלא מרגלא הכי בפומא דרבנן שיתין תכלי מטו, שיתין רהוטי רהוט [בבא קמא צב ע"כ] וכדומה.

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