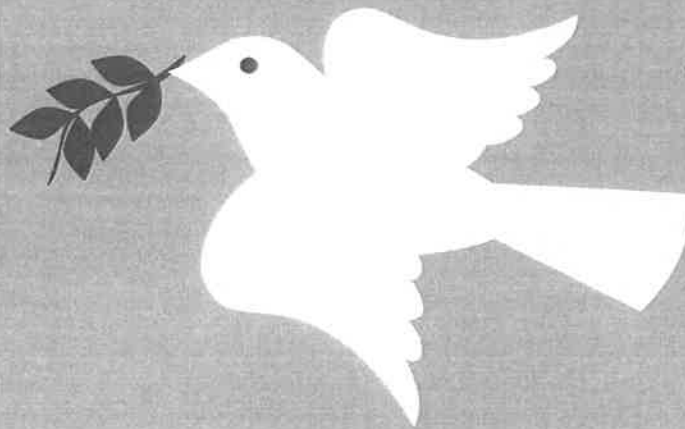


In Times of Illness and Recovery

For Hospital and Home



Min ha-meitzar karati Y-ah, anani va'merchav Y-ah.

From the narrow straits, from a tight spot I call out to
the Eternal One. The Eternal One answered me with
spacious, expansive relief without limit.

(Psalm 118:5)

By Rabbi Amy Scheinerman & Rabbi Yocheved Heiligman

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For Hospital and Home

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I. Introduction

Illness and surgery can be frightening and painful. At the same time, medical care provides hope and healing. The prayers and thoughts in this booklet have been prepared to help you face this challenging time in your life with the Eternal One's presence at your side.

Physical cure and spiritual healing are not the same, although the terms "cure" and "heal" are often used interchangeably. Your medical team strives to cure your body; they seek your recovery from the illness or condition they are treating. Healing means arriving at a spiritual place of acceptance of the situation and finding serenity even amidst it, sensing the Eternal One's presence, support and love in your life. The traditional *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for the ill asks for a *refuah shleimah* ("a complete healing") and then makes clear that complete healing has two components: *refuat ha-nefesh* ("healing of the spirit") and *refuat ha-guf* ("healing of the body"). Your body requires care, and so does your soul. Spiritual healing can augment and enhance physical improvement, but even in the absence of physical improvement, spiritual healing can bring a sense of *shleimut* ("wholeness") that is invaluable.

This booklet contains prayers, psalms and thought concerning the feelings and experiences you may be having at this time. We encourage you to make full use of this resource, and share it with those close to you and those who come to visit. Even if you are not accustomed to saying prayers, or to praying with someone, you might find it surprisingly empowering and comforting.

If you have a relationship with a rabbi, *please have someone contact your rabbi to let him/her know you are facing a medical challenge*. Often people think that someone else will tell the rabbi; yet that does not always happen, and privacy rules prevent hospital personnel from contacting your rabbi. Your rabbi wants to know and wants the opportunity to provide you comfort. Please give your rabbi your Hebrew name (if you have one, your English name if not) so that *Mi Shebeirach* (the prayer for healing) can be recited for you at services. If you do not have a Hebrew name, your English name can be used for the *Mi Shebeirach*. You can decide whether or not your English name and situation will be shared with the community.

It can be frustrating, isolating and frightening to be ill and confined to your home or to a hospital. Please make use of the resources available to you to connect with people, including the telephone and computer. If you are in a hospital, you will interact with many medical personnel. Please do your best to be patient and express gratitude for their kindness and care. Remember that those treating and caring for you are people with difficult and demanding jobs. Your expressions of gratitude will be greatly appreciated and help them do their jobs better.

To visitors: *Bikkur cholim* ("visiting the sick") is a very great mitzvah (religious obligation). There is great merit in fulfilling it. The Rabbis tell us that those who visit the sick remove a portion of their suffering. If you are visiting a loved one or friend in the hospital, please be as open in your communication as possible. Sometimes a person who is ill prefers company for as much time as you or others are available. Sometimes a brief visit is more appropriate. Please ask your loved one or friend what is best for them, so you can respect their needs and be a loving, healing presence at this time. There may be times when you do not know what to say, and conversation is difficult. Quiet is perfectly fine; your presence is the most important thing.

To patients: Please be as honest and open as you can. If you need time alone, or want to sleep, please tell those who attend you. Thank them for their care and company, but do not hesitate to express your needs. They want what is best for you.

We wish you both physical cure and spiritual healing, as well as the strength, patience and love to arrive at both.

II. Body, Mind, and Soul in the World of Medicine

Powerlessness

There it is in black and white: powerlessness. Medical conditions often make us feel that our lives are out of control, and we are utterly powerless to put them back on track. We may feel trapped in a body or in a situation from which we cannot extricate ourselves. There is a degree of truth to this, but it is not the whole truth, nor the most important truth. The old adage, "You don't deal the cards, you play the hand dealt you as best you can," comes to mind at times like this. Psychiatrist and neurologist Viktor

Frankl survived Thereisenstadt and Auschwitz. He later wrote, "...everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." We can control our attitude and choose our response to what is happening to us and around us. The truth is that for the most part that's all the power we ever had, but until we face a crisis and experience disempowerment, we are often not aware of it.

You do have power and control: over your attitude and how you will respond to your situation and the people around you. In addition, you can take a measure of control by setting goals for yourself, no matter how modest they may seem to you at this time. Ben Zoma taught: "Who is strong? Those who control themselves." You can be strong, and you can be a blessing.

Illness can be an emotional roller coaster, but it can also be a journey inward to discover parts of ourselves, including reserves of courage and strength we didn't know existed. Many people begin that journey experiencing a multitude of feelings: anger, sadness, fear, weakness and anxiety among them. With the help of the Eternal One, loved ones, friends and caring medical professionals, one can move toward realistic acceptance, courage, strength and optimism. The Reverend Reinhold Niebuhr penned the Serenity Prayer, which we offer you:

Eternal One grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Fear

Fear is a major component of many people's emotional experience of major illness. Fear can be suffocating and paralyzing. Please find someone trustworthy to talk to about your fear, perhaps a rabbi, social worker or close friend. It helps to acknowledge your feelings, and articulate what it is you fear so that others can help you cope and possibly provide information that will allay your fear. Mark Twain wrote, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not absence of fear." There are people nearby — clergy, social workers, chaplains and counselors — who can help you to resist and master your fear.

Doubts and Diagnosis

When serious illness enters our lives, it's sometimes difficult not to become the illness. For some people, it dominates their lives, because it is the major (or only) subject of conversation. It determines what they can and cannot do, and in a hospital setting, it may make them feel more like a disease or condition than a human being. It is crucially important to remember that your value is not determined by your diagnosis. You are precious to the Eternal One, not despite your situation, but regardless of your situation. Family and friends can also be invaluable in affirming your value. If you are in the hospital, it may help to make a connection with your doctors, nurses and technicians on a human level first: don't dictate, ask them how they are and thank them for their help, because they are human beings too. The more we treat others with respect and honor, the more they will treat us the same way. Ben Zoma taught: "Who is honored? The one who honors others."

Guilt

Some people experience a sense of guilt when they go through a serious illness. Guilt may arise from the belief that they caused (or failed to prevent) their condition, and it may be because they feel their health concerns are a burden to the people they love. In most cases, guilt is anger turned inward on oneself. It is a burden that will make addressing health needs and seeking healing much more difficult. How do you let go of your guilt? Try these three steps: First, recognize and acknowledge it. Second, know that guilt does not make things better; it makes them worse. Third, if you feel it necessary, forgive yourself. This is not a time for harsh judgments. It is a time to seek healing.

Pain and Suffering

Pain and suffering are often mentioned together, but they are not inextricably bound. Unfortunately, physical pain can come from illness, surgery or treatment. *We encourage you to tell your caretakers if you are experiencing pain, and to accept medical relief if it is deemed safe and appropriate.* Pain not only interferes with your quality of life, it can impede your recovery. (Please see below the prayer for before a painful treatment or procedure.)

Suffering increases when we ascribe meaning to our physical and emotional pain (for example, that the pain is

"deserved punishment"). For many, the situation they find themselves in – with or without physical pain – is a dark tunnel paneled with questions of meaning: Why is this happening to me? Did I do something to bring this upon myself? Does this mean I am an unworthy person? Did the Eternal One do this? Why didn't the Eternal One prevent this? There are no answers to these questions, and more, there is the danger that focus on these questions can separate us from the Eternal One, whereas our faith and traditions can provide comfort, strength and healing. We cannot make sense of suffering, but we can cooperate with healing, and allow those who love us and tend to us to ease our pain and suffering.

Please know that you are not the illness or condition, and your illness or condition is not a punishment. At all times, you are worthy of people's attention and caring; please accept their help.

Below you will find a prayer to recite before a painful treatment or procedure. Many people take comfort in the Book of Job, which honestly affirms the vexing nature of human suffering.

Hope

In distress, the Psalmist wrote, *Min ha-meitzar karati Yah, anani va'merchav Yah. From the narrow straits, from a tight spot I call out to the Eternal One; the Eternal One answered me with spacious, expansive relief without limit.* (Psalm 118:5). At many times in our lives, trapped and limited, perhaps due to a health challenge, but also due to many other factors. For Jews, the Passover story speaks to the possibility of redemption in our lives, and that possibility makes hope a religious obligation. There are times when it is difficult to maintain hope, even times when hope seems futile and unrealistic. Yet there is always something to hope for. The story of the Exodus reminds us that even when things look entirely bleak, the situation can turn around and redemption and healing can come. Hope helps us remain open to the possibilities medical procedures and treatments hold for improvement and comfort. We recommend Psalm 6, which acknowledges the misery and loneliness of sickness, but also the comfort of the Eternal One's healing presence. In addition, Psalm 30 helps us to envision recovery and keep hope alive in our hearts. Both psalms are included in this booklet for your use. Please do everything to keep hope alive in your heart; it is among your greatest assets on the road to recovery.

Humor, Stories and Music

The old adage, "Humor is the best medicine" is true. Laughter causes our bodies to release endorphins, our bodies' natural painkillers and stress relievers. Invite those who visit to bring jokes and funny stories to share. Proverbs 17:22 tells us, *A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast causes a body to shrivel.* For many people, music is soothing, so consider if it would bring you comfort and pleasure.

Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness is being aware of what is happening and what you are feeling in the moment. It is awareness without judgment, analysis or even reflection. Achieving mindfulness can bring you serenity and healing. Meditation is the practice of bringing everything to consciousness; it brings clarity and serenity, and it reduces stress. Mindfulness and meditation take practice. Here are some exercises you can try at home or in the hospital. Find what is soothing, calming and healing for you.

Deep breathing: For mindfulness, focus on your intake and exhalation of breath to the exclusion of all else. If possible, breathe from your abdomen rather than your chest, and in through your nose and out through your mouth. For meditation, recite *Shema* or another sort of prayer again and again. Imagine that the very breath of the Eternal One is flowing through you – in to bless you, and out to share with the world.

Music: Music reaches in and touches the very core of our being. For mindfulness, close your eyes and listen to music you enjoy (gentle music works best for this exercise), focusing solely on the music: its tempo, tone, texture. For meditation, allow the music to calm you. Imagine the notes vibrating within your body.

Observe your thoughts: Sometimes a raging river of thoughts courses through our heads. This is especially true when facing a serious illness or recovering from surgery. Stress, concerns, fears, pain, anxiety and more all vie for attention and become enmeshed with one another. Remove your mind from the fray, as if you are outside yourself looking in. Observe your thoughts without judgment. This helps many people reduce their stress.

Letting go: Many feelings may be cluttering your mind, making it difficult to think clearly. Some people find that writing them down helps to put them in perspective and make them more manageable. Consider which feelings are not helping you meet your goals. Show them the door. Remind yourself that you choose what to feel; our choices are often subconscious. This exercise helps raise them to the level of consciousness so you can have greater power over them.

III. Prayers for Challenging Moments and Experiences

Daily Prayers for Health (Prayerbook, Preparatory Prayers, and Sabbath Evening Service)

The soul that You have given me, O Eternal One, is a pure one! You have created and formed it, breathed it into me, and within me You sustain it. So long as I have breath, therefore, I will give thanks to you, O Eternal my Lord and Lord of all ages, Ruler over all creation, the Eternal One of every human spirit. Blessed is Ado-nai, in whose hands are the souls of all the living and the spirits of all flesh.

Shema Yisrael, Ado-nai Elo-haynu, Ado-nai echad.
Hear, O Israel, the Lord our Eternal one, the Lord is One.

Praised are You, Ado-nai our Lord, ruler of the universe, fashioning the human body in wisdom, creating openings, arteries, glands, and organs, amazing in structure, intricate in design. Should one of them fail to function by being blocked or opened, it would be impossible to exist and stand before You. Praised are You, Ado-nai, healer of all flesh, sustaining our bodies in wondrous ways.

Help us, O Eternal One, to lie down in peace, and awaken us again, our Sovereign, to life. Spread over us Your *sukkah* of peace and guide us with Your good counsel. Save us because of Your mercy. Shield us from enemies, disease... and sorrow. Remove the evil forces that surround us. Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings, O Eternal One, who watches over us and delivers us, our gracious and merciful Ruler. Guard our coming and our going. Grant us life and peace, now and always. Spread over us the *sukkah* of Your peace. Praised are you, O Eternal One, who spreads the *sukkah* of peace over us, over all the People Israel, and over Jerusalem.

A prayer for one who is ill to recite

Eternal One of the universe, Holy One of the strong and the weak, Lord of those who are well and those who are ill, be with me in this time of fear and pain. Help me to be mindful of You, even amidst the pain and fear that surround me now. Help me to be grateful for the life You have given me, and to be able to draw strength from You to help heal myself. You, who are *Rofeh Cholim*, the Healer of the sick, bring me healing, comfort, and a sense of Your abiding presence, here in this place of healing. Grant wisdom and skill to all those who participate in my care, and in the care of all those everywhere in need of healing. With Your help, and secure in Your loving arms, bring me from darkness back into light. Blessed are You, Eternal One, Comforter of those who fear, and Healer of the sick. [You might choose to recite Psalm 23, at the top of the next page.]

A prayer for those whose loved one is ill or in danger

Eternal One of life, I am overwhelmed with worry and fear for my loved one. The road ahead is unclear; the sky is gray and threatening. My heart is lonely and my spirit robbed of courage. Direct me in the path of life and flood my path with Your light, so that I never lose hope and courage, patience and fortitude. Grant me the ability to always feel Your presence and know that, with You near, I am never alone and will always have the strength to face what lies ahead. O Creator of life, renew the life of my loved one. [You might choose to recite Psalm 121, below.]

A prayer upon receiving good news

Creator of heaven earth, You made a world that includes the good and the bad. I am grateful and relieved to have received good news. I pray for strength and healing, health and wisdom. May the good news I received today strengthen my resolve to use my life and health to the best of my ability. May I be blessed to experience each day as a divine gift, and may my life and endeavors be a blessing to others. *Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-hayinu melech ha-olam ha-tov v'ha'maytiv*. Blessed are You, Eternal One, ruler of the Universe, who is good and brings good. *Baruch ata Ado-nai Elo-hayinu melech ha-olam ha-m'vaseir b'sorot tovo*. Blessed are You, Eternal One, ruler of the Universe, who brings good news.

You might also add: *Baruch ata Ado-nai, Elo-haynu melech ha-olam, she-he-che-yanu v'ki-ye-manu v'hi-gi-anu laz-man ha-zeh*. Blessed are You, Eternal One, ruler of the world, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this occasion.

A prayer upon receiving unfavorable news

Creator of all, Healer of the wounded, I am saddened and frightened by the news I have received. Help me find strength and courage to take the next steps, whatever they may be. Help me to find healing. My heart is heavy. Please carry some of this burden so that I will have the resolve to go forward despite what I have learned.

A prayer for healing treatment

(Talmud, Berakhot 60a, the prayer of Rav Acha, this might be recited prior to receiving treatment or therapy).
Yehi ratzon milfanecha Ado-nai Elo-hai she-ye-hei esek zeh li lifu-ah v'tirfa-eini ki el rofei ne'eman atah, ur'fu-at-cha emet. Baruch atah Ado-nai rofeh ha-cholim.

May it be Your Will, O Eternal One, that this therapy serve me as a remedy and that You should heal me, for You the Eternal One are the Faithful Healer, and Your remedy is true. Blessed are You, O Eternal One, healer of the sick.

A prayer before a painful treatment or procedure

(Many people think it is courageous or noble – or even healthier – to decline pain medication. This is not true. Research has demonstrated that people heal more quickly when they experience less pain. Please accept your doctor's or nurse's recommendation, or ask for pain medication when you need it. We offer this prayer if you must undergo a treatment or procedure that despite everything will be painful.)

O Lord, hold me close as I prepare for what I expect will be a painful experience. Help me to see that if I have pain, it is for the ultimate goal of healing. Help me endure it with courage and calm, as much as possible, and let me forget it as quickly as possible when it is over.

A prayer for one experiencing chronic pain

O Eternal One, there are moments when I am overwhelmed by pain. There are times when it seems unendurable. May my pride not prevent me from accepting pain medication, and grant me the insight to see that relief

from pain promotes healing and is not a measure of moral weakness. You are called the Compassionate One; teach me to be compassionate with myself. When pain makes me short-tempered or irritable, help me focus on my loved ones and friends despite the pain. Help me maintain my sense of self and not be consumed by the pain, so I may be fully present with my loved ones and friends and they can feel my love for them.

A prayer for when there is no diagnosis

(If knowledge is power, not knowing can be terrifying and disempowering. Those who are ill, but for whom there is no diagnosis, often feel they are in limbo, not knowing the seriousness of their situation or the proper course of treatment. They often feel suspended between hope and despair. Our best advice is to take things a day at a time – or even an hour at a time – and do best to avoid running worst-case scenarios through your mind.)

Eternal One of comfort, my physicians are doing their best but I am beset by anxiety and fear. Not knowing is so difficult. Help me to remember that in not knowing, much has been ruled out. Help me also to remember that not knowing the cause of my condition does not mean I cannot be cured. Help me find the strength to focus on healing and recovery. Bless my medical team with wisdom and skill. May I continue to recognize and appreciate the blessings in my life and draw strength and comfort from them. May I also find comfort in You, source of wisdom and healing.

A prayer while waiting for test results

(Testing doesn't change what is. Testing brings knowledge that our medical team and we need; knowledge is power to determine the course of our treatment. We are often inclined to fear the test itself for many reasons, and the results even more. The unknown is frightening, but knowledge empowers us. Anxiety and fear often engulf us, making the waiting painful. Please find someone with whom to discuss your feelings.)

O Eternal One of the mysteries of life, the anxiety of waiting and not knowing envelops me. I turn to You to help me find the strength, patience, and courage within to wait, knowing that whatever the outcome, You will always be with

me. May I discover during this time of waiting reserves of strength and perseverance within. May I find a measure of serenity knowing that whatever the results, knowledge will empower me to take the next step forward. I am grateful for loved ones who wait with me, and all those who are attending to my care and needs. Blessed are You, O Eternal One, whose world is filled with mysteries as well as knowledge.

(You might choose to recite Psalm 121, below.)

A prayer for one preparing to undergo surgery

Eternal One, You are with me in my moments of weakness. You know the trembling of my heart as the turning point draws near. Grant wisdom and skill to the minds and hands of those who will operate on me, and to those who will assist them. Grant that I may return to fullness of life and wholeness of strength, not for my sake alone but for those who love me, as well. Enable me to complete my days on earth with dignity and purpose. May I awaken to know the extent of Your healing power now and for ever. I commit myself to your care, body and spirit. *B'yado afkid b'eit ishan v'a'ira. V'im ruchi g'vi-a-ti; Ado-nai li v'lo i-ra.* I place my spirit in the Eternal One's care; my body too can feel the Holy One near. When I sleep and when I wake, You are with me; I shall not fear.

A prayer for relatives and friends in the waiting room

(In Yiddish, there is an expression that describes what many who spend endless hours in a waiting room experience. "Shpilkes" means "on pins and needles." You are probably not the only one feeling this. If there are others in the waiting room with you, they might be experiencing anxiety and fear. Consider reaching out to them and offering conversation and comfort; you may find that it flows back to you.)

O Eternal One, my loved one is undergoing surgery. His/her physical well-being is in the hands of others and all I can do now is wait. Please watch over my loved one and be with him/her through this operation. Please help me hold back the tide of fear and anxiety that threatens to overwhelm me. May I find comfort, patience and calm in the knowledge that skilled physicians attend to my loved one.

A prayer for one recovering from illness or surgery

Praised are You, Eternal One, healer of the sick. O Holy One, who creates our bodies with the capacity for healing. I am grateful for Your tender care and constant companionship. Help me to regain my health and strength. Ease my burdens of anxiety and pain. May I be blessed with Your comforting presence now and may I always feel and express gratitude for Your divine gift of life. Help my loved ones through the period of my recovery, and watch over my caregivers. Blessed are You, O Eternal One, healer of the sick.

A prayer for one sitting in the emergency waiting room or in the midst of a crisis

O Eternal One, at this moment I am acutely aware that life can change in an instant. I am in shock, not knowing all that is happening and afraid of what may be. Help me remember that just as crisis can occur, so too healing can happen. Grant wisdom and skill to those I cannot see who are treating my loved one/friend. Help me to be strong for my loved one/friend so that my presence nearby may providing healing and comfort. I am shaken; help me be regain enough equilibrium to do whatever I may be asked to do at this time.

A prayer upon recovery

(Jewish tradition provides for a public expression of thanksgiving upon recovery, accompanied by the community's grateful response. The blessing Birkat haGomel is traditionally recited soon after recovery, on an occasion when the Torah is read. Often, the one who has recovered is invited for an aliyah – to recite the blessings over the Torah – and then says: "Blessed are you, Ado-nai holy and eternal, who rules the universe, who has shown me goodness and bestowed favor upon me." The congregation responds: "May the Eternal One who has been gracious to you continue to bestow favor upon you." Please contact your rabbi when you return home to arrange to recite Birkat haGomel in the synagogue. If you have never done it before, and are nervous about doing this or want help, please tell your rabbi and please know that you will be gratified by the response of the community to your good fortune.)

Eternal One of life and healing, I give thanks for my recovery. I am grateful for Your presence in my life and Your role in my return to health. I am grateful for the medical care I have received, and for the love and support of those who have seen me through this trial. I look forward to returning to my daily life with renewed appreciation for all the blessings I enjoy, and a commitment to share the blessings of Your presence, and the love and support I have received, with others who are in need. May my experience of this medical challenge strengthen me, improve my character, increase my wisdom, and make me grow in compassion. O Holy One of life and healing, bless all those in need of healing, and those who tend to them.

IV. Psalms for Healing and Comfort

For healing and comfort: Psalm 6

(Even if surrounded by loved ones, friends and caring medical professionals, those who are sick or facing surgery often feel starkly alone. The Psalmist understands that his pain is not a punishment from the Eternal One, but rather intrinsic to life. He reaches out to the Holy One in his loneliness and finds the Eternal One's love and presence comforting and healing.)

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I languish.
 Heal me, O Lord, for my bones shake with terror.
 My whole being is stricken with terror,
 and You, O Lord – how long?
 Return, O Lord and rescue me!
 Save me for the sake of Your mercy.
 For among the dead there are none who praise You;
 Who in *Sheol* (the netherworld) will give You thanks?
 I am weary from my groaning.
 Every night I drench my bed;
 I melt my couch with my tears.
 My eyes are dimmed by vexation,
 worn out by all my adversaries.
 Leave me, all you evildoers,
 for the Lord hears the sound of my weeping!
 The Lord hears my pleas;
 the Lord accepts my prayer.
 All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish;
 they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.

For comfort: Psalm 23

(Psalm 23 is beloved for many reasons. Because it is comforting, it is often recited at funerals, but it is not about death. Here we highlight several themes:

- The image of the Eternal One as a shepherd can provide comfort. This does not mean that the Holy One inflicts illness, but rather that the One, who is pictured as a shepherd tenderly caring for his flock, can be a source of serenity and strength.
- The Eternal One can refresh our spirit and restore our sense of self, which is so difficult to maintain in the face of serious illness.
- When we go through a period of illness, loss or trauma, or when we face our own mortality, sometimes our vision is narrowed and it feels as though we are trapped in an enclosed, dark space. It may be that we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. Yet even there, the Eternal One accompanies us.
- "You set a table before me in the presence of my enemies" tells us that we can find the confidence to prevail over the challenge we now face.
- "Surely goodness and mercy... in the house of the Lord forever" is a message of spiritual healing, faith and hope.

Each time you recite Psalm 23, you may hear a new meaning in it. This is one of the reasons the psalm is so beloved.)

A Psalm of David.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

The Eternal One makes me lie down in green pastures, the Eternal One leads me beside still waters, and restores my soul. You lead me in right paths for the sake of Your Name.

Even when I walk in the deep, dark valley, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff comfort me.

You have set a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The course of illness and recovery: Psalm 30

(Psalm 30 touches on the entire experience of illness, recovery and the emotions its stages evoke, but they are presented in reverse chronological order. The Psalmist begins on a positive note – he knows what it feels like to be close to the Eternal One. How often have we said, "If only I had known then what I know now?" The Psalmist shares with us that it is possible to know and feel the emotions associated with recovery from the outset of a medical odyssey.)

(A Psalm, a song at the Dedication of the House, of David.)

I extol you, O Lord, for You have raised me up,
and have not permitted my enemies to rejoice over me.
O Lord, I cried out to You and You healed me.
O Lord, You brought me up from *Sheol* (the netherworld);
preserved me alive so I would not descend into the pit.
O you faithful of the Lord, sing to the Eternal One and praise the
Eternal One's holy name. The Eternal One's anger lasts only a
moment, but the Eternal One's favor lasts a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night, but the dawn of joy will come.
When I felt untroubled, I said: I shall never be shaken.
When You wished, you made me as a mountain stronghold;
when You hid Your face, I was terrified.
I called out to You, O Lord;
to the Lord I made my appeal:
What would be gained from my death, from my descent into the pit?
Would the dust praise You? Would it declare the truth of You?
Hear, O Lord, and show me mercy; O Lord be my help!
You turn my mourning into joyful dancing;
You untie my sackcloth and instead gird me in joy
So that my whole being can sing hymns to You and not be silent.
O Lord my Eternal One, I will praise you forever.

An expression of pain and fear: Psalm 77:2-4, 8-9

(Psalm 77 gives voice to the feelings of fear and distress that often accompany illness. The Psalmist poured out his heart to the One, allowing the One to help shoulder his pain.)

I cry aloud to the Eternal One;
I cry to the Eternal One to give ear to me.
In my time of distress I turn to the Almighty,
with my hand uplifted;
my eyes flow all night without respite;
I will not be comforted.

I call the Eternal One to mind, I moan,
I complain, my spirit fails...
Will the Lord reject forever
And never again show favor?
Has His faithfulness disappeared forever?
Will His promise be unfulfilled for all time?...

For strength: Psalm 121, A song of ascents

(Psalm 121 reminds us that the Eternal One is always near, even when we find it difficult to feel the Eternal One's presence in our lives.)

I raise my eyes to the mountains.
Whence will come my help?
My help is from Ado-nai, maker of heaven and earth.
The Eternal One will not allow your foot to falter; your Guardian will not slumber. Behold, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.
The Eternal One is your guardian, the Lord is your protective shade at your right hand. By day the sun will not harm you, nor the moon by night.
Ado-nai will protect you from every evil; the Eternal One will guard your soul. Ado-nai will guard your going and your coming, from this time and forever.

Value every day: Psalm 90

(Time is a precious commodity, because our lives are finite. The quality of our lives is greatly enhanced when we recognize and appreciate our blessings, especially time. How ironic that Moses, a man who lived 120 years, would recite this psalm, but Moses faced endless frustrations and disappointments. Although none of us finishes our life "to-do list," we can still cherish every precious moment allotted us and thereby see our cup as far more than half full. A "heart of wisdom" reminds us that even amidst pain and illness, we can learn and grow. Have you become more compassionate? patient? understanding? As the adage goes, "Don't count your days; make your days count.")

A prayer of Moses, a man of the Eternal One.
O Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation.
Before the mountains came into being,
before You formed the earth and the world.

From eternity to eternity You are the Eternal One.
 You return us to dust.
 You decree, "Return, you mortals!"
 For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has
 passed, like a mere watch in the night.
 You sweep people away as by flood into the sleep [of death]
 At dawn they are like grass that flourishes and grows;
 At dusk it is cut down and withers...
 [So too our lives] are speedily gone, and we fly away...
 So teach us to make our days count
 that we may acquire a heart of wisdom.
 Return O Lord! How long?
 Show mercy to Your servants.
 Satisfy us at dawn with Your loving kindness
 that we may sing joyously all our days.
 Make us glad even of our days of affliction,
 the years we have experienced great evil.
 Let Your deeds be experienced by Your servants,
 Your glory by their children.

**Gratitude for the Eternal One's listening ear and for
 recovery: Psalm 116:1-9, 12**

I love the Lord because the Eternal One hears my voice, my
 pleas. The Eternal One turn an ear to me whenever I call.
 The bonds of death encompassed me;
 the torments of *Sheol* overtook me.
 I came upon trouble and sorrow
 and I invoked the name of the Lord, "O Lord, save my life!"
 The Lord is gracious and beneficent;
 our Eternal One is compassionate.
 The Lord protects the simple;
 I was brought low and the Eternal One saved me.
 Be at rest, once again, O my soul,
 for the Lord has been good to you.
 You have delivered me from death,
 my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
 I shall walk before the Lord
 in the lands of the living...
 How can I repay the Lord for all the Lord's bounties to me?
 I raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the name of the Lord.

V. One last note

Those who have experienced serious illness or a life-threatening episode come to realize that life will never be the same again, and the world as they know it has changed forever. This does not mean that their lives and the world have been diminished. What they have experienced may well have kindled in them new insights about themselves – strength they never knew they had, for example – and greater appreciation for the blessings in their lives that perhaps were taken for granted at times. This is part of spiritual healing.

We wish you health, strength, healing and the Eternal One's presence always in your life.

VI. Recommended Reading

Samuel Chiel and Henry Dreher, *The Healing Power of Psalms: Renewal, Hope and Acceptance from the World's Most Beloved Verses*

Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness*

Joseph B. Meszler, *Facing Illness, Finding G-d: How Judaism Can Help You and Caregivers Cope When Body or Spirit Fails*

Kerry Olitzky and Debbie Friedman, *Jewish Paths Toward Healing and Wholeness: A Personal Guide to Dealing With Suffering*

Simkha Y. Weintraub and Sheldon Zimmerman, *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body: Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in Psalms*

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The BBOR is a moral and religious voice that provides spiritual leadership for the Jewish community, and promotes Jewish learning and living. We seek to lend our strength to the efforts of others in the community who promote social justice, Jewish education and spiritual growth.

Our hope is that you will find strength and comfort in these pages.

Rabbi Amy Scheinerman
President, Baltimore Board of Rabbis
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