

A Healing Journey Through the Psalms: A Traveler's Guide

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ABSTRACT

It was most important to me that this thesis be practical for use by Rabbis in the field. Many clergy are still uncomfortable walking into hospital rooms and then make social visits to ill congregants rather than pastoral ones. I wanted to take a sacred Jewish tradition of using psalms for Rabbis to utilize at the bedside of the ill and create healing rituals for Rabbis to use with those in the hospital. I also wanted to find a term that would define the person who is ill, not centered around their illness, but rather focusing on their equal status to the Rabbi. Therefore, I called the person who is ill, Traveler, one who sets on a journey towards healing in a variety of ways.

This thesis has an Introduction, five chapters and a Conclusion. The five chapters each include an Introduction to a psalm, a psalm Translation and Commentary, Pastoral Commentary on the psalm and Healing Ritual based on a psalm. The Psalm Translation and Commentary is in a two-columned table. The left side of the column is the Translation I chose to use for each verse of the psalm. The right side is Commentary including readings from secondary sources and explanations of why I chose certain translations from secondary sources over other translations. Pastoral Commentary includes each verse of a psalm and questions helping the Rabbi and Traveler study the psalm in depth. The Healing Ritual of a psalm includes instructions for the Rabbi to read before going into the hospital room and directions for how to implement the ritual with the Traveler. If the Rabbi is planning on visiting the Traveler more than once, the Rabbi can use the Pastoral Commentary first with the Traveler and the Healing Ritual in the second or third visit.

I used a variety of texts including primary resources such as sections of the Book of Psalms found in *Ketuvim*, and multiple books on Judaism and healing which include primary resources and secondary resources.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing this thesis is a bittersweet experience for me. I have enjoyed the entire process of translating, reflecting, writing and creating and I will miss spending the time engaging in these. I owe this enjoyment of the process to the time I spent with my thesis advisor, Rabbi Richard Levy. The time I spent brainstorming concepts, research, translations, commentaries and rituals with Richard was invaluable. I not only learned about Richard's passion and expertise in psalms, but I gained a mentor and a Rabbi. I want to acknowledge the time Richard spent with me on writing this thesis and am grateful I chose to work with him.

It is important and necessary for me to acknowledge my dedication of this thesis to my teacher and friend, Debbie Friedman. Debbie challenged me to bring my whole being to my work. She also helped me remain sensitive to the audience for whom I was creating healing rituals. I am a healthy person who was writing for people who are ill. Because Debbie had been sick for many years of her life, she was able to open my eyes to the possible limitations that come with being ill. She was my rebbe and I was unable to finish this thesis without her counsel. I miss her and am grateful for the eight months I was able to spend working with her on my thesis. *Zichrona livracha*, may her memory be for a blessing.

Although I was drawn to the healing realm of the rabbinate years ago, it was with the degeneration of my stepfather physically and neurologically that led me to create rituals to help Rabbis connect with people who are ill. Chronic and terminal illnesses change people's lives as well as their relationship to others. For the last six years I have watched my stepfather deteriorate and have witnessed the effects this has on my mother, his fulltime caregiver. I want to acknowledge the respect and compassion I have for my mother as I

watch her crumble underneath the weight of my stepfather's care. She is the reason for why I am a strong and loving person today.

In August 2009 my mentor, role model and friend Rabbi David Stern, stood over my mother's hospital bed after she underwent surgery for an injury she sustained during care giving. He whispered the *Mi Sheberach*, and an interpretative translation of this prayer for healing, to her while holding my sister and my hands. This experience alone was powerful enough to confirm the importance in creating healing rituals for those in the hospital. I want to acknowledge the powerful moments I have had shadowing and learning from David.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the importance my family of friends in rabbinical school has played in my professional growth as a Rabbi and in creating this thesis and the patience and love of my husband for helping guide and support me through the past six years towards the rabbinate.

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INTRODUCTION

These days, most hospitals have chaplains, clergy and other professionals who are not involved in curing, but who do provide healing. One chaplain was on her way to visit a patient when she was stopped in the Intensive Care Unit. The nurse asked the chaplain to visit a man who was dying. The chaplain entered the dying man's room. The only light came from the machines in the back corner. She leaned over the rails of his hospital bed. The man gazed at the chaplain; with tears in his eyes and in a barely audible voice he whispered, "I am really scared." The chaplain took hold of his weak, shaking hand and it was in that moment that the two strangers suddenly developed a connection based on compassion and concern.

The chaplain did not ask him many questions. Knowing that he was afraid of dying, she asked that they do a calming ritual together. She wanted to walk him through a guided imagery based on the Biblical psalm 23. She explained that although many of us are familiar with psalm 23, because it is recited at many funerals, the 23rd psalm is clearly an affirmation of life. The chaplain asked the man to close his eyes as she recited the first verse from the 23rd psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

She said: "Imagine God as your shepherd. What would it feel like to know that God watches over you and cares for you?" She paused, allowing him to imagine God as his shepherd. Then she recited the second verse, "God makes me lie down in green pastures." She asked the man, "See the green pastures stretching for miles and miles. Far beyond where your eyes can see, far beyond your dreams. What do they look like? Lie down in the pasture. What does the grass feel like on your back? Between your fingers? Between your toes? And now, imagine stretching yourself out as you lie in the grass."

She paused again. She continued reciting the rest of the verse, "God leads me beside still waters, restoring my soul. After lying stretched out in the cool grass you find yourself

led by God. How does it feel for you to let God lead you? What effect do the still waters have on you?”

Verse by verse she recited psalm 23, creating opportunities for the dying man to imagine a world free from pain, a world filled with comfort and peace. By the end of the psalm, he was asleep. By holding his hand and speaking, the chaplain guided him to a sweet painless world, which for those precious moments had become real enough for him to let go of his fear.

Like the 23rd psalm used in this encounter, “Psalms can be read for healing and finding inner strength.”¹ “Psalms are a container for our fears and hopes, a catalyst for the freeing up and offering up of our profound and deep wishes, prayers, desires and insights.”²

For centuries, Judaism has incorporated psalms into its healing tradition. “It is quite possible that [the psalms] were connected to Temple worship and the sacrificial cult.”³ During the Temple period, sickness was viewed as a divinely ordained form of individual or communal punishment. Israelite priests and prophets during biblical times believed in a “Divine connection to health and healing through sacrifice, prayer, repentance, or fasting...Priestly sacrifice and purification rituals were performed, given the perceived link between illness and ritual impurity.”⁴ Daniel Polish writes in *Bringing the Psalms to Life*, “The great scholar of Jewish liturgy and music, A.Z. Idelsohn, maintains that while the

¹ Person, Hara ed., *Mitzvah of Healing: An Anthology of Essays, Jewish Texts Personal Stories, Meditations and Rituals*, (New York: Women of Reform Judaism/UAHC Press, 2003), xvii

² Weintraub, Rabbi Simkha, “From the Depths: The Use of Psalms,” in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 2nd ed., (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 179.

³ Polish, Daniel *Bringing the Psalms to Life: How to Understand and Use the Book of Psalms*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 8.

⁴http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our_Bodies/Illness_and_Healing/Biblical_and_Post-biblical.shtml (February 2)

sacrifices burned on the altar, the Levites sang psalms accompanied by instruments.”⁵ It is hard to pinpoint exactly the origin of the psalms but they “eventually became a religious phenomenon unto themselves.”⁶ “They were used when an Israelite felt the need to commune with God, whether to express adoration and praise... to resort to petition and supplication in circumstances in peril, in a state of dire illness...”⁷

With the production of books came a “custom for Jews to have copies of the Book of Psalms with them at all times to turn to in moments of trouble.”⁸ A list of psalms where the psalmist turns to God for help and rescue, relief from pain, strength to fight against his enemies, and many other themes that can be applicable for contemporary use during times of turmoil, can be found in the back of the *ArtScroll Siddur*. The reason for turning to Psalms during times of trouble is that, “The Book of Psalms talks to our spiritual quest our desire to find God and our frustration that God often seems remote, hidden, unapproachable and unknowable. Psalms talk to human pain, illness and fear and to the sense that we sometimes have of being abandoned. Psalms know the sting of failure and the distress of being betrayed by people we trusted. Psalms can be the voice through which we cry out for help, and Psalms can be the guide through which the lost begin to be found.”⁹ Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, a Chasidic master, who personally struggled with the notion of healing within psalms, created *Tikkun C'lali*, a list of ten designated psalms: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150, that one could use as a “remedy for people afflicted by impure thoughts.” If these psalms were

⁵ Polish, 8

⁶ Polish, 9

⁷ Sarna, Nahum, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 23

⁸ Polish, 12

⁹ Polish, xiii

recited on the day when the impurity occurred, the sin would be completely rectified.¹⁰ “It has become *minhag* to read a specific selection of psalms including: 90-108, 20, 38, 41, 86 and 118 from psalms on behalf of a person who is gravely ill.”¹¹ “Universally in the Jewish world, psalms are recited at the bedside of a person who is close to death.”¹²

This thesis explores several of these psalms, included either the *ArtScroll Siddur* or Breslov’s *Tikkun C’lali*, and renders an English translation for each of them, a multitude of commentaries on the translations, questions and answers for a text study on the psalms (termed Pastoral Commentary), and a Jewish healing ritual connected to the theme that the psalms reflect. I chose five psalms as the crux of this thesis: 6, 23, 41, 42, 121. I decided to explore these five psalms after a thorough reading of all 150 in Robert Alter’s translation of the *Book of Psalms*.¹³ I identified words that were associated with healing and/or the psalmist’s relationship to God.

What kinds of words are associated with healing? When looking up the word “healing” in the dictionary the definitions included “mending,” “growing sound,” “to free from evil,” “to cleanse,” “to restore.”¹⁴ While reading through the 150 psalms I looked at each word while asking myself, “could this word fit someone’s definition of healing or their questions, struggles and relationship with God?” When my answer to the question was, “yes,” I wrote the word down.¹⁵ I listed many of the words that I found, such as “trust,” “hope,” “heal,” “rescue me,” “grace,” and “God will hear me” that, to me, were associated with healing. When I found words and themes repeating themselves, I placed the psalm

¹⁰ Polish, 17

¹¹ Polish, 72

¹² Polish, 15

¹³ Alter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms*, New York and London: W.W.Norton & Company, 2007.

¹⁴ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/healing> (February 2)

¹⁵ You can find this list in Appendix A

number next to the word. After reading through all of them, I returned to the list of psalms which the *ArtScroll Siddur* suggests to be said in time of sickness. I circled the psalms that were listed in the *ArtScroll* on the list of repetitive words in the psalms. Through this process I discovered struggle, passion, love, fear, anger, and excitement in many of the psalms. I found the themes woven within psalms 6, 23, 41, 42, and 121 to be especially poignant.

Psalm 6 includes words like “rescue me” and “heal” and I found the emphasis of the psalm on the psalmist’s relationship with God to be particularly powerful. Psalm 6 is one of the psalms in the *ArtScroll* list. Enemies are also an important part of psalm 6 and speak to the anger that the psalmist feels, towards God or the illness itself. Because the emotions that pour out of the psalm are reflective of many emotions that sick people experience, I chose to explore this specific psalm.

The choice of psalm 23, on the other hand, was based on the personal experience of observing the hospital chaplain described above. It was one of the holiest moments I have ever witnessed and I was determined to explore psalm 23, not as a psalm used during a funeral, but as a psalm for healing. Psalm 23 is a psalm of ultimate comfort where the psalmist expresses confidence in the presence of God. Not only did psalm 23 also mention “enemies,” but also words like “restore,” “not fear,” and “comfort.” Not only does illness bring about anger and frustration, as in psalm 6, but it can also bring one closer to God and make one more aware of God’s presence as in psalm 23. As Daniel Polish writes, the study of psalms, like psalm 23, “remind[s] us that we are not alone in the most painful situations of our lives.”¹⁶ I believe psalm 23 to be a powerful example of this.

¹⁶ Polish, 104

After reading the book, *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body*, by Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, who explores the ten psalms of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, I chose to look at psalms 41 and 42 in detail. The title of Rabbi Weintraub's chapter for psalm 41 is, "From Anger and Anguish to Healing and Wholeness." This title alone led me to look at this psalm in depth. Psalm 41 is included in the list in the back of the *ArtScroll Siddur*.¹⁷ With psalm 42, I looked at the themes found there including the words, "rescue me" and "has God forgotten about me?" which were two important details on which I wanted to focus. This psalm is not included in the *ArtScroll Siddur* list. I wanted to find the healing elements in a psalm that was not identified as a psalm used at the bedside of someone who is ill, but could be redeemed as one.

I chose psalm 121 for similar reasons as I did for psalm 23. Psalm 121 has been a common psalm for funerals. I was determined to find the healing elements of this psalm because I was already so familiar with the words of the psalm. I wanted to find other meanings and create different rituals for psalm 121 that were different from what I already knew. Similar to psalm 23, the psalmist in 121 expresses confidence that God is present. However, this confidence is not immediate. The psalmist asks, "from where does my help come?" (verse 1) Just as so many people who fall ill question where God is and what God's role might be in their sickness, the psalmist also wants to know where God is. Especially when the illness is new and unexpected, questions develop about God including, where is God when God is most needed? How could God let this illness happen to me? Some people may even blame God for the sickness or believe that they did something to deserve this illness seeing it as a punishment from God. With the help of spiritual and religious leaders as

¹⁷ Scherman, Rabbi Nosson, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1984)

well as personal reflection, many people who are sick may find a different way of relating to God. This may mirror what then happens in psalm 121. Ultimately, the psalmist finds God who “guards you from all harm” and “guards your whole life” (verse 7) and it is my hope that the person who is sick will also.

I took each of the five psalms in this thesis and began by translating them. I used a variety of resources including *JPS TANAKH*, Alter’s translation, Word Biblical Commentary, and the Anchor Bible. It was important that the translation faithfully reflect the Hebrew. However, there were times where I chose English words that were more general or all encompassing. For instance, throughout the translations I chose to translate “*nefesh*” as “whole being” rather than “soul” or “life.” This way, those who are ill can internalize however it applies to them. However, I do make sure to include a second column on the right hand side of the translation that includes other commentators and their translations of the same Hebrew words. Also included in this right hand column are notes from commentators on specific words and/or translations of each of the verses.

After translating the psalms I spent time reflecting on some of them. My teacher, Debbie Friedman, explained that before one creates rituals to help others, one must first bring oneself into the text. She helped me come up with the title for these personal reflections as, “*Tehillah l’Yehudit*,” “Psalms of Julia.” These reflections began as free writing exercises where I meditated on the verses in each of the psalms and found words that struck me as having a healing component. After the free writing exercise I spent time with both Debbie and my thesis advisor, Rabbi Richard Levy, condensing my free writing and transforming it into a piece that could be used by anyone, not just a personal reflection created by me.

It was from “*Tehillah l’Yehudit*” that I brainstormed rituals that would best reflect the themes in each of the five psalms. I created the healing rituals as well as spent time reading about each of the five psalms I translated in depth.

What do we mean by healing? Many of us have difficulty distinguishing between healing and curing. There is a story that illustrates this problem. A forty-year-old woman expressed her frustration when watching her mother slowly deteriorate from Alzheimer’s. She struggled to pray the *Mi Sheberach*, to ask God for healing, when she believed her mother would never be healed. In this instance, she was defining healing as curing. The *Mi Sheberach* speaks of “three dimensions of healing, *refuat haguf*- body, *refuat hanefesh*- soul and *refuah shlemah*- healing of wholeness...”¹⁸ “In mentioning these kinds of healing our tradition acknowledges that while a healing of body may not always be possible, a healing of the soul is still a worthy goal.”¹⁹

There is a difference between healing and curing. To cure means to completely remove emotional or physical pain. Rabbi Nancy Flam, a leader in the Jewish healing movement, describes curing the body as, “wiping out a tumor, clearing up an infection, or regaining mobility.”²⁰ Healing, on the other hand, is an ongoing process that can result in elevating one’s soul in times of need and of suffering. Engaging in healing allows individuals in pain to shift their focus away from their suffering and refocus outside of their physical selves. Rabbi Flam adds, “Healing the spirit is creating a pathway to sensing wholeness, depth, purpose, and peace.”²¹ “Healing is about the wholeness of a person, about a person’s

¹⁸ Person, pgs. 28-29

¹⁹ Person, xviii

²⁰ Person, 17

²¹ Person, 17

shalom... Healing happens through spirituality.”²² Healing is not about focusing on diagnoses, medicine, or prognoses. Healing is about nourishing and strengthening our inner selves, our souls.

While the reading of psalms is an important Jewish method of healing, it is not the only one. The notion of healing has been important to Jews for centuries. The Hebrew word for “healing” and “healer” contain the root “*r-p*” related to spiritual and physical redemption and wholeness.²³ During Biblical times, Israelite priests and prophets understood that God’s role as healer appeared through sacrifice, prayer and repentance.²⁴ When illness occurred, priestly sacrifice and purification rituals were performed out of the belief that there was a connection between illness and ritual impurity. Psalms were recited by the Levites in the ancient Temple during periods of severe illness.²⁵

It was not until the eighteenth century that we meet a Rabbi who identified the psalms with healing elements. In 1772 Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was born in the Ukraine during a time of persecution and great poverty.²⁶ His personal life was one of constant struggle in which he suffered from periods of depression, especially when trying to relate to God.²⁷ Rabbi Nachman taught, “Prayer is critical to the repair of the world, and is viewed as dialogue between humans and their Creator.”²⁸ He identified ten psalms as having special

²² Meszler, Rabbi Joseph, *Facing Illness Finding God: How Judaism can Help You and Caregivers Cope When Body or Spirit Fails*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), 50

²³ Person, ed, 3

²⁴ Person, ed., 4

²⁵ Person, ed., 4

²⁶ Spitz, Rabbi Elie Kaplan, *Healing From Despair: Choosing Wholeness in a Broken World*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 33

²⁷ Green, Rabbi Arthur, *Tormented Master the Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslov*, (Woodstock VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 27

²⁸ Weintraub, Rabbi Simkha, ed., *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body: Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in Psalms*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994), 18

power in bringing healing.²⁹ The healing powers of these psalms could not be uncovered through "...mere recitation. One must grow to identify with their contents in a deep and meaningful way and seek to apply the words to oneself, to find oneself in the psalm."³⁰

This thesis suggests that the Rabbi serves as a guide to help others discover themselves when uncovering the psalms. One important way in which the Rabbi can do this is by seeing the person who is ill as an equal. The word patient means "sufferer"³¹ which implies a certain passivity in relation to the person who is ill. A person who is sick may experience many losses including the comfort of their own home and having to move into a hospital or rehabilitation facility, giving up the routine of their every day life- grocery shopping, cooking, driving- and losing their regular support network because so many people fear hospitals or become uncomfortable seeing their loved ones ill. Those who are ill also may feel a loss of control over decisions they make daily- what to eat, what to wear, and whom they want to see. People who are sick do not get to choose when the doctors and nurses will visit them. Their privacy is invaded many times throughout the day and for the majority of their day they may feel lonely or sad.

As clergy, it is our duty to elevate them. One powerful way we can do this is by seeing them as an equal. Relating to the sick person as "patient" or sufferer labels them as weak or inferior to people who are healthy and changes their status from a person who is happens to be ill to being defined by their illness. It is in "the failure to address the individual

²⁹ Weintraub, ed., 17

³⁰ Weintraub, 172

³¹ Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 125.

when he or she is suffering”³² as someone equal to that of the people who are visiting her that motivated me to rename the “patient” as a Traveler, or *no’sé’a*. “We are all travelers. People who are sick are travelers on their journey towards healing, or however each personal journey meanders.”³³ Using the term “Traveler” as the title for someone who is ill reminds the reader of this thesis that this person is not going on their journey alone. According to Michael Lee, “The healer sees the patient as a person in trouble who needs to be made whole while the curer sees the patient as a carrier of a disease, which must be remedied or removed.”³⁴ However, defining a person who is ill as a Traveler removes the idea that the Rabbi is visiting her in order to make her whole. Instead, the Rabbi visits the Traveler as both an active and passive human being.

Like the psalmist in the Book of Psalms, who receives strength from God but is aware of his own power, so too does the Traveler. In fact, the language of each of the five psalms explored in this thesis suggests that the psalmist is a Traveler. For example, in psalm 121 the psalmist recognizes that God does not let his foot stumble (verse 3) and God is his guard in the daytime and the nighttime (verse 7). This is a Traveler who has physical abilities, or hopes to gain physical strength in the future. In psalm 6, the psalmist is “guided” away from her enemies, traveling away from evil with hopes to reach a more peaceful future. In psalm 42, a deer longs for water just as the psalmist longs for God. The psalmist travels because of his longing for God. This is a type of spiritual journey. In psalm 41, the Traveler rests as God supports him on a couch of pain. This is a journey of stillness and renewal.

³² Cutter, William Rabbi, ed., *Healing and the Jewish Imagination Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 43.

³³ Rabbi Pearl Barlev Jewish Chaplain at UCLA Hospital, December 2010

³⁴ Cutter, ed., quoting Michael Lee in “Poems in the Waiting Room”, in *Healing and the Jewish Imagination*, 4.

The Rabbi guides the Traveler on his or her journey towards healing in a variety of ways. The Rabbi engages in the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim*, listens to the Traveler, and can help them regain control through uncovering text. Just as Torah teaches that one who practices *bikkur cholim*, visiting the ill, imitates God who visited Abraham after his circumcision (*Genesis Rabba* 8:13), the Rabbi and others who engage in *bikkur cholim* brings with her a spark of the Divine.³⁵ *Bikkur cholim* offers the comfort of human connection and interdependence as well as the needed sense of community.³⁶ It “demonstrates the healing power of relationship.”³⁷ *Bikkur cholim* is also a kind of journey, one in which the Rabbi travels out of the world of health to a world of sickness. Even the walk down the hallway of a hospital and to the doorway of the Traveler is a journey where the Rabbi meets the threshold between sickness and health.

The Rabbi also guides the Traveler on her journey towards healing through listening. “To listen is to hear a story without giving in to the urge to solve the crisis, to give advice, to challenge false assumptions, or to fix the brokenness. Listening requires offering the gifts of time, patience and kindness.”³⁸ It may be one of the best gifts one can offer Travelers since so much of their time is spent alone in a hospital room possibly disrupted by nurses or dealing with and listening to concerned loved ones.

The Rabbi also guides the Traveler by helping them regain some of the control they feel they have lost during their illness. The Rabbi can help the Traveler feel in control by helping her uncover sacred Jewish text and discover the power behind ritual on their healing journey. Many of us believe that having control means we have the opportunity to make

³⁵ Person, 19

³⁶ Person, 18

³⁷ Person, 19

³⁸ Spitz, 9

decisions, such as what clothes we are going to wear and what we want to make for dinner. When we fall ill, we may lose some of this control, especially in a hospital setting. However, by teaching the Traveler about the importance of interpretation of text the Rabbi empowers the Traveler to decide how to understand the text they are considering. The psalm becomes a vehicle through which the Rabbi can help the Traveler restore a sense of control.

Engaging with psalms, just like uncovering a personal story, can be approached and guided by the Rabbi on four levels. On the *pshat* level it is “listening to learn what happened; the simple events in chronological order, the characters, and the physical realities. Then is the *remez* level, the emotional responses of anger, guilt or fear that require a caring presence for the telling of the story. The *drash* level is where the story or text is analyzed intellectually for issues that can be addressed, perhaps theologically... and for *sod*, the mystical level, understanding must be intuitive, the listener must uncover the unspoken.”³⁹

The Rabbi does give the gift to the Traveler of approaching the psalms on these four levels. The Rabbi may also leave the Traveler with the ultimate gift of ritual, a sign of routine and control. “Each of us, no matter how secular or religious, has rituals in our lives. We preserve these patterns unselfconsciously, and they help us feel safe. Life happens and it presents us with changes-unexpected and unanticipated. As we face these changes we have choices. Do we want our personal lives to be bridges to our Jewish lives and bridges to the Divine? There are thousand-year-old traditions of what blessings to say, what foods to eat,

³⁹ Spitz, 36

what clothes to wear. But, sometimes, Jewish tradition does not yet have in place the ritual that will fill our need.”⁴⁰

Although Judaism does provide us with the sacred text, *Tehillim*, to recite at the bedside of the ill, there are not many ancient rituals to offer support to those who are sick. That is where the goal of my thesis began, to create Jewish ritual and a way to mark holy time amidst the chaos that illness can bring. Jewish healing rituals can be a gift, something a Rabbi can leave behind when visiting a traveler. When someone falls ill there can be many changes in their lives- different routines, new medications or treatments, a variety of frustrations and interruptions to what the Traveler’s life was like when they were healthy. A Rabbi bringing text study and a healing ritual and as well as listening to the Traveler offers the Traveler some company and something they can control. The healing rituals in this thesis have the potential to offer company and comfort to the lonely Traveler. You, as the Rabbi, can bring healing to one in need. You can be the guide along the Traveler’s journey.

⁴⁰ Cohen, Tamara and Shapira Rabbi Rona, *About Ritual*, <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/whyritual/> (January 2011).

PSALM 6

One of the major reasons I was drawn to psalm 6 is what Daniel Polish writes, “In psalm 6 no connection is made between illness and punishment for sin. The psalmist’s sufferings are taken on their own terms. The theme of enemies is given only the most passing mention (verses 8 and 11) and, as elsewhere, can easily be construed as referring to adversities. We can read this psalm as addressing all manner of travail, but it makes most sense if we understand it as describing the agony of someone in the throes of serious illness.”⁴¹ “The pain and suffering of the protagonist are rendered graphically in this psalm. The author describes the feeling of languishing away, bones shot through with anxiety and pain (verse 3). We experience the author’s groaning and crying. Even eyesight fails from sheer weariness (verse 8).”⁴² “This vivid and realistic depiction of what it is to be ill evokes our empathy, and captures what we have experienced when we or our loved ones are in that very situation.”⁴³

Not only is the psalmist’s pain and suffering both physically and emotionally described literally in this psalm, but his relationship to God is detailed. Polish writes, “The interaction with God is very personal in psalm 6. The psalmist models a relationship in which we can argue with, even chastise God (verse 4).”⁴⁴ Part of the psalmist’s personal relationship with God in this psalm is one in which the psalmist feels that God is absent. “The significant things about these feelings of alienation are not that we have them, but that we move beyond them. To move toward healing we must first acknowledge that we feel ourselves cut off, abandoned. The psalms we have read (including psalm 6) reflect an author

⁴¹ Polish, 88

⁴² Polish, 89

⁴³ Polish, 89

⁴⁴ Polish, 90

who has done that, and help us do that as well. The next step is for us to move from a sense of God's distance to the sense that we can call on God for help."⁴⁵

What is important to note about psalm 6 is not only the psalmist's personal relationship with God and the detailed description of the psalmist's pain and suffering due to illness, but that the psalm, "...ends on a note of hope. The ending can give us confidence in our own encounters with illness that hope can prevail, that our calls for help will be heard."⁴⁶

Psalm 6 Translation and Commentary

1. For the leader with the music of an eight-stringed instrument, a psalm of David.	
2. Adonai, do not rebuke me with your flaming anger. Do not chastise me in Your heated fury.	<p>"Flaming- <i>apecha</i>"- Hebrew literally, your nose, could be translated as fiery, burning, red.</p> <p>If one pictures the color of flames one may imagine what it would look like to have a "flaming" nose which connects the reader back to the origin of the word- <i>apecha</i>, your nose- God's nose is flaming red with anger.</p> <p>"At the beginning of psalm 6, the protagonist- the 'I' of the text and the 'I' who reads the text-is also suffering some terrible affliction."⁴⁷</p>
3. Shower Your grace on me, Adonai, for I am withering. Heal me, Adonai, for my bones are shaking with terror.	<p>"Shower Your grace," or, "Be gentle with me."⁴⁸</p> <p>I preferred "Shower your grace" as the translation here because it mirrors the water theme in verse 7- "drown/soak/drench." Adonai provides a "shower" of compassion</p>

⁴⁵ Polish, 52

⁴⁶ Polish, 90

⁴⁷ Polish, 34

⁴⁸ Glazer, Miriyam, *Psalms of the Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Their Beauty Power & Meaning*, (New York: Aviv Press, 2009), 55.

	<p>even when we are deprived of our own natural water in our bodies when we cry and suffer in pain.</p> <p>“I am withering” can also be translated as “I am fading,” however, the definition of “withering” in the dictionary reads, “dry up or shrivel from loss of moisture.” Because we have “Shower your grace” at the beginning of this verse and the water themes in verse 7 it was appropriate to continue this water theme throughout the verse.</p> <p>“Shaking with terror” is used to balance the word “terrified” in the next verse, 4. The physical feeling of bones shaking with terror is portrayed in this verse. The next verse, 4, describes, “whole being” as terrified. This could portray one’s emotional, physical, mental, spiritual state in a state of terror.</p> <p>The use of “<i>ki</i>” in Hebrew may mean, “because you are filled with compassion, it matters to You, God, that my bones are shaking, because you are compassionate.”⁴⁹</p>
<p>4. My whole being is terrified. But, You, Adonai, how long?</p>	<p>There is a power dynamic here. “My” is the psalmist speaking about himself. But then the psalmist turns to God and says “You.” “My” versus “You,” how can this dichotomy change into partnership? “My” AND “You”</p> <p>The psalmist proclaims- “Adonai has heard the sound of my plea.” This partnership relationship continues with the rest of the verses in the psalm so that the psalm marks a transition. In the beginning, the psalmist is alone and small searching for a large and distant God.</p> <p>The psalmist is almost fighting God in</p>

⁴⁹ Richard Levy’s Psalms in the *Siddur* class, October 2010

	<p>His suffering. The conclusion of the psalm paints a picture of the psalmist connecting with God, needing and depending on her close relationship with God.</p> <p>There is a parallel here between “whole” being and “Adonai,” God is the whole of existence.</p>
<p>5. Turn back to me, Adonai! Arm my whole being! Rescue me with Your kindness!</p>	<p>“Turn back to me, Adonai” parallels “they will turn back” in verse 11, the first “turn back” is asking God to turn around and approach the psalmist. The second “turn back” is pleading for those near to the psalmist to go away.</p> <p>Again, the reader can sense a distancing between God and the psalmist. In verse 4- the psalmist is distant from God and might even be distancing himself on purpose.</p> <p>In verse 5, the psalmist is begging to be close to God.</p> <p>By the end of this psalm, the psalmist’s wishes are granted and God is a partner.</p> <p>“Arm” here suggests preparing the person- metaphorically, mentally, spiritual, or physically- to fight or succumb to the pain, illness, suffering.</p>
<p>6. For there is no mention of You in death. In <i>Sheol</i>, who praises You?</p>	<p>“The psalmist suffers not because of the inability to remember God in <i>Sheol</i>, but from being unable to share in the praise of God characterizing Israel’s worship.”⁵⁰</p> <p>The psalmist argues as to why God should save the psalmist.</p> <p>“Once we recognize the undertone to these verses we can also note that they constitute the beginning of movement from out of the pit of our despair.”⁵¹</p>

⁵⁰ Dahood, Mitchell, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms 1-51*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), 38.

⁵¹ Polish, 52

<p>7. I grow weary with my groaning (in distress). Every night I drown in my bed. With my tears I melt my couch.</p>	<p>“Drown” also- flood, soak,⁵² drench.</p> <p>I preferred the translation “drown” rather than “flood,” “soak,” “drench,” because it increases the dramatic effect of the verse. Drowning insinuates a certain helplessness that comes with the way the psalmists feels while in distress.</p> <p>“I flood my bed with tears every night, I drench it with weeping.”⁵³</p>
<p>8. My eyes dim from anger. They are wearing out because of all my oppressors.</p>	<p>My eyes waste away from grief.⁵⁴</p> <p>“From anger” preferable because it mirrors the second verse when describing God’s “heated fury” and “flaming anger.”</p> <p>Here, we notice a transition again from God versus psalmist to psalmist AND God in partnership when the anger is no longer coming from God. The anger is now a part of the psalmist. The psalmist becomes part of God even with his emotions.</p> <p>“Oppressors”-why are they only first mentioned here in this psalm? “The supplicant imagines that malicious enemies are exulting over his deathly illness.”⁵⁵</p> <p>“Between verse 8 and 9, it is clear that some dramatic change has occurred in the protagonist’s circumstances.”⁵⁶</p>
<p>9. Turn away from me all you wicked ones. For Adonai has heard the sound of my cries.</p>	<p>“Has heard the sound of my cries” or “has heard the sound of my weeping.”⁵⁷ I chose to translate “cries” rather than “weeping” because “cries” does not necessarily suggest tears streaming or sadness. However, “weeping” does. “Cries” can also</p>

⁵² Dahood, 37

⁵³ Glazer, 55

⁵⁴ Glazer, 55

⁵⁵ Alter, 16

⁵⁶ Polish, 34

⁵⁷ Dahood, 38

	mean speaking at a loud volume, yearning for God to hear the psalmist, yelling, etc.
10. Adonai has heard my plea. Adonai will take up my prayers.	<p>“My plea-<i>tehinati</i>” and “my prayer-<i>tefilati</i>” semantic parallelism.⁵⁸</p> <p>“Has heard” is the preferred translation for the first part of the verse because it mirrors what is written in verse 9, “has heard the sound of my cries.” This part of verse 10 may be clarifying what the psalmist meant by “the sound of my cries” meaning “my plea” written in verse 10.</p> <p>The second part of the verse is translated in the future “will” to emphasize the timelessness of God’s actions, especially now that a partnership has been established between the psalmist and God.</p>
11. All my enemies will be shamed and terrified. They will turn back shamed in a moment/instant.	<p>“They will turn back” in contrast to “Return Adonai” in verse 5- reflect this in the translation of verse 5 and verse 11.</p>

Psalm 6 Pastoral Commentary

2. *Adonai, do not rebuke me with your flaming anger. Do not chastise me in your heated fury.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Have you ever felt a flaming anger or a heated fury? What was it like? How did you allow the anger to subside? Do you feel angry now? Why? When you close your eyes can you describe the feeling of anger inside of you? What do you imagine anger to look like? What is the difference between a flaming anger and a heated fury?
- Why does the psalm talk about God’s anger? Do you think God gets angry? Have you ever been in a situation where you thought that God was angry? Have you ever been in a situation where you thought that God was angry at you? How was it different from feeling the effects of other people’s anger?

⁵⁸ Alter, 17

3. *Shower Your grace on me, Adonai, for I am withering. Heal me, Adonai, for my bones are shaking with terror.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Do you feel like you are withering? What in you feels like withering? When a flower or plant withers, sun and water help them to thrive again. What will help you gain strength? What do you need to help you thrive? Does God play a role in this strengthening?
- Do you believe that God can heal you? Do you ever feel your bones are shaking? When? How?
- Have you ever felt showered by God's grace? Describe the situation?
- Close your eyes and imagine God now showering grace upon you. What does that feel like? Can you physically feel it if you close your eyes and imagine? When do you feel other people's compassion? When are you compassionate to others? When do you shower others with compassion?
- Drawing exercise-take one word and draw and focus on it

4. *My whole being is terrified. But, You, Adonai, how long?*

Questioning Sequence:

- Does this verse speak to you? How?
- What terrifies you?
- Do you tremble because of your illness? Does your illness cause trembling?
- Does the pain- physical, mental, spiritual- feel all encompassing?
- Do you feel that God cares about you? When have you felt like that? What did it feel like? If you close your eyes can you feel that now?

5. *Turn back to me, Adonai! Arm my whole being! Rescue me with Your kindness.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it mean to have your whole being armed? Do you want to fight? What would this look like? If you do not want to fight, what would it feel like to arm your whole being?
- Rescue you-do you want to be rescued? Are you afraid of not being rescued? Why or why not?
- Do you believe God rescues people? Have you witnessed this before? If so, where and how? If not, who or what does rescue you?

- Have you felt God turn away from you? What does that mean? Where did God go, if God turned away? Do you want God to turn back to you? How would God do this? What would this feel like? What would be different in your life if God returned to you? Do you believe God leaves people? If so, why? Where is God right now?

6. *For there is no mention of You in death. In Sheol, who praises You?*

Questioning Sequence

- What does it feel like to hear the word “death”?
- What do you think happens after death?
- How do you feel about your own eventual death?
- Do you see yourself bargaining with God? When? Why?

Some say the psalm should end here, talking about the afterlife, but we hope that death will not come to you soon. So we return to the present and how you are feeling now with the next verse.

7. *I grow weary with my groaning (in distress). Every night I drown in my bed. With my tears I melt my couch.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What does it feel like to groan in distress? Try to make the noises as loudly as you can. Do you feel any release when you groan in a loud voice? Now try making groaning noises in soft whispers. Do you feel any release when you groan in a soft voice? What would groaning with distress look like if we put movements to it? If you are physically able, try to make your hands groan, your legs/feet groan, your fingers groan, your eyes, your nose, your mouth.
- Have you ever felt tears were causing you to drown in your bed?
- Close your eyes. Imagine the sensation of being surrounded by your own tears. What does it feel like? Are you floating? Are you drowning?

8. *My eyes dim from anger. They are wearing out because of all my oppressors.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Who are your oppressors? The illness? The hospital? The other patients? The doctors? Clergy? God? Your family? Your enemies?
- Why are the oppressors oppressing you? Why do they feel like oppressors rather than simply a pain, or suffering?

9. *Turn away from me all you wicked ones. For Adonai has heard the sound of my cries.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it look like to have the “wicked ones” turn away from you? How would you make this happen? Who are the wicked ones?
- Are there times you felt that God did not hear your cries? What would it mean for Adonai to hear the sound of your cries? Have you felt that God did hear you? What did that feel like?

10. *Adonai has heard my plea. Adonai will take up my prayers.*

This is a free writing activity for the Traveler. I pray for...

- From this free writing create a bedside blessing.
- What do you pray for now? What are your pleas?

Psalm 6 Healing Ritual

1. Psalm 6 will be introduced as a psalm with detailed imagery and powerful emotion. The specifics of the imagery and the range of emotions will be explored during this healing ritual.
2. Rabbi hands both the Hebrew and English of psalm 6 to the Traveler. One of them reads the Hebrew/English aloud pausing after each verse. Once they are finished reading all eleven verses the Rabbi will ask the Traveler to read the verses over again either aloud or silently. When they have finished reading the psalm the Rabbi will ask her to choose one word, sentence, phrase, or verse that interests them the most, that touches her in a different way than the other verses, or that she disagrees with.
3. If the Traveler is able to write, then the Rabbi will provide them with a piece of paper and a writing utensil. The Rabbi will ask the person to write the word/sentence/phrase/verse down on the piece of paper and begin a free writing exercise. If the Traveler would feel more comfortable with the Rabbi writing at the same time, the Rabbi will participate in the exercise at the same time.
4. The Rabbi will instruct them to spend the next 3-5 minutes (depending on the person's strength and ability to write for long periods of time) writing whatever comes to mind when they think about the word/phrase/verse that they wrote down. What emotions come up as a result of reflecting on this word/phrase/verse? What memories surface when reading this word/phrase/verse?
5. The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to read over the psalm and what she wrote during the free writing. After doing this the Rabbi will ask her to circle the words that speak to her in that moment. Are there words that bring up certain emotions when reading over them again? Are there phrases that are important to remember in your life?
6. After the Traveler finishes circling all the words/phrases/sentences the Rabbi will give her a blank sheet of paper to write all the words they circled from the free

writing down. The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to keep a significant amount of space in between the words she writes on the blank copy paper. The Rabbi will ask her to look at the psalm card and read over the words of the psalm again. The Rabbi will ask: “Are there any additional words from the psalm itself that speak to you? Are there any words or phrases that bring up certain emotions when reading over them again?” If there any words that jump out to the Traveler then she will write those words down on the blank paper as well, leaving spaces between the words.

7. The Rabbi will tell the person to cut out the words they wrote down and create a collage with the words they cut out. They can place the words anywhere and can use a variety of materials: scissors, glue sticks, tape, markers, tissue paper, crayons, etc.
8. While the Traveler is creating their collage, the Rabbi will remind her to reflect on how her creation might resemble the psalm they just read and wrote about.
9. When the person is through creating their collage the Rabbi will end by explaining that the person just created their own psalm based on the words of psalm 6 in the Bible, and the words the Traveler just wrote while reflecting on the psalm, and her artistic expressions based on the psalm and the free writing exercise. The Rabbi should then find a place that the Traveler would want to put it. It should be placed somewhere- on the closet/bathroom door, or the Rabbi should bring a frame to place the collage in and place it on the table or on the sink nearby.
10. The Rabbi should leave enough time to discuss what the process was like for the Traveler.

PSALM 23

The 23rd psalm is considered a “psalm of trust or confidence.”¹ The central theme of this psalm is God’s everlasting presence. “[Psalm 23] shows us how to recognize the presence of God at times and in places where we might think God was absent or when we might be so distracted by our own concerns that we would overlook God’s presence. It has the power to teach us to think differently and, as a result, to act differently.”²

The images described in the psalm contribute to its power. “The 23rd psalm, with its image of the Lord as our shepherd... It does not simply offer us the prospect of a better, safer world beyond this one... Our world may not be a perfect world, but it is God’s world, and that makes all the difference. Yes, the world may be dangerous, it admits, but God is there to take care of us, to help us...”³

“A way of dramatizing God’s nearness to man is reflected in the psalmist speaking of God in the third person in the beginning of the psalm and then switching to the second person when man is depicted as languishing in the valley of the shadow of death.”⁴ Rabbi Harold Kushner in *The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-Third Psalm* divides each of the chapters in his book by a single verse of the 23rd psalm. I include a summary of what he wrote about each of the verses.

¹ Craigie, Peter, *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 19 Psalms 1-50*, (Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 204.

² Kushner, Rabbi Harold, *The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-Third Psalm*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 7.

³ Kushner, 7

⁴ Stern, Rabbi Sholom, *When Words Fail: A Religious Response to Undeserved Hurt*, (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.), 6.

Verse 1: The Lord is my shepherd

Rabbi Kushner explains his understanding of the psalmist's description of God as shepherd in this psalm, "To say that we live in an unpredictable, often terrifying world, ever mindful of all the bad things that might happen to us and to those around us...what is the most important about God [is not that God is a literal shepherd] is that He is the Presence that makes the world seem less frightening."⁵

In the first verse of this psalm Kushner writes, "God can assure us that He cares about each one of us, as a shepherd cares for each of his flock. While He cannot keep every one of us safe, He grieves for each of us in our afflictions."⁶

Verse 2: I shall not want

In verse 2 of the 23rd psalm Kushner focuses on what it means to not lack anything. He writes, "The problem is partly one of translation. The four-hundred-year-old King James translation of the Bible uses words that mean something different in 21st century English than they did in late 16th century. 'I shall lack for nothing-' That is. God will provide me with everything I need. 'The Lord is my shepherd, what more do I need?'"⁷

Verse 3: He makes me lie down in green pastures

Kushner focuses his next chapter on the use of "green" in the third verse of this psalm. He emphasizes the world created by God so that humans can live comfortably in it. "God has colored His world in predominantly calming colors, blue sky, green leaves,

⁵ Kushner, 15

⁶ Kushner, 21

⁷ Kushner, 29

etc...God's world is decorated in blue and green, calming us, gently bathing our eyes with quiet, low-intensity colors.”⁸

Verse 4: He leads me beside the still waters

As Kushner writes, “Water is life. We are nurtured in water before we are born.”⁹ He further explains that too much water, or not enough water, can be damaging for our lives as well. So, where does God fit into this picture? Kushner explains, “God is the one who gives us water so that we can live, but at the same time makes sure that there is not too much water so that life becomes difficult.”¹⁰ “When the psalmist praises God for leading him beside still waters, he is not only thanking God for providing him with refreshing water to quench his thirst. He is thanking God for keeping the waters still, keeping them manageable and less threatening. He is thanking God for the blessing of self-control.”¹¹

Verse 5: He restores my soul

The first question that Kushner tries to answer in his fifth chapter is the psalmist's definition of soul in this psalm. He describes the soul as something that “represents everything that elevates human beings and brings us closer to God... Human souls are nourished by relationships, and your friendship, your going out of your way to show concern, has the power to heal a person's soul.”¹²

⁸ Kushner, 41

⁹ Kushner, 45

¹⁰ Kushner, pgs. 45-46

¹¹ Kushner, pgs. 53-54

¹² Kushner, pgs. 67-68

Verse 6: He guides me in straight paths for His name's sake

“When we speculate on the paths our lives have taken and all the good things that have come our way, some of which we could never have anticipated, let us pause to thank God for leading us in roundabout paths to end up where we were meant to be, for His name's sake.”¹³

Verse 7: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

“What is a shadow? A shadow is caused when something blocks out the light. There cannot be shadows without the sun shining, and the shadow of death cannot blight our lives unless the experience of death comes between us and the sun.”¹⁴ “The author of the twenty third psalm knew from personal experience what it feels like to find himself in the valley of the shadow. But he also knew that the valley is a temporary lodging, not a permanent home. Human beings are not fashioned to live in darkness...He came to learn that God's role is not to protect us from pain and loss but to protect us from letting pain and loss define our lives.”¹⁵

Verse 8: I will fear no evil

“[The psalmist] says that there is evil in the world and that he is as vulnerable to it as anyone else, but that doesn't frighten him because God is real and God is on his side”¹⁶

Rabbi Kushner summarizes this entire verse as, “in other words, in the face of diversity, God and man are bonded to each other. God will restore man's sense of self esteem and confidence.”¹⁷

Verse 9: The rod and staff

There is much speculation as to what the psalmist is referring to when he says God's rod and staff. Kushner speculates, "Two things reassure me that God is in control of the world and the world is not spiraling down into chaos."¹⁸ "All around me, I see evidence of God's staff sustaining the fallen and God's rod striking those who call it down upon themselves. And like the psalmist, I am comforted."¹⁹

Verse 10: Thou preparest a table before me

As Kushner writes, "How did this line find its way into the psalm? After the first two-thirds of the psalm have been filled with images of comfort, gratitude, and trust...there is something abrupt and unsettling about this line..."²⁰ "The Hebrew word translated 'in the presence of mine enemies' is *Neged* which ordinarily means 'opposite.' Might we take the verse to mean, God, you prepare a table before me in contrast to the people around me, to whom I turned for emotional nourishment, only to be disappointed."²¹ Kushner concludes this chapter by saying, "When human beings fail us, God is there to renew our strength and give us what we need to go on with our lives."²²

"But instead of cursing a God who permits our loved ones to die, it introduces us to a God who is with us in our pain, and who leads us through the dark valley back into the light. It summons us to live bravely, to go forward with our lives in the confidence that we are not

¹³ Kushner, 84

¹⁴ Kushner, 94

¹⁵ Kushner, 98

¹⁶ Kushner, 108

¹⁷ Stern, 7

¹⁸ Kushner, 114

¹⁹ Kushner, 124

²⁰ Kushner, 125

²¹ Kushner, 133

²² Kushner, 134

alone... The author of the psalm has enemies. He has known failure. He has lost people he loved.”²³

Verse 11: Thou anointest my head with oil

Kushner understands anointing someone as a way of saying, “Someone is special, designated for greatness.”²⁴ “When the author of the Twenty-third Psalm says to God, ‘You anointed my head with oil,’ he is saying, God You have granted me the privilege of feeling special...”²⁵

Verse 12: My cup runneth over

“The grateful heart understands that gratitude is a reciprocal process, giving and receiving at the same time. We accept a gift, we give thanks for it.”²⁶ “Gratitude is rooted in the sense that life is a gift.”²⁷ “For those who have cultivated the habit of gratitude, no matter how large a bowl we set out to receive God’s blessings, it will always overflow.”²⁸

Verse 13: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life

“When the psalmist speaks of ‘goodness and mercy following him all the days of his life,’ I understand that as a vision of a world where goodness and mercy will characterize every stage of the lifespan.”²⁹ “When the psalmist writes, ‘surely goodness and mercy shall

²³ Kushner, 8

²⁴ Kushner, 136

²⁵ Kushner, 143

²⁶ Kushner, 145

²⁷ Kushner, 146

²⁸ Kushner, 155

²⁹ Kushner, 162

follow me...’ he is expressing confidence, born of all his experiences with God, that he will be blessed with God’s love, not because of who he is but because of who God is.”³⁰

Verse 14: And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever

Kushner believes that “To dwell in the house of the Lord, speaks of love, of an enduring relationship.”³¹

Psalm 23 Translation and Commentary

<p>1. A song of David. Adonai is in my midst and I lack nothing.</p>	<p>“I lack nothing” can be translated as “I shall not want.”³²</p> <p>“Adonai is in my midst” can also be translated as, “the Lord is my shepherd.” “Although the likening of God or a ruler to a shepherd is a commonplace in this pastoral culture, this psalm is justly famous for the affecting simplicity and concreteness with which it realizes the metaphor. Thus, in the next line the shepherd leads his sheep to meadows where there is abundant grass and riverbanks where quiet waters run that the sheep can drink.”³³</p> <p>“Adonai is my shepherd” is found five times in the Bible. Shepherd is in reference to honoring God, only here do we see shepherd as the name for God.³⁴</p> <p>“Ro’ee”-neighbor, friend- God is near me.</p> <p>I chose to translate the second part of the verse as “Adonai is in my midst,” rather</p>
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³⁰ Kushner, 163

³¹ Kushner, 165

³² Alter, 78

³³ Alter, 78

³⁴ Even-Shoshan, Avraham. *Konkordantsyah Hadashah le-Torah, Neviim u-Khetuvim/New Concordance of the Old Testament*. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985), 1084

	<p>than “Adonai is my shepherd,” because the entire point of the psalm is the psalmist’s expression of confidence that no matter what or where, God is always present. Translating <i>ro’ee</i> as neighbor or friend—someone who is near to you express this sentiment exactly.</p>
<p>2. In grassy meadows Adonai stretches me out. Adonai guides me to quiet waters.</p>	<p>“Stretches me out” or “makes me lie down,” “this verb is a specialized one for making animals lie down; hence the sheep-shepherd metaphor is carefully sustained.”³⁵</p> <p>“Quiet waters,” or “placid waters,”³⁶ or “tranquil waters,”³⁷ “still waters.”³⁸</p> <p>“Quiet waters” is the preferred translation because Jewish tradition so often emphasizes living waters and waters of renewal but this water is one of stillness that does not indicate a pause or break, but a state of peacefulness rather than refreshment.</p> <p>Word Biblical Commentary³⁹ divides this psalm into verses 1-4 “God as shepherd” and verses 5-6 “God as host.”</p>
<p>3. Adonai restores my whole being. Adonai leads me in righteous actions for the sake of God’s name.</p>	<p>“Adonai restores my being” or “refreshes my soul,”⁴⁰ “my life He brings back.”⁴¹</p> <p>“The image here is of someone who has almost stopped breathing and is revived, brought back to life.”⁴²</p> <p>“Restores my soul,” Rashi writes, “He</p>

	restores my soul, i.e., restores to its former state, my spirit, which was depressed by troubles and flight.” ⁴³ I agree with Rashi here that the psalmist is referring to Adonai restoring his whole being to its former state without troubles.
	Hence, this is why “restores my whole being” is the preferred translation.

³⁵ Alter, 78

³⁶ Craigie, 203

³⁷ Scherman, Rabbi Nosson, ed., *Tanach: The Torah/Prophets/Writings: The Twenty-Four Books of the Bible Newly Translated and Annotated: The Stone Edition*, (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996), 1455.

³⁸ Berlin, Adele and Brettler, Marc Zvi, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 1306

³⁹ Craigie, 240

⁴⁰ Craigie, 203

⁴¹ Alter, 78

⁴² Alter, 78

⁴³ Gruber, Mayer, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms 1-89 (Books I-III): With English Translation, Introduction and Notes*, (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998), 133

⁴⁴ Alter, 78

	<p>“Righteous actions” “With this phrase, the speaker glides from sheep metaphor to speaking of himself in human terms.”⁴⁴</p> <p>This verse expresses the confidence and trust the narrator has in his faith in God.</p>
4. For even as I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff comfort me.	<p>“You are with me.” “At this crucial moment of terror in the valley of the shadow, the speaker turns to God in the second person.”⁴⁵</p> <p>This verse gives an “even-if” situation, even if I walk in the deepest of dark places God will be there for me. Verse 4 further emphasizes this ultimate confidence in God’s support.</p>
5. You arrange a table before me in front of my tormentors, you saturate my head with oil, my cup is well filled.	<p>“You arrange a table before me” or “you will spread a table for me.”⁴⁶</p> <p>“Arrange” is the preferred translation because it implies an intention behind God’s actions of making sure the psalmist sits with his or her enemies.</p> <p>“Table:” an altar that is part of the Temple image on which to make offerings.⁴⁷</p> <p>“You saturate my head,” or “moisten my head.”⁴⁸ The Hebrew verb, <i>dishen</i> is not the one that is used for anointment and its associations are sensual rather than sacramental. Etymologically, it means “to make luxuriant” This verse lists all the physical elements of a happy life- a table laid out with good things to eat, a head of</p>
	<p>hair well rubbed with olive oil, and an overflowing cup of wine.”⁴⁹</p>

⁴⁵ Alter, 78

⁴⁶ Craigie, 204

⁴⁷ Richard Levy’s class notes in Psalms in the *Siddur* class, September 21, 2010

⁴⁸ Alter, 79

⁴⁹ Alter, 79

<p>6. Surely goodness and compassion will pursue me all the days of my life and I will dwell again in the house of Adonai: for length of days.</p>	<p>“Again” implies the double meaning behind the Hebrew word <i>veshavti</i>- I will return and I will dwell in the house of Adonai”⁵⁰</p> <p>“For days without end.”⁵¹ I preferred to render the translation faithfully mirroring the Hebrew text. <i>Orech yamim</i>, means length of days, and this translation leaves the interpretation of what this might mean- what it means to dwell in Adonai’s house for a length of days- up to the reader.</p> <p>“It does not mean forever.” The viewpoint of the poem is in and of the here and now and is in no way eschatological: The speaker hopes for a happy fate all his born days, and prays for the good fortune to abide in the Lord’s sanctuary- a place of security and harmony with the divine.”⁵²</p>
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Psalm 23 Pastoral Commentary

1. Adonai is my shepherd I lack nothing, or Adonai is in my midst and I lack nothing.

Questioning Sequence:

- What does it mean for God to be your shepherd? Do you ever feel this way? Does this mean you see yourself as a sheep? What might that entail?
- What does it mean for God to be in your midst? Is God ever in your midst? How do you find God in your midst?
- Have you ever felt like nothing was missing in your life? When? Have you ever felt a lack for nothing? What was it like?

⁵⁰ Craigie, 240

⁵¹ Craigie, 204

⁵² Alter, 80

2. *In grassy meadows Adonai stretches me out. Adonai guides me to quiet waters.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it be like for God to stretch you out? Do you ever sense this in your life? When?
- When is God your guide? Do you let God guide you? If so, where does God guide you?
- What would quiet waters be like for you? Imagine them. Where are the quiet waters in your life?

3. *Adonai restores my whole being. Adonai leads me in righteous actions for the sake of God's name.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it feel like to be restored? How do you restore yourself? Could you imagine God restoring your whole being? How?

4. *For even as I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff comfort me.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it mean to walk in the valley of the shadow of death? Have you been there before? Are you afraid of this shadow? Why or why not?
- What is evil in your world? Do you fear evil? How do you hope to stay away from it? Can God help you with this?
- Do you feel God is with you even during times of evil?
- Have you ever felt that God is comforting you, or, have you ever felt that the comfort you receive comes from God?
- Does God comfort you? What about God is comforting?

5. *You arrange a table before me in front of my tormentors, you saturate my head with oil, my cup is well filled.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Who are your tormentors? What would it be like to eat a meal with them? How would you do this?
- When do you feel your cup is well filled? How can you make sure it continues to stay that way?

6. *Surely goodness and compassion will pursue me all the days of my life and I will dwell again in the house of Adonai: for length of days.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Do you believe that goodness and compassion pursue you? How can you ensure that this will continue? If you do not feel it now, how might you attain that feeling?
- What does it mean to dwell in the house of God?

This is a free writing activity for the Traveler. I want to feel God's presence when...

- From this free writing create a bedside blessing.
- When do you want to feel God's presence?

Psalm 23 Healing Ritual

1. The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to find the most comfortable place he can be, whether it is sitting upright, or lying all the way down in the bed. The Rabbi will tell him to close his eyes and imagine that he is finding his way into the psalm.
2. As Tehilla Lichtenstein writes about meditation, "Visualization is a technique promoted by mind-body therapists to facilitate mental relaxation and to reduce anger and bitterness."⁵³
3. Guided Meditation begins:

Rabbi says,

"Breathe slowly and evenly.

Now imagine standing in the middle of a field of tall grass.

Notice how the grasses go on for miles and miles; the pasture seems to go on forever.

You can feel the thick blades of grass as you walk through the valley.

The trees are beautiful and massive.

⁵³ Freeman, David and Abrams, Judith, *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 271.

The leaf covered branches stretch like arms, reaching up to touch the heavens.

The patches of snow white clouds scatter amidst the expanse of the blue sky.

Listen to the gentle breeze.

Listen again as the breeze touches the grasses that surround your feet and whispers as you brush by.

Feel the cool, gentle breeze that is all around you.

Watch the leaves as they dance to the rhythms of the wind.

You are not alone.

You know that you are not alone.

“Adonai Ro-ee lo Echsar, God is in my midst, and I lack nothing.”

God’s presence is with you.

What does it feel like to have God’s presence beside you?

Within you?

“Lo Echsar, and I lack nothing”

Imagine what it might feel like not to need anything.

“Al meh menuchot y’naha-lei-nee God guides me to quiet waters.”

Waters of tranquility, of stillness, of peace.

You find yourself yearning for a taste of the water, to bask in the stillness, the peace.

Al meh menuchot y'naha-lei-nee - God guides me to quiet waters.”

Put yourself in God’s hands.

What does it feel like to allow yourself to be taken to the quiet waters?

You taste of the unknown, you taste of hope, you drink the waters of tranquility.

You pray for the hope of peace and yearn for internal stillness.

In a moment, I will invite you to open your eyes.

Bring with you the tranquility, the coolness of the breezes.

The sense of hope and peace.

“*Nafshi Yeshovev*- God restores my life!” God we seek to be close to You.

“*Ach tov vchesed yrdefuni kol ymei chayai, veshavti bvet Adonai l’orech yamim*. Surely goodness and compassion will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell again in Your house, God: for days without end.”

“Please open your eyes.”

4. Rabbi may ask the Traveler, “What was that experience like for you? What emotions did you experience during that ritual?”

PSALM 41

Rabbi Nachman wrote in the introduction to his collection about psalm 41: “This psalm is a meditation on suffering. By confronting personal pain and anguish, the psalmist struggles through it. In doing so, the psalmist provides a model for us to emulate.”¹ Again, we see that the psalmist describes her suffering in a way that can resonate with our pain. That is why psalm 41 is such a powerful psalm for healing. “We hear our own voices in this meditation on suffering. Overwhelmed by the rush of fear, anger, and grief, she wonders whether she will find strength and courage to face her situation. Empathizing with her anguish, we nonetheless see that she has only begun the journey to comprehend her situation and transcend it.”²

But, what makes the psalmist different from many others? “Illness does not cause her faith to break. She has not wrestled with God. Rather, she casts God as avenger, not healer. She prays that God will become an ally to destroy her enemies...She is alone, weak, hurting. She is in the land of the sick.”³ So many of us lose our faith and trust in God when we become ill. The psalmist in psalm 41 is angry with God but pleads with God for help. He yearns for God to support him in this fight against his enemies.

Who are these enemies? “It may be that the enemies in verses 6-9 and in verse 12 are the illness itself. In that context, the once-trusted friend who has betrayed the author in verse 10 can be seen as the author’s own body... All of us have experienced the feeling that our bodies have let us down, have become something that we have to contend with, even struggle

¹ Olitzky, Rabbi Kerry, *Jewish Paths toward Healing and Wholeness: A Personal Guide to Dealing with Suffering*, (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 62.

² Freeman and Abrams, 79

³ Freeman and Abrams, 80

against. In such a reading the true focus of our concern would not be external enemies but the ravage of illness and the hope for recovery.”

Psalm 41 Translation and Commentary

1. For the leader: A song of David	“For the leader” is translated as “For the music director.” ⁴
2. How happy is the one who gives thought to the weak. In a hard time may Adonai deliver her.	<p>“How happy is the one who works intelligently with the weak” (<i>Maskil-sechel</i>, root, intelligence).</p> <p>Who are we asking for God to deliver-the <i>maskil</i> or the <i>dal</i>? (<i>Dal</i>-mirrors what God will do with the <i>dal</i> in verse 4).</p> <p>“Weak” can be translated as “thin/poor/low.”⁵</p> <p>“Weak” is the preferable translation as it mirrors the healing theme in the rest of the psalm.</p> <p>I chose to translate the word “her” rather than “him” to match the subject of the rest of the Pastoral Commentary and Healing Ritual.</p> <p>“The one who gives thought to the weak” is the translation I preferred to use rather than “works intelligently with the weak,” because one who thinks about another, one who is sensitive and aware of the other who is different from her should be rewarded.</p> <p>The psalmist is characterizing herself as such an individual and supplying a reason why Adonai has responded favorably to her prayer. The Lord’s attitude toward the merciful mirrors their treatment of the poor.⁶</p>

⁴ <http://net.bible.org> (October, 2010)

⁵ Brown, F. and Driver, S. and Briggs, C. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Boston: Henrickson Publishers, 2003), 968.

⁶ <http://net.bible.org> (November, 2010)

	<p>“In a hard time” can be translated as “in time of danger,”⁷ but “in a hard time” is the preferred translation, because its meaning is more generalized for the sick to relate.</p> <p>“May Adonai deliver her” can be translated in the future tense, “Adonai will deliver her” or in the present tense “Adonai delivers her.” “May Adonai deliver her” is the preferred translation because it mirrors the theme of pleading/praying to Adonai that the psalmist is conveying throughout the psalm.</p> <p>“We read in the Talmud, Blessed be he that considereth (<i>maskil</i>) the poor. The Lord will deliver her in the time of trouble. The Talmud says the poor refer to the sick (Nedarim 40a). The word <i>maskil</i> is derived from the same root as the word <i>sechel</i>-meaning a certain intuitive feeling that reflects good common sense. Thus, this passage from psalms could read, “blessed be he who possess the right kind of <i>sechel</i> and is able to understand the needs of the sick.”⁸</p>
<p>3. May Adonai guard her and sustain her and may he be happy in the land.</p> <p>Do not give her over (completely) to her enemies.</p>	<p>“Sustain” is translated as “preserve,”⁹ or “keep him alive.”¹⁰ “Sustain” is preferable because the sick person may not connect to studying a text that preaches God’s power to keep people alive, especially if the person is dying.</p> <p>Alter translates it as “over to his enemies’ gullet,” painting the image that the psalmist does not want to be swallowed up by the enemy.¹¹</p>

⁷ Dahood, 248

⁸ Stern, 171

⁹ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 1461.

¹⁰ Alter, 145

¹¹ Ater, 145

<p>4. May God support her on his couch of pain.</p> <p>You completely transformed her bed of sickness.</p>	<p>“Couch of pain”¹² can be translated as “couch of illness” which is the more literal translation. “Pain” is a more generalized noun for those who may not define themselves as being ill, but may experience physical, spiritual, emotional pain.</p> <p>Verses 2-4 are seen as a prayer of confidence.¹³</p> <p>“The <i>Targum</i>, Aramaic translation of the Psalms, renders <i>vis-ad</i>, or “support,” as “visit.” Therefore it would read, “The Eternal will visit him while he is on the bed of illness.”¹⁴</p> <p>“You transformed her entire bed of sickness”¹⁵ can also be translated as “Her bed of illness you turned around.”</p> <p>The meaning of the first translation is ambiguous, which adds to the mystery of the verse’s meaning and was the translation I chose to use in this verse.</p> <p>“The switch from verbs in the jussive to a perfect tense marks the transition from the generality of the prayer to the wretched to the subject of the psalm-thanksgiving for recovery from a grave illness.”¹⁶</p> <p>Psalm 41 [specifically verse 4] lends strong credence to the notion that true visitation of the sick involves empathy, sensitivity, and understanding.”¹⁷</p>
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¹² Alter, 145

¹³ Neil, William, *Harpers Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 452.

¹⁴ Ozarowski, Rabbi Joseph, “Bikkur Cholim: A Paradigm for Pastoral Care,” in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 2nd ed. (Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 61.

¹⁵ Alter, 145

¹⁶ Alter, 145

¹⁷ Ozarowski, 61

<p>5. I said to Adonai, "Fill me with compassion! Send my whole breath back in healing, even though I sinned against you."</p>	<p>Verse 5 is the prayer of the psalmist. This prayer combines a sense of sin with sickness.¹⁸</p> <p>"Compassion" or "grace," or "mercy." I preferred to use the word "compassion" because "grace" is many times used in a Christian religious context, and mercy means something entirely different than compassion. Mercy can be defined as kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy...¹⁹ Even though the psalmist speaks of sinning against God, the important part to focus on in this verse is the concern for God's compassion for the psalmist.</p> <p>One definition of compassion is, "a feeling of distress and pity for the suffering or misfortune of another, often including the desire to alleviate it."²⁰ There is something remarkable in pleading with God to fill the psalmist with compassion- asking God to sympathize with the suffering psalmist.</p> <p>"Heal my whole being," or "send back my breath in healing." The latter reflects the exhalation that will take place during the guided meditation and breathing exercise in the healing ritual</p> <p>"I said: 'The speaker launches on a narrative account of the time in the past when he was ill, beginning with a quotation of the prayer he uttered for healing.'"²¹</p> <p>The psalmist here begins his prayer for healing with, "And I said," just as he begins his prayer for eternal life in verse 13 with the same "And I said" formula.²²</p>
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¹⁸ Neil, 453

¹⁹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mercy> (February 14, 2011)

²⁰ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/compassion> (February 14, 2011)

²¹ Alter, 145

²² Dahood, 250

6. My enemies speak evil of me, saying: "When will she die and when will her name perish?"	Verses 6-8 are the words of the enemies. These verses permit the enemies to speak for themselves- the sins that inflict the sickness are those of the larger world. ²³
7. If one comes to see her, her heart will utter emptiness; she gathered iniquity for herself, went outside and spoke.	"His heart will utter," ²⁴ "emptiness," ²⁵ or "His heart spoke a lie."
8. Together all of those that hate me will whisper against me, they think evil towards me.	"Whisper" may refer to casting a spell. Sickness involved the evil world as well as the material world. ²⁶

Psalm 41 Pastoral Commentary

2. *How happy is the one who gives thought to the weak. In a hard time may Adonai deliver him.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Can you describe a time that was hard in your life? Did you feel God could deliver you? How?

3. *May Adonai guard him and sustain him and may he be happy in the land. Do not give him over (completely) to his enemies.*

Questioning Sequence:

- How does God guard people? Does God guard you? How does God sustain people? Does God sustain you?
- What would it mean to be given over to one's enemies? Who do you consider your enemies? Are you afraid of this happening to you? How can it be prevented from happening?

4. *May God support him on his couch of pain. You completely transformed his bed of sickness.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Do you feel you are on a couch of pain? How? What does it feel like? What would it mean to be supported on a couch of pain?

²³ Neil, 453

²⁴ Dahood, 251

²⁵ Brown, Driver and Briggs, 996

²⁶ Neil, 453

- What would it mean to have your bed of sickness completely transformed?
- Could we transform your bed for you? How?

5. *I said to Adonai, "Fill me with compassion! Send my whole breath back in healing, even though I sinned against you."*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it mean to ask God to fill you with compassion?
- What would it feel like to have your breath sent back to you in healing? What is a healing breath? Have you ever experienced this kind of breath before?
- The healing exercise on page 50 can be referenced here.

This is a free writing activity for the Traveler. I want from God...

- From this free writing create a bedside blessing.
- What do you want from God?

Psalm 41 Healing Ritual

The goal of this healing ritual is for the person to recognize that although some of their body may hurt, feel weak, move more slowly than before their illness, etc., that there are still parts of their body that work and that they can control. Clergy may want to focus on God's creative forces behind creating our human bodies and thinking about those things for which the Traveler may feel gratitude.

1. Rabbi explains the tradition that the *Shechinah* resides over the bedside of the sick.
2. The Rabbi will have a conversation with the Traveler about this rabbinical text, "The codes say that when a person is sick, the *Shechinah* dwells at the head of the bed." (*Yoreh Deah* Section 335)
 - a. "The Talmud openly says that God's very presence (*Shechinah*) rests above the sick person's bed, providing sustenance for him:
 - i. Rabin said in the name of Rav: From where do we know that the Holy Blessed One sustains the sick? As it says "The Eternal will support [the sick person] upon his bed of illness" (psalm 41) Rabin also said in the name of Rav: From where do we know that the Divine Presence rests above the invalid's bed? From the verse, "the Eternal will support

[the sick person] upon his bed of illness.” (*Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 40a*)

1. “This text assures the sick of God’s presence and love in time of illness. By sharing their presence, visitors can truly imitate God. In the eyes of many sufferers both clergy and lay pastoral caregivers represent the Divine Presence because they come on behalf of both Judaism and of the Jewish community.”²⁷
 2. “If the *Shechinah* is at the head of every sick person, a hospital or geriatric facility becomes a holy place.”²⁸
3. *Chuppah* ritual:
- a. Have one other person (minimum) help hold the *chuppah* poles (or the edges of the *tallit*).
 - b. Explanation of the *chuppah*--it can represent a home for a newly married couple, but it can also symbolize the *Shechinah*, a place where God’s presence dwells.
4. Healing Breathing Exercise:
- a. The Rabbi will read and lead the healing ritual for the Traveler under the *chuppah*.
 - b. While leading the Healing Breathing Exercise, the Rabbi will show sensitivity and awareness of the Traveler’s physical limitations. During the Healing Breathing Exercise, the Rabbi may want to change the focus onto different body parts depending on the person’s limitations or physical pains.

²⁷ Ozarowski in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 61

²⁸ Ozarowski in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 60

Healing Breathing Exercise

Rabbi: “When we rest and relax ourselves, the silence can make us vulnerable. When we actually go to sleep we can choose to open ourselves to a spiritual possibility. We can choose to let our souls go into God’s hands, to be carried by God through the time we are sleeping.”

“When we lie down and close our eyes we become aware of ourselves as living, breathing beings.”

PAUSE

We inhale (*inhale with the person*) deeply concentrating on the feeling of our chest expanding with each inhalation. Then we exhale (*exhale with the person*) feeling your abdominal muscles preparing for our next inhalation. The whole cycle occurs again

and again

and again

Expansion and preparation,

We breathe in, expanding our ribcage to allow air to expand inside of us

We breathe out, concentrating on our ribcage settling and preparing ourselves for the next inhalation.

As we breathe in we concentrate on the words:

Adonai Choneni: God, fill me with grace (verse 5).

We let a breath out while saying:

Refa'ah nafshi: Send back my breath in healing.

(Then actually do the breathing exercise here: Breathe in, *Adonai choneni*, breathe out, *refa'ah nafshi*)

With every breath in we say- “God fill me with grace.”

With every breath out we say- “Send back my breath in healing.

Breathe in we say, “God fill me with grace.”

Breathe out we say, “Send back my breath in healing.”

God, You fill us with grace. We focus on our toes and ankles.²⁹ We inhale and say, “*Adonai Choneni*: God fill me with compassion.” We breathe out and say, “*Re’fa’ah Nafshi*: Send back my breath in healing.”

We allow ourselves to relax.

Let’s focus on our stomachs. Let’s breathe in, “God, fill me with compassion.” Feel the breath we take into our bodies moving inside of us. I breathe out, “Send back my breath in healing.”

Let’s feel our fingers relax and we inhale, “*Adonai Choneni*.” Breathe out, “*Refa’ah Nafshi*.”

We imagine the different movements of our face muscles. The wrinkle between our eyebrows when we are confused. The upward dance of our cheekbones when we smile. The flutter of an eyelid when we blush. The scrunching of our noses when we are tickled by the wind’s breath on us. We imagine our faces resting with very little movements, very still. We take a deep breath in, “God fill me with compassion.” Let a deep breath out, “Send back my breath in healing.”

“God is my guard” and my protector (verse 3).

I feel God’s ultimate protection, Adonai guards me when I give up control and close my eyes to sleep. “Fill me with compassion. Send back my breath in healing. Carry me, God.”

²⁹ If person is restricted in movement clergy may want to say, “I imagine my body beginning to relax”

This is my hope that I will continue to entrust my soul into your hands, *b'yado afkid ruch*.

Conclusion of ritual:

If person is awake chant "*b'yado afkid ruch*" and continue to hold *chuppah* over them. When timing feels right, take the *chuppah* down and continue chanting.

If there is time, allow the Traveler to reflect on the ritual.

God is the comfort for our minds and souls. Just when it feels as though the darkness feels as if it will swallow us, we are lifted. God lifts us and carries us as it says in verse 6, "I am supported on my couch" of relaxation.

"My bed is completely transformed." As you lie under this *chuppah*, do you feel God's presence? If not, what would it take to invite God in? If so, when were there other moments in which you felt God's presence?

God is my warmth. As God kissed the eyelids of Adam in the Garden of Eden before he fell into a deep sleep, I feel God's kiss on my eyelids, tucking the sheets under me, a wave of warmth settles over my body- it must be the heated blanket of my mind and my soul, my God.

This is my hope that I will continue to entrust my soul into your hands, *b'yado afkid ruchi*.

Conclusion of ritual:

If person is awake chant "*b'yado afkid ruchi*" and continue to hold *chuppah* over them. When timing feels right, take the *chuppah* down and continue chanting.

If there is time, allow the Traveler to reflect on the ritual.

God is the comfort for our minds and souls. Just when it feels as though the darkness feels as if it will swallow us, we are lifted. God lifts us and carries us as it says in verse 6, "I am supported on my couch" of relaxation.

"My bed is completely transformed." As you lie under this *chuppah*, do you feel God's presence? If not, what would it take to invite God in? If so, when were there other moments in which you felt God's presence?

God is my warmth. As God kissed the eyelids of Adam in the Garden of Eden before he fell into a deep sleep, I feel God's kiss on my eyelids, tucking the sheets under me, a wave of warmth settles over my body- it must be the heated blanket of my mind and my soul, my God.

PSALM 42

In the opening of the 42nd psalm the reader is introduced to, “the remarkable faith of a downcast soul. The opening words portray the quest of a devout person. The psalmist initially states that he feels distant from God because of his physical exile from the land, but it becomes apparent that it is an existential exile not physical exile.”¹ “During times when our lives resonate with the mood of these psalms, God seems remote and absent to us. We feel like God has forgotten all about us, or cast us off. More darkly, we fear that perhaps God even smolders with anger against us. The psalms, [including psalm 42] make repeated use of the powerful image of God’s face being hidden from us.”²

“These verses also remind us that it is an authentic religious experience to feel cut off from God. The awareness of God’s absence, as much as the awareness of God’s presence, is part of what it is to experience life as a religious person.”³

Not only is the psalmist initially concerned with God’s absence, he portrays a hope for a better future. “The psalmist uses two words in the text (last verse) that connect the faith of his past with hope for his future. In his concluding declaration of faith he says, *ki od-* yet. This terminology suggests that, in the indefinite future the exile will end.”⁴

¹ Weintraub, 52

² Polish, 46

³ Polish, 47

⁴ Weintraub, 56

Psalm 42 Translation and Commentary

1. To the Chief Musician: a maskil for the sons of Korach.	<i>Maskil</i> may be translated as instruction
2. As a deer longs for streams of water, so my whole being longs for You, Adonai.	<p>I chose “as a deer longs for streams of water,” rather than “As a hart longs for flowing streams,”⁵ because a “deer” does not suggest any details of the animal where a “hart” insinuates an adult male deer. I wanted to make sure to keep the metaphor as general as possible.</p> <p>“So my whole being longs for You, Adonai” is the preferred translation rather than, “so my soul cries out to You, O God”⁶ because translating <i>nefesh</i> as “whole being” rather than “soul” allows the Traveler to imagine a physical being as well as a spiritual self, rather than only a spiritual being like “soul.” In addition, I chose to translate “longs” rather than “cries,” because “cries” may imply that the psalmist is actually shedding tears and weeping rather than a deep yearning for God that “longs” suggests.</p>
3. My whole being thirsts for Adonai, the living God, when can I come to see the face of Adonai?	<p>“My whole being” can be translated as “My soul.”</p> <p>“The living God”⁷ is the preferred translation to “the God of life,”⁸ because it is obvious that God creates and gives life, but what does it mean to be “the living God?” This allows the Travelers to imagine their own concept of the “living God.”</p> <p>“When can I come to see the face of Adonai?” is the preferable translation to, “when will I come to appear before God?”⁹ What does it mean to “see the face of Adonai?” Travelers will be encouraged to</p>

⁵ Boadt, Lawrence, ed., *The Psalms: Ancient Poetry of the Spirit*, (New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 131

⁶ Weintraub, 51

⁷ Dahood, 254

⁸ Craigie, 323

⁹ Weintraub, 51

	consider this question in the Pastoral. Commentary section
	“This verse portrays the author’s sense of abandonment and estrangement as he laments.” ¹⁰
4. My tears were my bread by day and night as was said to me all day long, “Where is your God?”	<p>“As was said to me” or “Said to myself.”¹¹</p> <p>“As was said to me” is the preferable translation to “my enemies that taunt me all day.”¹² It is difficult to find healing elements in the phrase “my enemies taunt me all day” unless the Rabbi stretches this to mean “enemies” are the sickness. “As was said to me” leaves a person asking: What was said? Who said?</p> <p>“While men say to me...”¹³</p> <p>“From here you learn that distress satiates man and that he doesn’t need to eat...and from here (you learn that) crying satiates, hence it says, ‘Tears have been my food...’” (<i>Midrash Shohar Tov</i>)</p>
5. I will remember these things and shall pour out my whole being. I used to pass with the many and walk with them to Adonai’s house amid shouts of thanksgiving and joy with the many celebrators.	<p>Martyrology in Yom Kippur liturgy</p> <p>“Walk with them, ”or “bow down or prostrate.”¹⁴</p> <p>“Thanksgiving and joy.”¹⁵</p> <p>“I used to pass with the many...” these are daily tasks, as I do this (step in procession marching to the house of God) I will cry out in pain.¹⁶</p>
6. Why, my soul, are you downcast within me? Why are you so disquieted within me?	<p>“Downcast within me”¹⁷</p> <p>“Disquieted within me”¹⁸</p>

Hope in Adonai, for I will praise Adonai again for Adonai's rescuing presence.	"Hope in God....rescuing presence" ¹⁹
7. My whole being is downcast within me, therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan and the Hermon range from the mountains of Mizar	<p>"My soul is downcast...mountains of Mizar."²⁰</p> <p>"The psalmist initially states that this feeling of distance from God is the result of his physical exile from the language."²¹</p>
8. Deep cries out to deep the sounds of the opened channels of heaven; all Your breakers and billows have swept over me	<p>"Deep cries out to deep."²²</p> <p>"Breakers and billows" or "waves"²³</p> <p>"Breakers and billows have swept over me"²⁴ or "sound of your channels"²⁵</p> <p>"In verses 8-12 as the psalmist bares more of his tormented soul, he continues to use water as the organizing metaphor. Whereas earlier water was depicted as a nourishing agent, it now becomes a terrifying and destructive force. A massive collusion of water sources overwhelms..."²⁶</p>
9. By day, Adonai has sent Adonai's grace and by night Adonai's song is with me; a prayer to Adonai the living God.	

¹⁰ Weintraub, 50

¹¹ *Chevruta* with Sam, October 19, 2010

¹² Weintraub, 51

¹³ Boadt, 131

¹⁴ Dahood, 254

¹⁵ Dahood, 254

¹⁶ *Chevruta* with Sam, October 19, 2010

¹⁷ Craigie, 323

¹⁸ Craigie, 323

¹⁹ Alter, 150

²⁰ Craigie, 323

²¹ Weintraub, 51

²² Weintraub, 51

²³ Craigie, 323

²⁴ Weintraub, 53

²⁵ Alter, 150

²⁶ Weintraub, 53

10. I say to Adonai, my Rock, “Why have you forgotten about me? Why do I walk in darkness because of oppression from the enemy?” ²⁷	<p>“Why have you forgotten about me...”</p> <p>“During times when our lives resonate with the mood of these psalms, God seems remote and absent to us. We feel like God has forgotten all about us, or cast us off. More darkly, we fear that perhaps God even smolders with anger against us.”²⁸</p> <p>“Like the face of the sun hidden by clouds, or during an eclipse, God’s face feels hidden from us in our time of need...These verses also remind us that it is an authentic religious experience to feel cut off from God. The awareness of God’s absence, as much as the awareness of God’s presence, is part of what it is to experience life as a religious person.”²⁹</p>
11. With a breaking in my bones, my enemies tease me, by saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”	
12. My soul, why are you so downcast? Why are you so disquieted within me? Hope in Adonai for I will praise Adonai again for Adonai’s rescuing presence.	

Psalm 42: Pastoral Commentary

2. As a deer longs for streams of water, so my whole being longs for You Adonai.

Questioning Sequence:

- Have you ever longed for water? Why did you long for the water? What did it feel like?
- What would it feel like for your whole being to long for God? Have you ever longed for God? If so, was there a similarity between longing for water and longing for God? How? What did it feel like to long for God? Do you still long for God? How do you feel satisfied or fulfilled with or without God?

²⁷ Craigie, 324

²⁸ Polish, 46

²⁹ Polish, 47

3. *My whole being thirsts for Adonai, the living God; when can I come to see the face of Adonai?*

Questioning Sequence:

- What is the difference between your whole being *longing* for God and your whole being *thirsting* for God?
- Have you ever thirsted for God? How? Why?
- What would it mean to see the face of God? Why would you want to see the face of God?

4. *My tears were my bread by day and night, as was said to me, all day long “Where is your God?”*

Questioning Sequence:

- What could be the connection between the longing and thirsting for water and tears?
- What does it mean that “tears were my bread by day and night”? Have you ever experienced this? If so, what was it like? If not, why not? Do you agree that tears can be sustenance? Why or why not?
- In the psalm, who do you think was saying all day long ‘where is your God?’ Have you ever experienced anyone, even yourself, asking this question? How would you answer this question today?

5. *I will remember these things and shall pour out my whole being. I used to pass with the many and walk with them to Adonai’s house amid shouts of thanksgiving and joy with the many celebrators.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What do you think this verse is describing? Why is it in the middle of a psalm that is describing crying and longing for God? Do you ever feel joy in the midst of longing for something? When?

6. *Why, my soul, are you downcast within me? Why are you so disquieted within me? Hope in Adonai, for I will praise Adonai again for Adonai’s rescuing presence.*

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it mean for a soul to be downcast within someone? Have you ever asked your soul this question? Do you feel your soul is downcast within you now? Have you ever felt this way before? What would it take for to elevate your downcast soul?

- What is the difference between someone's soul being downcast and being disquieted? Do you ever feel your soul is disquieted? How can you quiet your soul?
- What would it mean to hope in God? Do you ever have hope in God? When?
- Do you feel God possesses a rescuing presence? Why? How?
- When do you feel like praising God? How do you praise God?

7. My whole being is downcast within me, therefore I will remember You from the land of Jordan and the Hermon range from the mountains of Mizar.

Questioning Sequence:

- Why would the psalmist remember God when his/her whole being is downcast?
- Do you feel a distance between you and God? When?

8. Deep cries out to deep the sounds of the opened channels of heaven; all Your breakers and billows have swept over me.

Questioning Sequence:

- What does it mean for the deep to cry out to the deep? Have you ever experienced this? When?
- What would the open sluices of heaven "sound" like? What would it feel like to experience this?
- What are God's breakers and billows? When could you imagine them sweeping over you? What would this experience be like?

9. By day, Adonai has sent Adonai's grace and by night Adonai's song is with me; a prayer to Adonai the living God.

Questioning Sequence:

- What might it feel like for God to send God's grace? Have you felt God's grace before? When?
- What is God's song? Do you ever feel it is with you? When?
- What is your prayer to God?

10. I say to Adonai, my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I walk in darkness because of oppression from the enemy?"

Questioning Sequence:

- What would it mean for God to be your rock? Have you felt God to be this way before? When?
- Do you feel God has forgotten you? Why?
- Do you feel oppressed? How? Who are your enemies? How could you regain your strength to fight against these enemies?

11. With a breaking in my bones, my enemies tease me, by saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Questioning Sequence:

- Do you feel a breaking in your bones? When? What makes you feel whole again?
- How do your enemies tease you? Are there people in your life who ask, "Where is your God?" What is your answer?

12. My soul: my whole being, why are you so downcast? Why are you so disquieted within me? Hope in Adonai for I will praise Adonai again for Adonai's rescuing presence.

This is a free writing activity for the Traveler. I hope for...

- From this free writing create a bedside blessing.
- What do you hope for now?

Psalm 42 Healing Ritual:

The goal of this healing ritual is for the Traveler to focus on the water imagery in the psalm while using water as part of a healing and cleansing ritual. Verses 2-5 are the focus of this healing ritual and describe water as a nourishing, positive, agent whereas later verses describe water as destructive forces.

1. The Rabbi shows the verses that describe water in psalm 42.
2. The Rabbi will take out an electric water fountain and will plug it in so that the water flows through the fountain. The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to stare at the water for a

few minutes. Then, the Rabbi will instruct him, “See if there are any details of the water you never noticed before.” After a few minutes, the Rabbi will instruct the Traveler to close his eyes. The Rabbi will say, “Listen to hear if there are any details in the sounds of the water you never noticed before.” The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to open his eyes.

3. They will then discuss the looking and listening to the waterfall exercise.
4. Rabbi explains *midrash* on water in the Bible.
 - a. Water is a symbol of birth and rebirth. Garden of Eden was watered by a river (Genesis 1:10). Without water the Garden would have died and so would the people, plants, and animals. Rebirth of the Israelite people from slavery to freedom as they crossed over the parted seas into the desert.
 - b. Abraham washed the feet of his guests in (Genesis 18:1-33) when the guests came to tell Abraham that he and Sarah were pregnant with Isaac. Water is a symbol of welcoming another person/presence.
 - c. Priests would wash their feet in water before entering the Tabernacle. It was a ritual cleansing of the person’s soul. It meant their intention was clean and they were ready to serve God.
 - d. Water was a scarcity- the wells mentioned in the Bible are a meeting place for strangers who then become husbands and wives. It was also a place for servants to refresh themselves.
 - e. Biblical verses focusing on water: As God cleansed the earth with the waters of the Great Flood, making it livable for a new generation (Genesis 8:8) so I pray for renewal and prepare myself for new life.
 - f. As Moses and Aaron and the priests of Israel washed with cleansing waters before attending to God's service at the altar (Exodus 40:31-33), so do I now cleanse myself before Your altar of sanctification.
 - g. "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean" (Ezekiel 36:25).³⁰
5. The Rabbi will ask the Traveler to look again at the water and ask him if he feels any differently after hearing about the biblical and rabbinic references to water they just discussed. The Rabbi will instruct the Traveler to close his eyes and concentrate on the details he hears as the water flows through the fountain.
6. The Rabbi and the Traveler will spend some time talking about imagining what it would be like to be a deer who longs for streams. What would it feel like? What does it mean to thirst for God? Are there similarities between the deer longing for streams and a person longing for God? What are they?

³⁰Rosman-Penzner and Small, Rabbi Amy Joy “Ceremony for Immersion,”
<http://www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/intimacypartnering/mikveh/CeremonyforImmersion.xml>,
 November, 2010

7. The Rabbi will instruct the Traveler that he will now be able to experience the water physically. The Rabbi will take a basin and a cup of water. The Traveler will either place hands, or fingers in the water. If physically unable to do this the Rabbi will pour water gently over his hands or place a wet washcloth over the Traveler's hands.
8. Before the Traveler places hands in water, the Rabbi will ask him to think of filling in the next few blanks. The Traveler can write them down, say the answers out loud, or think about the answers to himself.
 - a. I fear_____
 - b. I need_____
 - c. I welcome_____
9. Rabbi will then ask the Traveler to reflect on the verses: (2: As a deer longs for streams of water, so my whole being longs for You *Adonai*, 3: My whole being thirsts for *Adonai*, the living God, when can I come to see the face of *Adonai*) and to choose one word or a series of words on which the Traveler can focus as he sprinkles his hands/fingers with water.
10. The ritual will conclude with the last part of verse 6 as both Rabbi and the Traveler recite: "Hope in *Adonai*, for I will praise *Adonai* again for *Adonai*'s rescuing presence."

PSALM 121

Psalm 121 “offers a glimpse of immortality.”¹ It was chosen as one of the five healing psalms explored in this thesis, because it begins with a question- ‘From where will my help come?’ (verse 1) which is so often a question of a Traveler. Along the healing journey Travelers may find themselves asking, “Where is God?” “Why me?” “Why would God allow this to happen to me?” Even within the first verse of this psalm, the psalmist’s searching and asking for God reflects the traveler on his/her healing journey. “Although Psalm 121 begins with a question, there is no questioning in the psalm itself. It depicts God as dedicated to our wellbeing and as utterly reliable. Its words of assurance in all times and circumstances provide a powerful depiction of a relationship of trust.”²

The rest of the psalm “conveys a sense that God’s help and protection is constant and consistent.”³ “Psalm 121 speaks explicitly of God as helper...God is spoken of as a *shomer*, a guard. The word is used to describe someone who stands watch. Not only does God watch over us...we are assured that God ‘neither slumber nor sleep.’ By employing a series of paired opposites, the psalmist conveys a sense that God’s help and protection is constant and consistent.”⁴

¹ Polish, 172

² Polish, pgs. 187-188

³ Polish, 187

⁴ Polish, 187

Psalm 121 Translation and Commentary

<p>1. A song of ascents, I lift up my eyes to the mountains: from where will my help come?</p>	<p>"I will lift up mine eyes..."⁵</p> <p>"I raise my eyes."⁶</p> <p>The addition of "up."⁷</p> <p>"The image of mountains usually conveys a sense of eternity, consistency."⁸</p> <p>Mountain symbolizes "Yahweh's celestial abode and Yahweh himself."⁹</p> <p>"The speaker, fearful of unspecified dangers-of the sort that any person might encounter in life-looks up to the mountains around him and wonders who or what will help him."¹⁰</p> <p>I chose to render the translation as "I lift up," because it clarifies exactly what the psalmist is physically doing. To add the word "up" implies that the mountain is high above This directional term helps express the sheer majesty of God's creations.</p>
<p>2. My help comes from Adonai, Creator of heaven and earth.¹¹</p>	<p>"My help will come from the home of Yahweh."¹²</p> <p>"Maker" instead of "creator."¹³</p>

⁵ Polish, 187

⁶ Dahood, Mitchell, *The Anchor Bible; Psalms III 101-150*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 199.

⁷ Weintraub in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 170

⁸ Polish, 67

⁹ Dahood, 200

¹⁰ Alter, 437

¹¹ Weintraub in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 170

¹² Dahood, 199

¹³ Alter, 437

<p>3. Adonai does not let your foot stumble. Our guard does not slumber.¹⁴</p>	<p>“He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.”¹⁵</p> <p>“He will not let your foot give way¹⁶</p> <p>“From here to the end of the psalm, we have what looks like a response to the question and affirmation of the speaker at the beginning. The form of the psalm would be a dialogue.”¹⁷</p>
<p>4. Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.</p>	<p>“Indeed” instead of “behold” or “look”¹⁸</p> <p>“Behold the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps” is the preferred translation to “Look, He does not slumber nor does He sleep, Israel’s guard,¹⁹” because it mirrors the antiquity of the text by using the word “behold” rather than “look.” The verse also calls God “Guardian of Israel” which is a powerful name for God and the rest of the verse “neither sleeps nor slumbers” emphasizes the omnipotence of God.</p> <p>“The key word, ‘guard’- <i>shomer</i>, occurs six times in the eight lines of the poem. Without poetic ornamentation, the psalm becomes a moving expression of trust in God, using traditional language and patterned repetition.”²⁰</p>
<p>5. Adonai is guard. Adonai is your shade at your right hand.²¹</p>	<p>“<i>Yahweh</i> is your guardian, <i>Yahweh</i> is your shade, the Most High is your right hand.”²²</p>
<p>6. By day the sun does not strike you, nor the moon by night.²³</p>	

¹⁴ Alter, 437

¹⁵ Polish, 187

¹⁶ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 1753

¹⁷ Alter, 437

¹⁸ Dahood, 199

¹⁹ Alter, 438

²⁰ Alter, 438

²¹ Alter, 438

²² Dahood, 199

²³ Alter, 438

<p>7. Adonai guards you from all harm, Adonai guards your life.²⁴</p>	<p>“In a climactic pattern of asserted trust, three of the six repetitions of “guard” occur in the last two lines of the poem.”²⁵</p> <p>“...this psalm is understood as praising God for watching over and protecting us in this life. But some readers see an emphasis on the word “soul” encountered in verse 7. For such readers, psalm 121 is about God’s protecting the soul as it leaves the body, about a journey beyond the realm of this earth.”</p>
<p>8. Adonai guards your going and your coming, now and forevermore.²⁶</p>	<p>“Now and forevermore- this concluding reference to the eternality of God’s protection completes an arc begun with reference to creation at the beginning of the poem in the designation of God as ‘maker of heaven and earth.’”²⁷</p> <p>Verse 8 describes how God guards the soul when it “goes out” of the human body which has contained it during its earthly career, and when it “comes in” to the realm of life eternal in which it will live “from this time forth and forever more.” For those who read psalm 121 in this fashion, these words represent a hope for eternal life.²⁸</p>

Psalm 121 Pastoral Commentary

1. A song of ascents, I lift up my eyes to the mountains: from where will my help come?

Questioning Sequence:

- When we walk, we oftentimes keep our eyes down. Could you imagine what it would be like to walk with our eyes facing forward all the time?
- Have you ever been to the mountains? What would it be like to lift your eyes up to the mountains?

²⁴ Alter, 438

²⁵ Alter, 438

²⁶ Alter, 438

²⁷ Alter, 438

²⁸ Polish, 171

- From where does your help come?

2. *My help comes from Adonai, Creator of heaven and earth.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Do you ever get help from God? How?

3. *Adonai does not let your foot stumble. Our guard does not slumber.*

Questioning Sequence:

- When do you stumble? What would it be like for God to not let your foot stumble?
- Who do you think is the guard in this verse? Do you ever feel like a guard? When? Do you know of others who are your guards? Are you ever a guard for others? When? What does that feel like?

4. *Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.*

5. *Adonai is guard. Adonai is your shade at your right hand.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Is Adonai your guard? How? When do you feel the most guarded/protected? When do you feel the least guarded/protected? How would you ask God to guard you?
- What does it mean that “God is your shade at your right hand?” Do you agree with this? Have you ever experienced this?

6. *By day the sun does not strike you, nor the moon by night.*

Questioning Sequence:

- Have you ever felt the sun’s rays upon you? When? What did it feel like?
- Do you feel as if the moon can or does strike you? When? How?

7. *Adonai guards you from all harm, Adonai guards your life.*

- Do you believe God guards you from harm? What types of harm?
- How might “God guards your life” feel differently from “God guards you from all harm?”

8. *Adonai guards your going and your coming, now and forevermore.*

This is a free writing activity for the Traveler. I want to God to guard me by...

- From this free writing create a bedside blessing.
- How do you want God to guard you?

Psalm 121 Healing Ritual

1. Rabbi will ask the Traveler to reflect on a word that was repeated several times in the psalm. The word is “guard” and it is related to how the psalmist sees God as guard and protector.
2. Rabbi will ask the Traveler, “Do you find it challenging to see God as protector or guard in your life? Have you felt God in this role before? If not, could you imagine God or a powerful force as your guard or protector someday? One way in which we can ask for protection or imagine being guarded is through prayer.” “Prayer is circular, rather than one-directional and initiates a relationship with God and can maintain this relationship with God on the path toward healing.”²⁹
3. The Rabbi will then ask, “Prayer can happen in a variety of ways. Have you ever prayed before? What did you do? How did you do it? We will spend the next couple of minutes brainstorming ways in which you can connect to the words in this psalm and initiate a conversation with God through prayer.”
4. Rabbi says, “Some people connect to God through song or wordless melodies, *niggunim*. If you were to hum a melody that reflected the themes in this psalm what would it sound like to you? Or, if you could chant using one or two words from this psalm what would those words be and what would the chant sound like?”
5. Rabbi says, “Let’s try it together.” The Traveler can either lead the Rabbi in the *niggun* or chant or the Rabbi may want to try one first so that the Traveler hears and understands what the Rabbi is asking.
6. The Rabbi then may say, “Others do not find chanting or singing to be a form of prayer. Some find meditating on a phrase to be calming and a source of connection to God. Could you imagine doing this? What phrase would you use? Can we try it now?”
7. “Others enjoy reading words over and over and over again so that the reading ushers them into a meditative state. Can we try reading the psalm over and over again either aloud or to ourselves to see what it feels like?”

²⁹ Olitzky, 42

8. Rabbi will then tell the Traveler that together they will create a healing service. The Rabbi will explain how wearing a *kippah* during this service can help our minds transition from the hospital bed to a prayerful and holy moment. The Rabbi will offer the Traveler a *kippah*. The Rabbi may want to explain to the Traveler that wearing a *kippah* is *minhag*, or custom, not a mitzvah, or commandment. However, it is deeply significant to many people. These are a few of the reasons for why people wear a *kippah*:
 - a. Wearing a head covering may date back to the period of the First Temple when the High Priests would wear a head covering. Once the Temples no longer existed the rabbis taught that all Jews should be like High Priests and be attentive to God's presence. Therefore, the *kippah* came to symbolize a means of expressing awareness of and respect for God throughout the day.
 - b. There is also a story that one Rabbi would not walk further than four (*amot*, approximately six feet) without wearing a head covering because God's presence, or the *Shechinah*, rests above his head. Therefore, people started wearing *kippot* to recognize God's presence above them.
9. Although there is no "official" blessing for putting on a *kippah*, the Rabbi may want to teach the traveler the morning blessing: *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam Oter Yisrael B'tef'arah*. Blessed are You our God, Ruler of the Universe who crowns Israel with Glory.
10. The Rabbi will turn on the electric lights they brought as well and turn down the lights. The Rabbi will say the blessing, "*Baruch atah Adonai yotzer ha'ma'arot*." "Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God who creates and forms lights." The Rabbi will begin by using the traveler's chant/*niggun* created at the beginning of the ritual. Depending on the Traveler's energy, they will either join in with singing or listen as the Rabbi chants or sings. Then the Rabbi will ask him to meditate on the phrase they chose from the psalm. In conclusion, the Rabbi will ask the Traveler to read the psalm over and over again to themselves or aloud.
11. The Rabbi will then wash the person's hands to conclude the healing service.³⁰ The Rabbi will ask him what the experience was like. Could they imagine trying it on their own? What would they change?
12. The Rabbi will turn on the lights and leave a small journal with the traveler. The Rabbi will suggest that he try some or all of the healing service that they did together every day. The journal is for the person to reflect on the experience.

³⁰ This part of the ritual, the handwashing, only works if the person has their hands free, you could use a sani-wipe or a wet washcloth or you could do just imagine doing the ritual.

CONCLUSION

It was important to me that I create a thesis that was practical. I believe that any Rabbi could pick up this thesis and use it in a variety of ways. First, the Rabbi could read the thesis from Introduction to Conclusion and hopefully find a few useful pieces within it to use with congregants in the hospital. Second, the Rabbi could take each of the five psalms, the Pastoral Commentary and their Healing Rituals and use them when visiting congregants who are open to the idea of working through their healing journey. Third, the Rabbi may realize that when visiting a Traveler, the Rabbi is interested in developing a deeper connection with this person, or the Traveler wishes to know more about the healing journey. Therefore, the Rabbi might sift through this thesis and find the psalm that works best with the relationship the Rabbi and the Traveler have developed and use that particular psalm in the hospital.

How else can this thesis be utilized? This thesis is a resource for writing sermons on a diversity of topics. One topic that may be explored is what it means to distinguish between healing and curing in our lives and the frustrations of confusion the two terms. Another topic is defining people who enter our lives as Travelers, whether ill or not, and what implications that has. Furthermore, one may want to preach on the importance of ritual and the benefits that healing rituals can bring to others.

In addition, this thesis can be used in adult education settings. The Rabbi may want to study a few psalms in depth by using the charts I created with translation and commentary to explore the deeper meanings of these psalms. She could study these psalms with one congregant who is converting and is interested in looking at psalms, or someone who is anticipating going through surgery and comes to the Rabbi for comfort, or with a Bible study group looking at psalms.

It is my hope that Rabbis may find this thesis useful in their rabbinate. Healing is at the core of who we are as Rabbis and this thesis is intended to help us guide Travelers on their way.

APPENDIX A

Themes throughout the psalms:

- “In the straits:” 4, 18, 25, 31, 46, 54, 66, 69, 77, 86, 102, 116
- “Enemies/foes/wicked:” 3, 6, 13, 17, 18, 23, 31, 35, 40, 43, 54- strangers, 55, 56, 66, 69, 71, 88, 94, 9, 102, 119, 140, 142, 143
- Has God forgotten about me? 13, 22, 30, 42, 43, 77, 88, 102, 143
- “Safety/shelter/house:” 4, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 31, 46, 57, 61, 62, 69, 71, 86, 94, 142
- “Light/Darkness/night/shadow:” 27, 36, 4, 16, 17, 18, 22, 37, 42, 50, 43, 46, 55, 56, 67, 69, 77, 84, 86, 88, 103, 121, 130, 142
- “Guide/lead:” 31, 100, 143

Repetition of words and phrases:

- God will hear and answer: 3, 4, 6, 13, 17, 18, 20, 31, 40, 50, 54, 55, 61, 66, 69, 70, 77, 84, 86, 94, 102, 116, 130, 140, 142, 143
- Rescue me: 6, 7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 27, 31, 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, 43, 50, 51, 54, 57, 62, 69, 70, 71, 86, 88, 116, 119, 140
- God’s “righteousness:” 4, 7
- “Trust:” 25, 31, 4, 22, 37, 40, 43, 55, 56, 84, 86, 116
- “Hope:” 25, 27, 31, 37, 42, 43, 62, 69, 71, 130, 119
- “Help:” 30, 35, 40, 46, 71, 86, 94, 119, 121
- “Kindness:” 31, 36, 6, 51, 57, 66, 69, 77, 88, 94, 100, 103, 143
- “Heal:” 6, 41, 103
- “Stumble:” 16, 17, 37, 55, 62, 66, 94, 116, 121
- “Grace:” 55, 56, 57, 67
- “Fear:” 67, 103, 130

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