

Jewish Perspectives on Health and Healing

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Jewish Imperative

“Take utmost care and watch yourselves
scrupulously...”

Deut. 4:9

Interpretation:

*Be careful with the health of your soul and the
health of your body...*

Jewish Imperative

- Obligation to safeguard one's health (Maimonides)
 - Make every effort to protect the article we are given from loss or damage
- Physicians have been granted the authority to heal
 - One may seek medical treatment from a recognized physician
- We are granted authority to pray for our health and healing

“Give me your hand”

Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba fell ill and Rabbi Yochanan went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him.

Rabbi Yochanan once fell ill and Rabbi Chanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not Rabbi Yochanan raise himself? — They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.

Our Bodies – *Asher Yatzar* Prayer

Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe, who formed human beings with Wisdom, creating pores, orifices, hollows and holes, openings, cavities, channels and ducts. It is clear and established before Your Throne that if one should open and another should close it would be impossible to endure and to stand before You. Blessed are You, Adonai, who heals all flesh and performs wonders.

Translation by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW, National Center for Jewish Healing

Chevruta Study

- Study in pairs, small groups
- From the Hebrew word “*chaver*” – friend
- Highest form of traditional study

If two sit together and are engaged in the study of Torah, the Shechina – the presence of God – comes to rest between them.

Mishnah, Pirkei Avot 3:6

“Mi She’berach” – Prayer for Healing

- Literally “the one who blesses”
- Standard prayer formula
- Evolved over time; ancient formula
- Traditionally recited in the synagogue, during the Torah reading on Saturday/Shabbat morning
- Recited on behalf of someone else

Mi She’berach Prayer for Healing

*May the one who blessed our ancestors –
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah,
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
bless and heal the one who is ill...
_____ son/daughter of _____*

*May the Blessed Holy One
Be filled with compassion for their health to be restored,
And their strength to be revived.*

*May God swiftly send them
a complete renewal of body and spirit,
And let us say, Amen.*

***'Mi Sheberach'* Text Study**

1. What are your first thoughts, reactions, questions after reading this prayer?
2. What speaks to you in this prayer?
3. What do you like? Dislike?
4. What does this prayer tell you about Jewish views of health and healing?

Teachings from the Mi She'berach

- Healing happens in community
- Healing happens in relationship with other people
- Healing connects us to tradition and to history
- Mind, body and spirit are linked

Jewish Communal Responses and Best Practices

Synagogue-Based Programs

- *Bikkur cholim* – friendly visiting
- Bereavement committees – *shiva* support
- Social action committees
- Children and adult education
- Prayer services on weekdays, Sabbath and holidays

Service Providing Organizations

- Jewish Family and Children's Services (JFCS; JFS)
- Jewish Community Centers (JCC)
- Jewish Federations (umbrella organizations)

Jewish Healing Centers

- Spiritual support to those who are ill, dealing with loss or transition
- Spiritual support groups, chaplaincy, counseling, volunteer training, etc
- Approximately 25 around the country
- Housed in JFCS, JCC, congregations

Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health

- Founded in 2000
- Coordinate and provide pastoral education at HUC-JIR, Los Angeles
- Sponsor and create conferences and colloquia on Judaism, health and healing

Judaism, Health and Healing for Physicians

- Ten-week courses combining retreat and online *chavruta* (partner) learning
- Designed to encourage Jewish clinicians to deepen their connection with Judaism and to help build communities of Jewish clinicians. The Initiative expects to:
 - increase physician participants' knowledge of Jewish tradition and sources related to health and healing.
 - provide tools, insights and experiences to help clinicians infuse Judaism, spirituality and self-awareness into their professional and personal lives.
 - promote wellness and enhanced meaning thereby addressing burnout, compassion fatigue and related issues.

Staff Healing Circles, Boston

- Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston
- Model of self-care for human service professionals working in JFS
 - Alleviate and prevent pervasive effects of work-related stress
 - Foster atmosphere of spirituality and support
 - Promote personal growth

End-of-Life Care Program, San Francisco

- Kol Haneshama Program, Bay Area Jewish Healing Center
- Volunteers and staff trained to provide spiritual and emotional support to residents of Jewish Home
 - Diverse Jews of all levels of affiliation, no matter end-of-life care choices
 - Transformational experience for volunteers and patients/families

Future Research Questions for the Jewish Community

The Jewish “Hypothesis” about Health and Wellbeing

“Public religious participation and private
spiritual exploration benefit health”

Research Directions

- There is a need to understand how the variables of Jewish communal participation and spiritual exploration affect health outcomes
- Next steps:
 1. Map the range of activities
 2. Identify and analyze data and outcomes

Translating the Research

Define terms in ways that capture the continuum of the Jewish American experience:

- Involvement
- Attendance
- Health
- Healing
- Well-being

Mi She'Berach

Mi She'Berach, words by Debbie Friedman

Mi She'berach avoteinu

M'kor habracha l'imoteinu.

May the Source of strength Who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing, and let us
say: Amen.

Mi She'berach imoteinu

M'kor habracha l'avoteinu.

Bless those in need of healing with *r'fuah shleima*,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit, and let us say: Amen.

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