

The
NATIONAL
CENTER
for
JEWISH
HEALING

With Sweetness from The Rock:

A Jewish Spiritual Companion For Caregivers

By Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, LMSW



National Center for Jewish Healing
Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs
Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

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The **National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH)** helps communities better meet the spiritual needs of Jews living with illness, loss and other significant life challenges. Working closely with a network of Jewish healing centers and programs throughout North America, we offer consultation, resource material, publications, training and referrals to community resources.

NCJH is a **Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Program** which supports Jews through life transitions and challenges by connecting with community and tradition. These programs work collaboratively with synagogues, schools, JCC's and other community partners to help people cope and grow by drawing on resources that are spiritual, psychological and practical.

The **Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services** is one of the nation's leading voluntary mental health and social services which touches the lives of more than 65,000 people each year through a diverse network of 185 community-based, residential and day treatment programs and extensive outreach and educational services. Meeting the diverse needs of the Jewish community remains vital to our mission and is central to our work.



The Kalsman Institute
on Judaism and Health

Forward

The critical role played by family and other unpaid caregivers in helping an ill family member has been increasingly recognized in our society. More resources are becoming available, in the form of books, web-sites and advocacy organizations as well as education and training for medical providers, community service professionals and caregivers alike. There is now some government-funded respite care. Caring communities in synagogues and other organizations also offer practical support and share some of the burden. Many caregivers are part of support groups and find them to be helpful, whether in person or on the phone, one time or ongoing. Yet all this is only a fraction of what is needed. The National Center for Jewish Healing, through the SeRaF Project, is pleased to present *With Sweetness from The Rock: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Caregivers*, as a new addition to the growing body of resources that are available to caregivers and to those who offer them support.

Each caregiving situation is unique. It depends on the nature of the previous relationship, and on the type, duration and characteristics of the illness or condition. It is affected by the range of responsibilities, the location in which and from which care is provided, and the physical, emotional and spiritual support the caregiver has and/or needs.

Yet there is much that is shared by caregivers. There are feelings of sadness and a sense of isolation. There is upheaval in family dynamics and economic consequences. There is anger and frustration at the system and the challenge of facing difficult decisions. It is painful to see a loved one suffer and physically exhausting and stressful. There is a lack of time for self-reflection and self-care.

There are also unexpected gifts. You can discover that you have the strength and power to make a difference and that you can survive the most difficult of times. There can be reconciliation in difficult relationships and the satisfaction of doing a good thing, even if your care-recipient cannot offer the emotional healing that you wish for. You learn to reach out and find or even create a caring and supportive community. You come to understand that hope, gratitude and joy can exist even in the most difficult situations.

The Talmud teaches that deeds of loving-kindness are equal to all the other commandments. Caregivers engage in deeds of loving-kindness on an ongoing basis. We pray you find continued strength and blessing for the good that you bring to your care-recipient and to the world.

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Dedication

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Introduction

And I will satisfy you with sweet honey from the rock. (Psalm 81:17)

Caregiving is a challenge for and can be a gift to the spirit. There are many different Jewish ways of supporting the spirit. Some are well known resources from Jewish practice such as prayer, alone or with a community, the study of sacred texts, and Shabbat and holiday celebrations and rituals. Music, meditation, natural settings, touch, physical exercise and relaxation are also very much within the Jewish tradition. Being with others who care can support the spirit as can being alone in deep silence.

This book offers caregivers spiritual support from the sustaining well of Jewish writings. The selections found in *With Sweetness from The Rock* come from across the spectrum of Jewish history. There are Biblical texts, Rabbinic teachings, Medieval prayers and contemporary poems and memoirs. They reflect the experience of Jews, male and female, reaching up to God, out to their community and into their souls. Some of these pieces were written specifically in response to the author's experience as a caregiver or to offer support to caregivers. Many come from the more general body of Jewish literature. If you are open to looking for it there is wisdom for caregivers in many places in Jewish tradition.

The title of this spiritual companion comes from the final line of Psalm 81. The Psalmist understands that there are challenges and burdens in life but offers hope and the assurance of support. The word *tzur* has a double meaning. *Tzur* is a rock, something very hard and unyielding, as the experience of caregiving can sometimes be. Yet it can be from those very same hard places that the sweetest moments emerge which sustain you on your journey. *Tzur* is also The Rock, a name for God. With God's presence as a foundation stone, may you be sustained and satisfied with sweet honey.

With Sweetness from The Rock is organized around seven themes. The themes reflect different experiences placed in a Jewish context. Within each section there is a flow as you read through the material. However, the movement is more like the ebb and flow of the waves of the ocean at the shore than the flow of the river moving towards the ocean. Each section touches on the shadow side as well as the light.

Caregiving seldom happens in a straight line and the emotions of caregiving do not follow a pre-defined path. Joy and despair, success and failure, and a step forward and a step backward can all happen within one hour. This resource touches on some of the emotional and spiritual feelings that are common among caregivers, but there are as many missing as may be found here.

This spiritual companion is not intended to be read all at once, or in any particular order. Find a few moments to look through the book and choose the section or individual page that speaks to you today. You might keep what you read private or you might choose to share it with friends or family, including your care-recipient.

This spiritual companion is dedicated to my parents, Natalie and Stanley Dickstein, and to my in-laws, Deborah and Ira Weinstein, who have blessed me through their models of devoted caregiving.

Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, LMSW

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Brit – Covenant

Caregiving is a *brit*, a covenant. It is a partnership among two or more individuals. It is not a desired or welcome circumstance, for no one desires to be ill, frail, vulnerable or dependent. No one wishes for the illness of a loved one, with its accompanying responsibilities. Yet the relationship of caregiver and care-recipient can open the possibility of a new and even deeper partnership than existed previously.

The partnership of a caregiver and care-recipient usually begins in the context of a different kind of *brit*. It might be the *brit* of marriage or commitment--equal partners building a life together. It might be the *brit* of parent and child, in which the parent expects to raise a child to independence and a child attempts to fulfill what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai calls the most difficult of all *mitzvot*, "honor your father and your mother" (*Tanhuma Eikev 2*). It may be the *brit* of siblings, the bonds of childhood carried over into adult companionship. Or it may be the *brit* of friendship-- loyalty beyond defined boundaries. Other connections of love or obligation may also bring people into relationships in which giving and taking become defined by physical or mental deterioration.

There is a cartoon in which a man lies in a hospital bed, attached to many wires and machines. His wife says, "I never thought this would happen to me." Her cry is a true one. What happens to your loved one happens to you. Yet, you need to understand that you are also separate from your loved one. Your experience is different, and being able to accept and appreciate that may allow you to provide better care, as you recognize that you must care for your own needs. It may help you to engage more effectively with those who are also partners in caring be they family, professionals, friends or your community.

Avinu Malkeynu, Parent and Sovereign, grant the blessing of brit. Let us find a way to be partners in the face of our challenge and not victims of our situation. Teach us to understand the uniqueness of each of us within our shared journey. Grant us the wisdom to be partners with the others who accompany us on this path.

As you and your care-recipient learn new roles within your brit, the contemporary psalmist Debbie Perlman z"l reminds you that there is yet another partner in this process.

Forty-two

Steadiness

Balance our days, Beloved Friend
When we careen without plan
From task to task, from thought to thought
Seeking right paths.

So many days we do not pause.
Rushing on, we lose our focus,
Forgetting the center of our being
Is contained within Your hand.

Like erratic winds, we swirl about,
Rustling all directions, turning dust to wraiths
Across this dry plain of responsibilities.

Running faster, calm evades us,
And the shattered fragments scatter,
Lost and tumbling along parched ground.

Pull around us, then, Your strong arm.
Halt our frantic motion.
Water this arid ground with living water;
Irrigate our thirsty souls.

Place our actions before us,
A rediscovered path to You;
Balance our days with Your regard,
Fill our tasks with holiness.

In her book, Talking to God, Rabbi Naomi Levy offers models of prayer for two sides of the brit of caregiving. Change the details so that the prayer gives voice to your particular situation.

A prayer for a child who must care for an aging parent

It's so painful, God, to watch my mother begin to falter. I have always counted on her and now she needs to count on me. I love my mother; I can't stand the way our roles have reversed. I don't want to see her in her weakness. I know this reversal is humiliating for her. She doesn't want to feel helpless or dependent. But she needs me now.

Help me, God, to rise to this critical occasion. Show me how to care for my mother with respect, tenderness and love. Fill me with compassion and patience. Shield me from anger and resentment.

Calm my fears, give me strength, God. Help me to seek out relief and support when the burden is great.

Give her strength, God. Bless her with dignity, grace and health. Amen.

A prayer when one fears becoming dependent

I don't want to be a burden, God. I certainly don't want pity. But I can no longer do it all alone.

Help me, God. Teach me not to be afraid to rely upon others. Show me how to accept kindness, how to ask for help. Teach me, God, that my children still love me even though they are grown.

I still have so much to offer, God. Help me find the ways to transmit my wisdom, to share my love, to realize my talents, to offer my reassurance and support.

Most of all, I place my trust in You, God; I place my body and my soul in Your hands, and pray that You will be with me. Amen.

Mi Sheberach is the name for a category of prayers in which we ask for God's blessing in a specific situation; sometimes it is connected to a life cycle transition. Commonly, when the term Mi Sheberach is used without further identification, it refers to the prayer for healing. This Mi Sheberach for Family Members and Close Friends is based on the phrasing of the traditional prayer for healing. It is intended to be recited by the one who is ill. If your care-recipient is not able to actually read this prayer, you might imagine him/her reciting it for you.

Mi Sheberach for Family Members and Close Friends

May the one who blessed our Matriarchs and Patriarchs

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Bless and strengthen _____

My (family member, good friend, etc.)

May s/he be instilled with patience and fortitude,

Sensitivity and understanding,

With courage and hope.

May others reach out to her/him

With tenderness and loving-kindness

And may s/he receive

The blessings offered by our community and tradition.

Help her/him to know

How much I appreciate her/his love and devotion

Give her/him a long, full peaceful and happy life

Marked by a complete healing

A healing of spirit and a healing of body,

Now and always

And let us say

Amen

Love is the foundation on which many caregiving partnerships are based. Rabbi Ira Stone offers one attempt to describe the power and limits of love.

Love is the state of being passionately engaged with a separate personality in its entirety, and being loved is allowing that separate personality to be passionately engaged with one's self. It is characterized by a desire to nurture the other unconditionally as well as a desire to be nurtured by the other.

Only God is capable of perfect love. At no time is God's love unavailable to us, although it may be hidden by other qualities, such as God's anger. Our love of God, as well as the love of one person for another, is imperfect to the degree that we are alone in moments-of-death. At such times, our deeply rooted lonesomeness precludes the possibility of being engaged with others, whether divine or human.

There is no love in death or in moments-of-death in life. Instead, we convince ourselves that the other is also dead, and we act in anger at our abandonment. Human love--as well as God's love-- merely washes over us in the hope that it may find a crack through which to enter our shell, and by so doing, begin to dispel our isolation by nurturing and accepting us. Thus, to the extent that we seek ways to eliminate God's absence, His love finds us and bathes us in its glory.

The full power of God's love lets us accept and return His love. In so doing, we again learn to accept and reciprocate the love of others.

A Teaching from Torah: For Siblings

“How good it is, and how pleasant when brothers dwell in harmony — *Hinei ma tov uma na'im, shevet achim gam yahad.*” These words, sung to popular melodies, are probably among the best known of Biblical quotes, yet few know the verse in its original context. It is the opening line of Psalm 133.

A song of ascent, by David

How good it is, and how pleasant when brothers dwell in harmony.

It is like precious oil upon the head,

Flowing down the beard, Aaron's beard,

To the very edges of his robe.

It is like abundant dew falling on the hills of Zion.

There, Adonai bestows God's blessing, life forever more.

This psalm is unusual in presenting us with an image of Aaron in language that is as sensual as parts of the Song of Songs. The moment being described is the opening of the investiture of Aaron and his sons as the *Kohanim*, the spiritual and ritual leaders of the Jewish people. In Leviticus chapter seven, Aaron is dressed in beautiful, sacred clothing. “He (Moses) poured the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to sanctify him.” This is the moment being described in the middle section of our psalm. The first line, “How good it is for brothers to dwell together” serves as the introduction. It is clearly a moment when we see two brothers sharing one purpose.

At this moment, the brothers do appear to be acting in harmony, but we can appreciate the wonder of the Psalmist's introduction only if we see it in the overall context of the relationship of the siblings. Even as children, the relationship was challenging. Did they even know they were brothers, when their mother Yoheved served as wet-nurse for Moses, the adopted grandson of Pharaoh? Later, Aaron was called to serve as the voice for his younger brother, the one with the direct line to God. He was the one who had to take the blame for building the Golden Calf, even though it was Moses who stayed away so long. In his new capacity as *Kohen Godol*, he will still be subservient to his younger brother. And on Moses' side there may be equal amounts of ambivalence. Aaron has always been more a part of the People of Israel; he just understands them better and they love Aaron in a way they don't love Moses. That feeling of jealousy might be especially close to the surface on this day, when Moses sanctifies his brother's sons as *kohanim*, while his own sons seem barely to be acknowledged. And close readers of our sacred narrative know that shortly, two of Aaron's sons will die mysteriously in a fire from God. Yet it is precisely at this moment, which is so full of the family history and passionate and conflicting emotions, that our Psalm calls out--*hinei matov*--how wonderful it is when brothers can dwell in harmony.

That is the powerful teaching of this psalm. Certainly, there are brothers and sisters who never experience tension, and who have not only always loved each other, but who have also been able to function as a team. For most of us, though, the experience of being a sibling is much more challenging. The competition, the slights, the disappointments and different life choices can lead to distance between siblings, as well as physical and emotional separation. It is possible to live very well without significant interaction with a sibling until a crisis happens. Often, that crisis is the aging or illness of a parent. Then siblings are forced back into a significant relationship. Even those who might consider themselves close find that the stress of trying to care for a parent can cause painful tensions. It is in this sort of situation that Psalm 133 is an inspirational text. It reminds you that siblings can find ways to dwell together- not because you are the same, or have never caused each other pain, but despite the tensions inherent in your relationships. In fact, it is in confronting your differences and difficulties that you can truly create something that is *tov* (good) and *na'im* (pleasant.) Your relationship can become as refreshing as the abundant dew falling on the hills of Zion as you grow in awareness of the blessings of Adonai.

Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein, LMSW © 2004, Spiritual Care Coordinator of the Shira Ruskay Center/ JBFCS

The professionals who help to care for your loved one are an essential part of the brit of caregiving. When you can be in constructive partnership with them, they can be a healing resource for both you and your care-recipient.

Mi Sheberach to be recited for Health Care Professionals

May the One who blessed our Matriarchs and Patriarchs

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Bless and Strengthen _____

And all who seek to heal those who are suffering.

Imbue her/him with courage, confidence

Understanding and compassion

So s/he may join You

In the work of healing.

May s/he not surrender to despair,

Uncertainty or fatigue,

But engage in Your work

With wholeheartedness and devotion.

Help her/him to accompany us

Throughout our journey-

To speak to us

To listen to us

To be with us

So that together we may strive

For a complete healing,

A healing of body and a healing of spirit,

Soon, speedily, without delay

And let us say,

Amen

A Prayer for Those Who Tend the Sick

I don't get paid much, thanked much or noticed much. But I am here, and I know how valuable I am. I am the one who stays when everyone else goes home. I clean things no one else will touch. I watch things no one else can bear to see. I bring comfort and companionship. I listen, I hear.

I pray to You, God, for strength. When I grow weary, renew my spirit. When my patience grows thin, bless me with stamina. When I feel forgotten and alone, show me that you are near. When others treat me poorly, remind me that I am doing Your work.

I thank You, God, for giving me the opportunity to bring light into the lives of the afflicted. Amen.

Mikvah – Purification and Renewal

Tumah is the Biblical term for ritual impurity and often exists in relation to contact with death, whether real or symbolic. Caregiving brings you into contact with *tumah*, with that which is both literally and metaphorically impure. In caring for the physical needs of your loved one, you may touch wounds and bodily excretions that can be distressing. You engage in tasks of medical management that you never imagined you would or could do. If the mind of your loved one is becoming distanced from itself and reality, if it is deteriorating, you may find that you are dragged into dark places and must confront irrational and hurtful words and behaviors.

Our tradition teaches that when we have come into contact with that which drains us of life, we must find ways of purifying ourselves, so that we can return renewed to life and hope. The *mikvah*, a ritual pool of natural water, is the setting for this purification. First we give ourselves a period of time to be separate from the *tumah*, then we wash our bodies, and finally we enter the *mikvah*, to emerge renewed.

Making use of an actual *mikvah*, to mark the movement from one point in caregiving to another, may be one helpful ritual for you. But there are many different ways to acknowledge the *tumah* of caregiving and many small and large ways in which you can renew yourself and begin again with hope.

God, help me to hold on to the knowledge that the tumah I encounter in giving care is not the totality of my loved one. Guide me to find ways of purifying and renewing myself, so that I can continue to care for my loved one and myself.

With Sweetness from The Rock

Tears, the water that comes from inside of you, are one of the ways in which you can purify yourself from the pain inside. Tears are a form of prayer which often accompanied tkhines (pronounced Ti-khee-nes), the Yiddish prayers written by and for Jewish women in Europe from the Middle Ages on. Tkhines address the most intimate of moments of life as well as the official times of the Jewish calendar.

You require tears and sighs, I give them to You.

Accept my tears, see how my very heart weeps.

I will cry and call out before Your Holy Name.

Accept the tears I pour out before You.

May my tears deflect the sword of the Angel of Death.

I have washed myself in my tears.

Even when other gates are closed, the Gate of Tears is never closed.

As you read the following verses, from a tkhina for Yom Kippur, replace the word "sin" with "tumah/impurity", and imagine yourself cleansed of the impurities that you have encountered in your acts of caregiving.

How shall I begin to beseech You?

How can I bring myself to rise early to plead before Your Holy Name? Nevertheless, I beseech You to forgive my sins. I know that I have no defenders other than my tears, as it is written:

"All gates are locked, but not the Gate of Tears"

All the gates are locked but the Gate of Tears is not locked. And so, merciful Father, accept my tears and place them in a jug and wash away our sins with these tears. Move from the seat of Your attribute of justice to the seat of Your attribute of Mercy. Omeyn.

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky shares his experience of the healing power of tears.

Tears of Pain

I am worn out from my groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. Psalm 6:6

I don't remember ever seeing my father cry — even when his own father died. Neither do I recall a time when I saw or heard my older brothers cry....Crying was just not something men did, especially in public. Their advice to me in bad times was always the same: "Be tough. Don't cry."

The Biblical psalmist lived by a different code. He knew how to express the many dimensions of his pain — and felt free to do so. In his prayer-poems, we read about his daily struggles, his petitions for God's help. He shed his tears without shame.

Other deeply spiritual Jewish men have expressed similar feelings. Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav revealed that he screamed silently. Another Hasidic master, the Kotzker, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, would review his personal list of the day's transgressions at the end of each day. He believed that his tears of remorse helped him wash the slate clean so that he could begin the next day fresh.

For years, when I would read such teachings, I would ask myself: Why can't I cry like the Kotzker or scream silently like Nahman? Why do I refuse to release the pain bottled up in my own soul?

I used to tell myself that I simply had no tears to shed. I feared I had been trained too well to be a modern American man. But slowly I began to permit myself to cry, if only when I was alone- while driving my car or standing in the shower. I told myself: Only God can see me here, and God is the only witness that really matters. But these moments of vulnerability were rare and brief, and never did I let myself lose control...I asked my self: What will it take to bring me to tears?

It was my younger son Jesse who finally helped me break through the logjam of my feelings. During the year he was preparing for his bar mitzvah--"to finally become a man", as he liked to put it-- my wife's thyroid cancer recurred after a five-year remission. Normally, Jesse preferred to sit with his friends in synagogue, rather than next to his parents. But on the Shabbat after he learned about his mother's cancer, he broke his normal routine. At the end of the Torah service, Jesse stood up from among those friends and walked alone toward the *bimah*. A number of adults joined him around the open Torah, towering above his small frame. As the rabbi offered the *mi sheberach* prayer for healing, I could see by the intensity in Jesse's face that he felt personally called to a mission. And each week, as Jesse walked away from his friends and mounted the *bimah*, I could see him growing older, truly becoming a man. Only then did my tears, held back for so long, finally flow uncontrollably.

And Jesse, too, has learned--blessedly at a younger age than I did-- to cry along with me.

Kos Miryam: The cup of healing water

Water is an essential part of Biblical rituals of purification, and it is also an element in many contemporary healing practices. Water for hand-washing and the salt water, representing tears and the primal waters of the sea, are traditional parts of the Passover seder. Water is part of an increasingly widespread contemporary ritual found at many seder celebrations. A special cup is placed on the table, often next to Elijah's cup. It is called *Kos Miryam* (glass of Miryam) and represents the essential role women played in maintaining hope during the darkest days of slavery and demonstrating courage during the Exodus. Miryam is associated with water for a number of reasons. She watched over her baby brother as he floated in the Nile River and she led the women in song and dance at the edge of the sea. She was a midwife, using water to wash the newborn infants and the exhausted mothers. In a midrash, it is taught that a well of water accompanied the Jews in the desert throughout Miryam's life. It is this well which sustained the people in the dry places.

Miryam devoted her life to caregiving. Unrelieved responsibility can take a significant toll on the caregiver. Perhaps this explains Miryam's hurtful accusations against her brother, Moshe. God seems to punish her with *tzaraat*, a temporary skin disease. However, it might be that her enforced separation from the center of the camp till she healed, her respite from caregiving, was a blessing. Miryam needed to learn to take time for herself, and to allow the Jewish people to care for and to pray for her.

Many of us are caregivers and we find ourselves overwhelmed. This year, at the seder, pass *Kos Miryam* around and pour some of the refreshing water from this well into your cup. Quietly or out loud, ask for a blessing, not for the world, and not for your loved ones, but for yourself. Allow the others at the table to care for you by responding "Amen."

An ancient psalm and a modern poem offer the promise of renewal to those who have shed tears.

Psalm 126

A song for the Levites to sing on the steps.

When Adonai brings about the return of Zion from Exile
We shall be like dreamers.

At that time, our mouths shall be filled with laughter,
Our tongues with gladness.

At that time the nations shall declare
Adonai has done great things with this people.

Indeed, Adonai has done great things for us
And we shall be truly happy.

Adonai, bring us back home as effortlessly
As those desert streams flow through the Negeb.

People who sow in tears, shall reap in gladness.
One who goes out crying as he carries his bag of seed
Shall surely come back in gladness
Carrying mature sheaves.

Create Me Anew

Father,
O great and holy Father of all mankind,
You create the world, Your child, every instant.

If for an instant You withdrew
The loving gift of Your creation
All would be nothingness.

But You shower Your children, Your creatures,
With blessing every moment.

Once again the morning stars appear,
Singing a song of love to You,
And once again the sun bursts forth,
Singing a song of light to You.

Once again angels sing of holiness to You,
Once again souls sing of yearning to You.
Once again grass sings of longing to You.

Once again birds sing a song of joy to You,
Once again orphaned nestlings sing of loneliness to You
And once again a brook whispers its prayer.

Once again the afflicted, faint, pours out his complaint to You
Once again his soul-prayer splits Your heavens, rising to You,
Once again he trembles in awe of Your glory
And once again he hopefully awaits You.

One ray of Your light and I am immersed in light
One word from You and I am reborn,
One hint of Your eternal presence and I am refreshed
With the dew of youth.

For You create everything anew,
Father, please, create me, Your child anew.
Breathe into me of Your spirit
That I may begin a new life.

Hillel Zeitlin

Yom Kippur – Assessment, Confession and Return

Throughout your life you make mistakes, choose the wrong action and speak in ways that hurt others, whether deliberately or accidentally. It is no different when you are a caregiver. You are not always kind, compassionate, courageous, patient, an effective advocate or all of the other things that characterize the perfect caregiver. Being perfect is an impossible task. The season on the Jewish calendar culminating in Yom Kippur is a time that Jews devote to self-assessment. When you are willing to look at how you have strayed from who you really want to be, you can enter into a process of repair, forgiveness and change. But *tshuvah* is not limited to the Days of Awe. Jewish tradition and liturgy structure moments every day to engage in a process of *tshuvah*.

So much is taken out of your control when you are a caregiver. Sometimes all that is in your control is your desire to do what is right and good. Sometimes your anger at your self and at others seems to replace the desire to do even that. Anger uses up the energy needed to care. At that point, there is not a great deal of energy left for regrets and guilt. Yet if you do not confront the places in which you have stumbled, if you cannot find appropriate ways to forgive yourself and others, you may find yourself burdened by these feelings and unable to move on with a lighter, more open heart.

Compassionate Judge, allow me to honestly examine my deeds and to recognize my mistakes and wrong choices. In Your mercy, guide me on the paths of repentance and return me to the best in myself.

The first step of tshuva is to slow down enough to enter into the process. Slowing down and looking inward can sometimes feel overwhelming for caregivers, but it is essential to your own healing.

Ninety-seven

Turning, turning, I search for You
Sometimes I turn too quickly,
Sometimes I forget to keep my eyes open.
Sometimes I look only outward.

Turning slowly, I see clearly;
Hurts I have caused, anger, sadness.
I see the results of not looking,
Broken sidewalks trip my impenitent steps.

Turning slower still, my days take focus
Until the paler tones of the positive
Appear through the harsh glaring hues
Of the tasks undone, the cruel replies.

Until my revolution stops, and sighing
I once again see the far distance of the Eternal.
You ask me to try, but do not forsake me in failure.
You forgive me as I struggle to forgive myself.

Turn me again to You, Merciful One;
Turn me again to my own exoneration
Turn me to these tasks of mending and healing
Inwardly, outwardly, that I might stand before You.

Debbie Perlman

With Sweetness from The Rock

Prayer is like a bath house, repentance is like the sea. As the bath house is sometimes open and sometimes closed, so the gates of prayer are sometimes shut and sometimes open, but as the sea is always open, so the gates of repentance are always open. When a person wishes to bathe in the sea, s/he can bathe in it at any hour desired. So with repentance, whenever a person wishes to repent, God will receive her/him. (Lamentations Rabbah 3:60)

Al Het/ for the sin, is one of the vidui/confessional prayers which we recite on Yom Kippur. It details many of the sins we commit in our relations with others. Sometimes, as a caregiver you just need to lay out honestly and in explicit words the wrongs you have done in the course of trying to do what is right. You can speak these words, knowing that your repentance will be received at any hour of the day or night.

For the sin we committed unwillingly or willingly;
And for the sin of the hardening of the heart.

For the sin we committed by not thinking;
And for the sin of idle talk.

For the sin we committed knowingly and deceitfully;
And for the sin of offensive speech.

For the sin we committed in wronging another;
And for the sin of the scheming heart.

For the sin we committed through wielding power;
And for the sin of desecrating the Name.

For the sin we committed with the evil impulse;
And for sins both knowing and unwitting.

For the sin we committed in business dealings;
And for the sins we committed in eating and drinking.

For the sin we committed by casting off responsibility;
And for the sin of stubbornness.

For the sin we committed by being meddlesome;
And for sins occasioned by confusion of the heart.

For all these, O forgiving God,
Forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

From *Renew Our Days: A Prayer Cycle for the Days of Awe*, edited and translated by Ronald Aigen. (Quebec: Congregation Dorshei Emet. 2001.) Used with permission.

Psalm 32

A song of David, of instruction:
Happy is one whose sins are forgiven,
Whose transgressions are wiped away.

Happy is one whose wrongdoing Adonai passes over,
Whose spirit is without deceit.

When I kept silent, my bones wore out;
I groaned all day in fear.

Day and night Your hand weighed heavily upon me.
My marrow turned dry, parched as by the heat of the summer, Selah

So now, I will acknowledge transgressions,
I will no longer obscure wrong doing;
Even as I began to say, "I admit my sins before Adonai"
You forgave my errors and misdeeds, Selah.

Let one devoted to You offer this prayer
At those moments when You may be found;
When trials and troubles come,
May they not flood in a deluge of destruction!

You are my shelter,
You protect me from distress, from enemies,
You surround me with the joy of deliverance, Selah.

(You have said:)
"I will teach you wisdom,
I will illumine the path you must take,
My eye will advise you and guide you."

Do not be like a horse or a mule who cannot understand,
Who, with a bit and a bridle must be restrained during grooming,
So that they do not come too close and attack.

Many are the troubles of the wicked,
But one who trusts in Adonai
Will be enveloped by *hesed*/lovingkindness.

Rejoice in Adonai!
Exult, righteous ones!
Shout for joy, all who are upright in heart!

Tshuva is intimately related to forgiveness, both of yourself and of others. Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg considers the role of love in forgiveness. Love and the wish to be loved is, after all, what may have brought you into the challenging role of caregiver.

Love is connected to the capacity for forgiveness. There are, of course, many aspects to forgiveness. According to Jewish teaching, there is an ultimate forgiveness that can be effected only by God; but I refer to the very human struggle to forego recriminations, rebuild relationships and carry on with life. Lines like “forgiven and forgotten” make it sound as though it were so easy, but the ability to manage such matters is not to be estimated lightly. If we are honest, most of us will acknowledge that on a bad morning our minds will throw up even a trivial incident from ten years ago and still be full of fury. How much more so do most of us remember and rehearse the deeper hurts we consider ourselves unjustly to have received? It takes a great deal of generosity and forbearance to let go of our wounded feelings and carry on with life without them.

There is the challenge of forgiving other people for what they have done to us. This can be enormously difficult.... There is the further challenge of forgiving life itself. Life is not fair. Life lets the unthinkable happen...What, as we acknowledge in the frightening *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer, do we know about our own future; “Who shall live and who shall die...who by fire and who by water?” One of the most terrible aspects of tragedy is that if we cannot forgive life, we suffer doubly, not only from the dreadful events themselves, but also from our bitterness over them. Here the poet Rachel Bluwstein struggles with just this question...

In my great loneliness, loneliness of a wounded animal
Hour on hour I lie, keep silence.
Fate has gleaned my vineyard, left not a grape behind
But the heart, subdued has forgiven.
If these are the last of my days
Let me be calm
Lest I cloud with my bitterness the calm blue
Of the sky – my companion of old.

What is there strong enough to absorb the anger, fierce enough to neutralize the acidity of bitterness, if not love? What else is there, when destiny is truly harsh, to help one move from rage to reconciliation? If we are to forgive, we need all the love and gratitude we can muster, for other people, for life itself, for the clear blue sky and for God.

A Teaching From Torah: Starting over for the First Time

In a d'var Torah written for the first Parsha, Bereishit (Genesis 1:1-5:9) Rabbi Rafael Goldstein reflects on how you might change and be more open to new learning after going through the process of tshuva. He also suggests a reading of the creation story in which the Divine caregiver also has to learn through experience how to provide loving and appropriate care.

With this in mind, we look at these first chapters of the Torah and can see them as very different from the ways in which we experienced them last year. My teacher, Professor Ora Horn Prouser points out that the Torah begins with two very different creation stories, "the orderly thought out, structured creation of Genesis 1" when God creates each of the days and on each of the days has an agenda of orderly creation, "and the less planned, almost trial and error creation of Genesis 2," when God creates Adam first out of the group and creates animals in attempting to find partners for the man.

We would like to live our lives following the structure of Genesis Chapter 1. In reality, most of us live the lives of Genesis Chapter 2, where we do our best and keep struggling, facing each issue as it arises. Sometimes we get things wrong, as when God created the animals thinking they could be partners for the man. At that point, the only answer is to try again until we get it right, as when God finally created woman to be man's partner.

I never saw the experience of the second chapter of Genesis as "trial and error" before. While I understand these creation stories as allegories, intended to teach religion and spirituality, not science or history, I never thought about the theology of the second story depicting a God who learns, grows, is surprised and adapts, whereas the first story depicts a God with a plan and action that is based on the plan exclusively.

God's Presence is different as we read these two stories, and we can see how much we reflect that Presence by our own actions and experiences. We learn by trial and error, and we make plans and act on them. Both approaches are reflections of God's love and presence....Just as God "gets it right" in the creation of woman, we can ultimately "get it right" as we experience the sandpaper of our lives.

Getting it right or getting it wrong, it's all part of our experience, all a reflection of God. Ultimately, there is holiness in both experiences. We have to learn to accept our errors as a natural and holy part of our learning process....As we start re-reading Torah, may we come to accept our mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning. May we fear errors less and value our experience more, and see God in all of it.

Shabbat – Rest:

Time for Reflection and Appreciation

For six days, God expended great effort in creating the world. On the seventh day, God rested and took time to appreciate and enjoy the world. For caregivers, time can lose meaning. Day and night become the same--sleep is caught in minutes and hours, flying across the country, sitting up in a chair or anticipating that cry for help.

Shabbat is the reminder that there is “evening and morning,” that time has distinct moments. God modeled this value by setting a time for rest and reflection. Shabbat offers you an opportunity to follow the Divine example. Give yourself permission to rest, to be good to yourself, even if it is for just a few minutes, a few times during the day. Shabbat can be a time to take pleasure in your food, to linger over a meal. It can be an opportunity to tell stories, to recall special times. It can be a time to appreciate nature, going outside if possible, or just opening or looking out a window. You can study Torah, connecting with the wisdom of ancient Jewish texts and growing from that encounter. It can be a time when visitors don’t have to rush off and conversations can reconnect you with others.

Creator of space and time, give meaning to time and let the hours of day and night be spent in activities appropriate to each. Let Shabbat be a day of rest and renewal, when I can enjoy time spent in companionship, contemplation and reflection. Allow me to appreciate that which has been good and is good in my life and in the life of my loved one.

Shabbat has come

Where has this week vanished?

Is it lost forever?

Will I ever recover anything from it?

The joy of life, the unexpected victory,

The realized hope, the task accomplished?

Will I ever be able to banish the memory of pain,

The sting of defeat, the heaviness of boredom?

On this day let me keep for a while what must drift away.

On this day let me be free of the burdens that must return.

On this day, Shabbat, abide.

And now Shabbat has come,

Can it help me to withdraw for a while

From the flight of time?

Can it contain the retreat of the hours and days

From the grasp of a frantic life?

When all days abandon me, Shabbat, abide.

Let me learn to pause, if only for this day.

Let me find peace on this day.

Let me enter into a quiet world this day.

On this day, Shabbat, abide.

David Polish

Psalm 92 is titled "A Song of the Sabbath Day". It is full of praise for God, The Caregiver. It reminds you that giving thanks for what you have can be good for you. Shabbat can be a day for enjoying music, contemplation, security and refreshment.

Psalm 92

A psalm, a song of the Sabbath day.
It is good to give thanks to the Eternal,
To chant psalms to Your name, Most High;
To tell of Your loving-kindness in the morning
And of Your faithfulness at night,
Upon the ten-stringed lyre and lute,
With voice and harp together.
For I have rejoiced in Your works, Eternal One;
I exult in what You have wrought.

How great are Your deeds, Eternal One,
How profound Your designs.
A coarse person does not know,
Nor can the shallow understand,
That when the wicked sprout like grass
And evil doers flourish,
They may be cut down forever.

But You are exalted for all time.
Surely Your enemies, Eternal One,
Surely Your enemies shall perish;
All evildoers shall be scattered.

You strengthen me like the wild ox;
I am refreshed with anointing oil.
I shall see the defeat of my foes;
Of those who rise to harm me,
I shall hear of their demise.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree
And thrive like the cedars of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of the Eternal,
In the courts of our God they will bloom.
Even in old age, they will be fruitful,
Remaining fertile and fresh,
Attesting that the Eternal is upright,
My Rock, in whom there is no wrong.

Rabbi Edward Zerín writes about the ways in which he sought to sustain himself and to find Shabbat/rest and renewal during the years as a caregiver after his wife suffered traumatic brain injury.

Where can I find wisdom? Where shall I run? To the beach where the tides beneath a setting sun may bring moments of golden silence? To the *shtieblach* (homes) of my people where familiarity may embrace my troubled being? To the sages whose words are immortalized in tomes of yellowed pages? To the doctors who probe with MRIs and write prescriptions for psychotropic pills?

These places provide the settings where I may meditate and quest in quietness. And yet, be it place or person, I know that where I go or whom I meet, I bring myself. The sages, the pious, and the doctors offer advice and information which at times I find helpful and at other times not. It is I, however, who must bring the wisdom to sort, to distill and to heal the weariness and helplessness of my chosen undertaking as a husband.

I know of no other way except to look within and muster the courage to be. I do not want to break rank, but when the pressure is greatest, I do retire and regroup, searching deep within for that courage and strength to go forward again. This is my wisdom. This, I believe, is my way of bringing healing to husband and wife alike. Time will test the veracity of my wisdom.

With time, however, I also realize that I must reach beyond myself. Taking advantage of the five cents per minute Sunday telephone rates, on a weekly basis, I began to call a classmate who lived cross country, a rabbinic colleague whom I have cherished for more than fifty years, and a retired dean of a psychology school with whom I have bonded as a brother. Each of them also had his burdens... So we talked and we shared. We cried and we supported one another.

Yet another challenge remained. Despite the healing telephone conversations, once I put down the receiver, I was still alone. It will be another week before I have someone with whom I can communicate by telephone, and more important, to share the give and take of everyday living. Again, I made a telephone call, but this time it was a local call. "Malka, I need a family." The next day the chair of the temple's care committee visited Margie and me in the nursing home, invited me to his home for Rosh Hashanah dinner, and announced that henceforth, I was a member of his *chavurah*, the circle of eight families that meets monthly. Soon, I was invited to a bar mitzvah, a wedding and yes, a funeral. Once more I had reached out, and no longer was I so alone.

When you make the time to refresh yourself and to care for yourself, you may become aware of the shadow that has been covering you. In a certain way, it is safer under cover, there is less risk; yet there is something gained in reaching out. Rabbi Naomi Levy offers words for a prayer and some practical advice.

A prayer for the strength to combat self-pity

When I am feeling self pity, God, help me to see beyond myself.

When I am feeling despair, restore me to hope.

When I shut people out, help me to believe in the healing power of companionship.

Remind me that I am not alone, that I am needed, that I am heard, that I am loved.

And that You are with me, now and always. Amen.

As Darkness Lifts...

As the darkness lifts, don't let that moment pass without experiencing its full force. Take a walk, even if it's only around the block. Breathe deeply. Gaze at the trees, listen to the bird, look up at the sky, take in the beauty. Eat your favorite food. Savor every bite with a renewed appetite for living. Grate a lemon and smell its rind. Hug your family, thank your friends for standing by you when you were in pain. Ask forgiveness from those you alienated. Stand before a mirror and stare into your own eyes. See the hope that shines through. Tell yourself how far you have come and acknowledge the strength you never knew you had. Sit in a quiet place and talk to God. Express your full range of emotions. Your anger, frustration, and sadness as well as your joy, relief and optimism. Give thanks for the power to endure and carry on, for the new day and its promise, for all the blessings you have taken for granted.

Then brace yourself for the struggles that are yet to come.

Reprinted from *Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle and Celebration* by Naomi Levy. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2002.) Used with permission.

Reprinted from *The Mitzvah of Healing: An Anthology of Essays, Jewish Texts, Personal Stories, Meditation and Rituals*. Edited by Hara E. Person. (New York: Women of Reform Judaism/UJHC Press. 2003.) Used with permission.

There is evening and there is morning; there are times for rest and times for work. Havdalah/differentiation is the ritual that marks the conclusion of Shabbat. We end Shabbat as we begin it, with candlelight and wine, but we add spices, to revive our spirit as the joy and serenity of Shabbat depart. We inhale the healing scent of the spices to be our memory as we go into the every day. Havdalah begins with verses of comfort and reassurance taken from various Biblical books. It ends with a statement of differentiation, something which is important for caregivers to hold onto. Just as God differentiates the aspects of creation, you need to differentiate between care of yourself and care of the other and to value both.

Havdalah

(The brief Havdalah prayer is recited holding a cup of grape juice, wine or some other liquid. A twisted or braided candle is lit at the beginning. If you don't have a Havdalah candle, hold two candles so that their wicks are touching, and burn together. If open flame is not permitted, any electric light can be used for the blessing on light. There should also be some pleasant smelling spices in a box or cup. You can also use a tea bag. Havdalah can be found by checking the table of contents in most siddurim/ prayer books)

Behold, God is my deliverance; I am confident and unafraid.

Adonai is my strength, my might, my deliverance.

With joy shall you draw water from the wells of salvation.

Deliverance is Adonai's; may You bless Your people.

Adonai Tzevaot, blessed is the one who trusts in You.

Help us Adonai; answer us, O Sovereign, whenever we call.

There was light, gladness, joy and honor for our ancestors, So may we be blessed.

(Lift the cup of wine/ grape juice a little higher)

Praised are You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the Universe, *for creating the fruit of the vine.

*(*for other liquids- "through whose word all things exist")*

(Put down the cup and lift up the spices. After the blessing, breathe in their scent and pass them around to others present)

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, for creating fragrant spices.

(Put down the spices. After reciting the blessing for light, all present hold up their hands to the light, to see the shadows made by the flames)

Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, for creating the lights of the fire.

(Hold the cup for the remainder of the prayer)

Praised are You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the Universe, for endowing all creation with distinctive qualities, distinguishing between the sacred and the secular, between light and darkness, between the people of Israel and other people, between the seventh day and the six working days of the week. Praised are You, Adonai, who differentiates between the sacred and the secular.

(Drink from the cup and extinguish the flame.)

Tisha B'Av – Despair, Anger and the Search For Comfort

Tisha B'Av is the fast day on which we recall the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the devastation of Jerusalem, and so many of the disasters throughout Jewish history. It is a time when we experience God's anger and our own anger at our alienation from God. Tisha B'Av is preceded by a period of days in which we are filled with despair at the impending destruction.

Anger and despair are both integral parts of caregiving. You rage at the illness, at the inadequacy and inhumanity of the health care system, at the friends and family who have disappointed or abandoned you. In your powerlessness, you may express your anger at the recipient of your care. You rage at God, for what else can you feel in the face of the suffering of your loved one and yourself? You feel hopeless as you watch the accumulation of physical and emotional losses. You despair in your helplessness as you await the apparently inevitable destruction of a human being.

God, who is sometimes hidden, understand my despair, and do not turn away from my anger. Hear it as my honest cry for help. Let me feel Your presence in my life.

The poet of this Psalm gives voice to the longing for security in God's presence and his distance from that place. The Psalmist journeys through depression, doubt, fear, persecution and the memory of what has been lost. He feels far from God, even as he hopes for communion with an elusive God.

Psalm 42

For the conductor: A wise-song of the Korachides

As a stag yearns for streams of cool water, so does my soul yearn for You, O God.

Indeed, my soul thirsts for God, for the living God, saying, "When shall I come and see the face of God?"

Tears are my bread day and night, as scoundrels say to me all day long,

"Where is your God?"

Their question prompts me to remember so many things, to pour my heart out in anguish as I recall what it is was to walk up to the House of God singing songs of joy and thanksgiving with a crowd of friends in the midst of a truly festive multitude.

Why so downcast, my soul, so that you whine about my lot? Hope instead in the God to whom I continue to give thanks, in the God whose face is salvation.

O my God, my soul within me is downcast; thus must I recall You from the land of Jordan, from Hermonim, from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep at the sound of Your torrents; all Your breakers and waves have washed over me.

By day Adonai commands that divine mercy be with me and by night, a divine song, a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, "O my rock, why have You forgotten me? Why must I walk in darkness under pressure of the enemy?"

With the intent to murder, my foes insult me down to my bones when they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Why so downcast my soul? Why do you whine about my lot?

Hope instead in the God to whom I continue to give thanks, in my God, the one in whom my face finds salvation.

You can become a caregiver at different points in your life. Sometimes you know or hope it will be time-limited; sometimes you fear that it will not end, even as you fear the end. Parent to child, child to parent. Fear, anger, betrayal, despair and bargaining are there in all the caregiving you do.

Croup

At night
In our bed
Rigid
Listening
Listening for that breathing

And then
Racing to the bathroom
Hot water
Steam

We take turns holding him-thirty pounds, fighting for air
Together we hold him
(How does a single parent do this?)
the steam condensing on the three of us
I've never loved you more
Than at this moment
In our bathroom.

I don't let him feel my fear
I take all of his fear into me
And finally, the heavy little body relaxes
Back into his crib

I love you so much
I love you so much

And You God- I hate You
I hate You with all my heart
With my clenched teeth
With my clenched fists
With my fingernails I hate You
For playing with me and my little boy.

And You God-thank you
Thank you- I kiss Your feet
You let me keep my little boy.
I'll be so good
You won't be sorry.

Merle Feld

Loss

Job said in reply;

*"Today again my complaint is bitter, My strength is spent on account of my groaning.
Would that I knew how to reach Him, How to get to His dwelling.
I would set my case before Him." Job 23:1-4*

Adonai, I do not know what to pray for or how to pray...
Even the *Mi Sheberach* is too bright for me.
This is the long Kaddish. This is the darkening road.
My mother is losing her memory... I don't know how to get it back for her.

Will You consider in the balance of her fate, how she nursed so many,
So tenderly?
That she eased the journey of thousands through illness..
Faithful care,
Even unto death.
That she championed the weak and the young and the lost
Everyday of her life.
That she made a home that was an unfailing refuge for my heart...
That was a gallery for my small triumphs.
How everything that is good and compassionate in me is only the faintest echo
Of what I see in her?
Will You remember that her faith in You has always been unshakeable?
How diminished Your song of praise will be if she forgets who You are,
If she forgets who I am...
How can this be borne?
She holds on to us, and to who she is, as tightly as she can,
But her grasp is not strong and I feel her slipping away.
Why are my hands so weak, so helpless to draw her back?
She knows this...she is frightened...she is ashamed.

The shame is mine...
All my life, her strength was there for me, never failing in the face of
My despair.
What kind of a child am I, who stands so useless before her need?
How do I help her, protect her, raise her high, carry her
Clear those dark, sticky tangles from her mind?
Keep my cries of despair silent... keep my love for her shining on her dimming path...
Will You not show her some small mercy?
Is there some price I can pay for her sake?

*"See, I am of small worth, what can I answer You? I clap my hand to my mouth.
I have spoken once and will not reply, Twice, and will do so no more." Job 40:4-5*

Anger is almost always present in the chorus of emotions of caregivers, but many of us have been taught to fear anger, both our own and that of others. Rabbi Ira Stone offers a way of seeing and using anger in the light of the Divine expression of anger.

Anger results from our inability to admit the disparity between what we want and what is. It is a consequence of the impossibility of perfection in the created world in which the idea of perfection nevertheless exists. It is, therefore, grounded in the distance between the mortal and the immortal.

Anger generates great energy in both humans and God. God's anger results from the disparity between what He wants for us and what we are.

The energy generated by anger can be either constructive or destructive. When it reduces the moments-of-death in life, it is positive. When it causes us to be further removed from the presence of God, it is negative. In such stories as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the bringing of the flood or the scattering of the builders of the tower of Babel, God's anger and the energy it generates are models for acting on our anger and its energy. Typically, God's anger is ignited by injustice, by deceit, by cruelty and by unfaithfulness; He directs the energy generated by this anger at combating the causes of these conditions. God's anger can reestablish the equilibrium of the world. It aims to eliminate moments-of-death in life. It is life-giving.

But these biblical stories also tell of God's anger being potentially destructive. This destructive energy causes God to withdraw His presence from humanity or to contemplate such withdrawal. In these instances, we learn that we can attempt to dissuade God from acting on His anger. Abraham, Moses and other prophets remind God of human imperfection and of God's own promise to maintain the life of this creation by His presence.

Human beings also typically become angry when confronted with injustice, deceit, cruelty and faithlessness. The responses characteristic of God when He is angry — life giving or destructive — are also common to humans.

Following the example of the prophets, each of us has a mandate to assuage the destructive energy of anger in ourselves, in other people and in God. We also have a mandate to accept the life-giving energy that emerges from the anger that is constructively channeled, whether it comes from God or people.

Shema Koleynu/ Hear Our Voice is one of the frequently repeated prayers of the Yom Kippur liturgy. You are the answer to your care-recipient's prayer. You make sure that your loved one is not cast off or abandoned when strength fails. You do not forsake your loved one in old age. Yet, you may read this wondering whom God will send to be there with you when you grow old.

Shema Koleynu

Hear our voice, Eternal One our God,
Be compassionate and loving with us,
And with loving favor accept our prayer.

Restore us, Eternal One, to You
And we shall return;
Renew our days as of old.

Give heed to our words, Eternal One,
Understand our thoughts.

May the words of our mouths
And the meditations of our hearts be acceptable,
Eternal One, our Rock and Redeemer.

Do not cast us away from Your presence;
Do not take Your holy spirit from us.

Do not cast us off in old age;
When our strength fails, do not forsake us.

Do not forsake us, Eternal One, our God;
Be not far from us.

Show us a sign for well being,
That our foes might see and be confused;
For You are the Eternal who helps and comforts us.

For we wait for You, Eternal One;
You, Our God will respond.

When you recite the blessing over Shabbat candles, you can add personal meditations. The following two paragraphs come from a book of prayers given to an 18th century Italian Jewish woman as a wedding gift. They are intended to be said as the Shabbat candles are lit. The first paragraph weaves together Biblical verses reminding the petitioner of all the good we see in light. Light is blessing, and guidance, security and life. The second paragraph is a more personal petition, but since no Jew approaches God alone, the petitioner's personal prayer quickly enlarges to encompass requests for the well being of all Israel.

Meditations for Lighting Shabbat Candles

Almighty God of Israel, may it be Your desire to radiate light, joy, happiness, honor, goodness, mercy, prosperity, blessing and peace upon those in the heavens and those here below. And bathe us, our souls and our spirit in the light of Your luminous countenance. "For the radiance of a king's face grants life." "For in You is the source of all life; by Your light do we see light." "Light is sown for the righteous." "The Lord is my light and my help." "The Lord is God, who sheds light upon us." May the Lord be gracious to us and bless us. May He shine his countenance upon us, Selah. " May He shine his countenance upon us and be gracious to us", extending graciousness through the concealed light, the light of all life, about which it is written, "And the Lord said, 'let there be light and there was light.'" Amen, Selah.

God of Israel, may it be Your will to be gracious to me and to my husband [my wife] (and if s/he has children add, to my children) and to all my family and the people of Israel. Grant us long life and full health, security from evil, prosperity in all good. Think well of us: bless us. Be mindful of our needs for care and mercy. Bless us with many blessings. Fill our household with everything that is good. Let Your holy presence dwell among us. May there not be counted among us a childless man or a barren woman, a widow or widower. May our children not die in our lifetime. May we be spared all suffering... Please now hear my plea; for the sake of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, our Mothers. Let our candle shine forth. May it neither flicker nor ever be extinguished. Shine your face upon us, so we will be saved, all Israel, speedily and in our day. Amen, Selah.

A Teaching from Torah: When God opens your eyes

The Biblical stories of Hagar and Bilaam share a common theme. In both stories, there is a journey into danger and an angel who appears at a critical moment. The protagonist is not able to see what is right in front of her or him. Most significantly, God opens the eyes of the protagonist, bringing true vision. Hagar and Ishmael, the son she bore to Abraham, are sent out to the wilderness. Running out of water and despairing for the life of her son, Hagar puts him under a bush. Turning away, she cries out, "Let me not look on as the child dies." This near death experience has the miraculous ending that we all pray for in the face of life-threatening illness. The angel tells her there is hope. God opens her eyes and she sees a well of water; the child and his mother are saved and continue to live out their lives. In the story of Bilaam, and his talking donkey, the gentile prophet goes on the road, with the intention of cursing the Jewish people on behalf of the king of Moab. He is riding on his way, when his donkey swerves off the road. We know that the donkey sees an angel of the Lord with a drawn sword, but Bilaam keeps on beating his poor donkey until the donkey begins to speak. However, Bilaam is unable to see the threatening angel until God opens his eyes. He then continues his journey, which will culminate, not in curses, but in a powerful blessing.

The illness of a loved one means a journey along a road you do not want to travel. It is a road that can seem hopeless; there are stumbling blocks at every turn. What can the stories of Hagar and Bilaam teach you? Illness is a journey on a road which is difficult to travel on because of external as well as internal obstacles which might or might not be perceived and understood. There is an angel, but angels are more complex than they are commonly thought of. Sometimes they can hold you up and not allow you to go in the direction you need to go. Sometimes they can offer, not just words of hope, but practical guidance that gets you back on the road. Most fascinating is what happens when God opens the eyes. The expectation is that when God gets involved with a situation, you can expect an impressive, obvious miracle. However, supernatural miracles are not what happens when God gets involved in these stories. God opens the eyes and, behold, the answer was there all along.

God opens Hagar's eyes and she sees the well. With that, the mother knows what to do. Immediately, she fills the skin with water and brings it to her son and helps him to drink. God didn't create a new well, but by opening her eyes to see the resources that were already there, God enabled Hagar to get beyond her helplessness and hopelessness. When she could imagine something other than terror, she could take action. Even more importantly, she could be present for her son once again.

For Bilaam, God's opening his eyes also brings understanding and relief. How betrayed he must have felt when his loyal donkey suddenly behaved in a way he could not understand, keeping him from his appointed and well-funded task. How disorienting it must have been when that long time speechless companion began to talk. Hearing from God was a regular event for Bilaam the Prophet, but hearing words from his donkey turned his world upside down. You, who are competent and in control of your world feel this way when you first learn of illness, especially mental illness or dementia in a loved one. Suddenly, your road, and your companion doesn't make sense and you may question your own abilities. Then God uncovers Bilaam's eyes and he sees that there really is a definable obstacle in the road. That angel, as it says, is an adversary. But once you understand the adversary you face, you can take the steps that will get you back on the road. You can negotiate solutions, as Bilaam now does with the angel. They are not always ideal solutions. At first, in the negotiations, Bilaam offers to go back, but usually, going back is not an option. Bilaam learns that he will be able to go ahead and meet with Balak, but there will be serious limits to what he can say. Bilaam doesn't like those limits and he tests them, eventually coming to understand that he can only do what God allows him to do. You won't always like what you see when God opens your eyes and allows you clear vision. It can be quite painful. However, with the information that you have when your eyes are open, you can make the best possible choices from the broadest range of options. In the ability to see, choose and take action, there is blessing.

Light is a metaphor for vision, inspiration and creativity. As a caregiver, you face constant challenges and new situations. Your ability to respond creatively can be a great gift.

Twenty Five

For the Chief Musician, with Guitar

In my moments of invention
I honor You, Source of Creation,
Who created infinite worlds
That I might grow in this one.

You set the questions before me
And give me ways to find the answers;
You fashion a candle of my soul
And offer me the flaming brand.

I reach out my hand to Your hand,
And in that glowing space before they meet
I grasp the incandescent thread
And pull it toward me to form my answers.

Blazing with radiance, I move the filament
To write with new words
To sing Your melodies,
Transformed through my being.

Bless me with Your creative force;
Open me to innovation.
Ignite my soul with praise for You
Burning sparks of exaltation.

Debbie Perlman

Light also represents hope and the victory of living fully in every moment we have. Chava Freund reflects on the enlightenment she gained in the years since her mother's diagnosis.

In Praise of Denial

I recall a question raised in the novel *Zorba the Greek* by the pensive, introspective foil to the colorful, exuberant Zorba, "Shall we live each day as if it were our last, or as if we would never die?" Several decades of lived life have taught me to choose the latter. Although it cuts against the grain of the confrontation baby boom generation, with its no-frills approach to honesty and realism, I think there is a lot to be said in favor of denial.

When my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and when we discovered it had spread beyond its original site, I felt myself swallowed by a sea of fear, panic and rage. My anger was largely directed at doctors, many of whom deserved it, but also at the punch-line of their ineptly delivered conclusions; that this was a terminal illness, which we would not fight but would treat to control its pace and its symptoms. Some of these medical men were infuriated by me as well, for refusing to accept what they regarded as inevitable; one asked me quite hostilely, "How much more do you want for someone born in 1912?" My answer is: More. And I am willing to fight for it.

It astounds me that those doctors don't realize what most patients and their families do: that to fight is to live. The challenge is to give death a run for the money. For what is terminality, other than knowing the name of the calamity that may, in the end, possibly cause one's death? Disease is no more a terminal condition than life itself.

Whenever I get my nose rubbed in "medical facts", I sink into black degrees of anticipatory mourning, which does nothing to enhance living for either of us. I'm not at all sure that the consciousness of death helps one to "savor" life, and would in fact, argue against it. It certainly would have destroyed the joy in living the past seven years that we have been blessed with thus far!

I remember the first big vacation we took after Mom's illness was discovered. I could not shake the thought that it might be our last trip together. Weepy, sentimental sensations overwhelmed me, thankfully only after she retired for the night – which certainly detracted from the pleasure to be experienced in the present. When I think of the half dozen or so vacation trips we've enjoyed together since then, I must conclude that an obsession with death and dying produces a morbidity that must be transcended if one is to live at all.

I am guided by the courage and optimism of my mother, who simply believes that she will live as long as God wants her to live. She leaves it to Him and continues her life as she has always lived it.

I cannot transcend fear of loss completely, but in the midst of happiness, I say the blessing *Sheheheyanu*, thanking God for sustaining us in life to see this day, instead of envisioning its converse in a time of loss. Once a death has occurred, there is all the time in the world to face its reality. While there is life, there should only be blessings.

And here is what I have learned in the years of wrestling and denying the angel: living in the present requires faith and hope in the future – faith and hope that there will be time, to start new projects, to plan reunions, to plant lilac trees and hope to see them bloom. Because there may well be time and to withdraw prematurely is to cheat oneself.

Life in the valley of the shadow of death is also life, if we can ignore the shadows long enough to till the valley – and this applies to all of us. None of us knows when our hour will come; what a shame it would be to refrain from starting things and wait for it. I think of the midrash of the old man whom Rabbi Yohanan met planting a carob tree. Did he expect to see its fruit? It's not clear from his answer that he had given up all hope of seeing it, but he trusted that his children would.

I can never fully evade the consciousness that these good days will not last forever, that every month, every year is a gift. But memories last forever and the time to make good memories is now. And if denial helps you do that you have my blessing.

Reprinted from *Wrestling With The Angel: Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*. Edited by Jack Reimer. (New York: Schocken Books. 1995.) Used with permission.

Psalm 118 is the conclusion of Hallel, a unit of psalms that is recited on many joyful holidays. As we sing them, we remember the despair and challenges that we have faced even as we hoped for and achieved victory. Think of yourself when you reach the line describing how the righteous shall enter the gateway to God. Ask for the gift of being able to see each day as containing something for which you can rejoice.

Psalm 118

Give thanks unto Adonai, for God is good, for divine mercy is forever.
May Israel say, "for divine mercy is forever."
May the house of Aaron say "for divine mercy is forever."
May the fearers of Adonai say "for divine mercy is forever."

From dire straits I called out to God, who answered me with the generosity of God.
As faith in Adonai is mine, I have no fear, what can a mere mortal do to me.
If Adonai is among my helpers, I can stare down my enemies.
It is better to trust in Adonai than to trust in human beings.
It is even better to trust in Adonai than to trust in noblemen.

Alien nations of all sorts surround me,
But I shall cut them down to size in the name of Adonai.
They swarm about me, surrounding me completely,
But I shall cut them down to size in the name of Adonai.
They swarm around me like bees, spreading fire through dried-out thorns,
But I shall cut them down to size in the name of Adonai.

You shoved me hard that I might fall, but Adonai helped me.
God is my strength and my song and will always be the source of my salvation.
The sound of joy and salvation is always heard in the tents to the righteous,
For the right hand of Adonai is mighty.
Indeed the right hand of Adonai is exalted, the right hand of Adonai is mighty.

I shall not die, but live to tell of the works of God,
Although God afflicted me with grievous suffering, God did not put me to death.
Open the gates of righteousness for me
That I might pass through them and give thanks to God.
This is the gateway to Adonai, the righteous alone may pass through it.
I am thankful when You answer me, thus becoming the source of my salvation.
The stone the builders despised has ended up serving as the cornerstone.
Wondrous in our eyes, this can only have come from Adonai.
This is truly the day Adonai has wrought, let us rejoice and be glad on it.

We beseech You Adonai, save us. We beseech You, Adonai, grant us success.
Blessed be those who come in the name of Adonai
We bless you from the house of Adonai.
Adonai is God and shall grant us light
Loose the festival offering from its bonds and bring it up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God and I give thanks to You, my God in whom I exalt.
Give thanks unto Adonai, for God is good, for divine mercy is forever.

Reprinted from *Our Haven and Our Strength: The Book of Psalms*. Translation by Martin Samuel Cohen. (New York: Aviv Press. 2004.)
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Susan Rosenthal reflects on how the spiritual learning which strengthened her during her own struggle with life-threatening illness became a gift as she struggles with the privilege of long distance caregiving for her elderly parents.

From the Alzheimer's/ Dementia Foundation, I learned that despite our coast-to-coast relationship, my brother and I were indeed our parents' long distance caregivers. Why did I think that one needed to live under the same roof to earn this label? The label mattered because all the stress, worry, responsibility, wear and tear we experienced now made sense. We had much to learn.

I found myself following in the footsteps of my friends at shul who walked and more often crawled along this path before me. I watched them make the same trips home with ever-increasing frequency; agonize and wrestle with the tough issues of respecting their parents' fierce independence and determination to live in their own homes on the one hand and building in care and safety on the other.

I worried about our health and well-being because we were not taking care of our own bodies and spirits. In the face of long periods of helplessness, self-care seemed like the last item on our "To Do" list. However, I did feel supported and deeply blessed that I had discovered the great treasures and teachings of the Torah just seven years earlier. Torah, this big container or holding environment, is the place where friends and I can wrestle, from the head and the heart, with how to act and where to find strength and meaning when the answers aren't clear.

And I continue to learn that, despite the pain and exhaustion of this journey, there can be openings – moments of profound intimacy and/or reconciliation – which enable me to say it is a privilege.

Two years ago on Shavuot, the holiday celebrating the giving of the Torah, I waited in synagogue (not so patiently) for the piece of Torah I might personally receive that day. And then, just like that, I saw an image of my father as a young man carrying the Torah down from the top of Mount Sinai. Like Moses, his eyes were full of light, and I started to sob tears that cleanse the soul and open the heart. I realized that my father, by his life-long example, had given my brother and me the Torah teaching of *hesed* (loving-kindness), his eternal gift to us. Once again, I found that the Source of Life had blessed me with a spiritual resource that lifted my spirits as I boarded the plane that very evening to fly to the other coast to tend to my increasingly frail parents.

The flights continue and so do the challenges and gifts...

The High Priest was the spiritual caregiver for the Jewish people in the days of the Temple. On Yom Kippur, after completing the awesome tasks in the Holy of Holies, and emerging safe and whole, he offered one of the most beautiful prayers in our liturgy. With humility and confidence he asks God for the material and spiritual blessings which will allow for security, shlemut/wholeness and healing in the coming year. As a caregiver, you ask for many things which you may not be given. So, too, does your care recipient. But still you ask, and that act, of looking ahead with hope, is important.

Prayer of the High Priest

May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors to grant us, with all Your people Israel, a year of blessing, a year of corn and wine and oil, a year of prosperity, of assembly in Your Temple, a year of abundance, of happy life, of dew and rain and warmth, of ripening fruits, a year of atonement for our sins, a year in which You bless our food and drink, a year of commerce, a year of plenty, a year of joy, a year in which You bless the fruit of the womb and the fruit of the land, a year in which You bless our comings and our goings, a year in which You show us Your compassion, a year of peace and tranquility, a year in which You bring us rejoicing to our land, a year in which Your people Israel will not require support from one another or from other People, the work of their hands being fully blessed by You.

(And for the inhabitants of the region of Sharon, who lived in peril of sudden earthquakes, he prayed: May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, that their homes not become their graves.)

In what was among her final gifts of healing texts, Debbie Perlman z'l, wrote of her new perspective in the journey of caregiving when her "husband's heart attacked him."

Caretakers

Your arm has sheltered us before
Again we call Your name for healing;
Your vigilance deferred disaster,
Holy One, Your care will sustain us.

Join us on this new path of recovery
Guard the newness and sameness of the road;
Bless our years of love, our compass,
The beacon of affection that leads us home.

Settle us, Divine healer, in these days of recovery;
They are a mid-western spring: warmth and then cold rain.
Make our new life rhythms gentle,
Your hand marks the cadence of our adaptations.

Reach into this sphere of caring,
Guard us both, patient and helper;
Let rest come, sleep and healing dreams,
Let morning find our strength renewed.

As the Israelite children measured the journey to Sinai,
So have we tallied the distance to recovery;
As You helped them grow into freedom,
So have we learned the bounty of survival.

Teach us the meaning of Your lessons,
We hear and obey, we cling to new meaning;
Sustain us as we learn right choices,
Decisions that sustain, destiny restructured.

We thank You, our protector, for these days.
We store up summer warmth,
We feast on the fruits of recovery,
Tasting the tang and sweet of this victory.

We find You in the nuance of gratitude;
You bless our evolution.
On the bounty of the season
We grow strong and whole.

Teaching from Torah: Finding God in the Unexpected

As Jacob leaves his birthplace and begins the journey to his mother's homeland, he receives a powerful dream. He sees a ladder stretched between the earth and heaven with angels going up and down it. God stands upon the ladder and promises protection on his journey and tells him of the wondrous future that lies ahead. When Jacob awakens from his dream he exclaimed, "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it."

How does this happen to each of us? We are going about our lives, busy with life's many details and all of a sudden something happens. Something stops us and we realize the sanctity of the moment. Perhaps we are brought to this awareness by an onset of illness or crisis. Anniversaries, life-cycle events and other moments of joy can also remind us of the preciousness of life.

Jacob's revelation is momentous, filled with angels, heavenly gateways and visions of God. Yet this same awareness can come in more subtle forms; the first bite into a crisp apple; a tree burning itself up in brilliant oranges and reds; the sound of a baby's laugh; the voice of a friend from far away; the scent of the lilies filling an entire room; or an unexpected kindness from a stranger.

The daily liturgy contains a prayer for these ordinary miracles; "We give thanks...for the miracles that are with us every day...every hour, morning noon and night." Here our tradition reminds us to notice the miracles that are with us at every moment. Not the miracles of the Exodus and Sinai, but the ones that fill our days and sustain us from one breath to the next.

May we be blessed to find God's presence in our daily routine, as well as life's milestones; when we are amid the beauty of nature and among our community; as we celebrate life's joys and when we find ourselves filled with sorrow. May we be blessed like our ancestor Jacob, to awaken to God's presence in unexpected places.

Dr. Shoshanna Silberman reflects on her learning in the year following her husband's cancer diagnosis. She makes reference to Reb Nachman of Bratslav, a late 18th century Hasidic rebbe, whose writings and songs have been a source of strength and healing for many people.

Although people often tell me now, Shoshana, you are doing so well now, I'm not sure what this means. Who is the real me? Do medications mask my true feelings? Mel and others say I am still myself, but I'm never totally reassured. Rabbi Dayle Freidman asked me how this trauma affected my faith. I never blamed God for Mel's affliction, but I have to admit I kept my distance. I could not utter one syllable, one word of prayer. Perhaps my constant sobbing was itself a prayer. Reb Nachman taught that even if all you can say to God is "help," it's still very good. Repeat this over and over again until God opens your lips and the words begin to flow from your heart, and even when no words come, do not despair. Just wanting to speak to God is in itself a very great thing.

Actually, it was Mel who helped me find my voice, who encouraged me, who literally pushed me to sing and I'm thankful to him for this. There were many difficult hurdles. Each holiday or life cycle event was both traumatic and life affirming. I cried every time Mel sang his version of *Eshet Chayil* (A Woman of Valor) to me on Friday night. When I couldn't sing *Mi Haish*, the selection from Psalms that I sing to him each week, my family and friends became my voice. Each *yontif*, when I recite *Sheheyanu*, thanking God for sustaining us and bringing us to that season, I feel so grateful for the gift of time.

Like so many in our generation, I've cherished the insights and advice of Reb Nachman. His teachings inspire us to never lose hope, to find joy and a cause for happiness in everything that happens. Perhaps his most famous saying is "A person walks life on a narrow bridge. The most important thing is not to be afraid." Well, I'm better at the narrow bridge part than the not being afraid, but I'm working on it. When Nachman teaches us to always look for the good in yourself, to focus on that good, highlight and turn even depression into joy, I'm learning not to put myself down as a caretaker because of my fears and my flaws. Through all the craziness, through all the ordeals, I can offer my help, my hope and my love. May God and the physicians help with the rest.

Psalm 23 is perhaps the ultimate expression of comfort, not because it eliminates or ignores the difficulties and suffering of our lives, but because it offers the comfort of God's Presence in the midst of the even the darkest of moments. You do not go through these times alone.

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David:

Adonai is my shepherd
I lack nothing.

In the greenest pastures
Adonai lays me down;
Alongside still waters
Adonai leads me.

Adonai renews my soul, my life;
Adonai guides me in the paths of *Tzedek/right*,
For the sake of the Divine Name.

Even if I should walk
Through a valley of deepest darkness
I fear no evil
For You are with me.
Your rod and Your staff
These comfort me.

You spread before me a table
In full view of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows!

Only *Tov/* goodness and *Hesed/* Lovingkindness
Will pursue me
All the days of my life;
I shall dwell in the house of Adonai
For many full, long years!

To be a caregiver is to affirm love and to affirm life. Caregiving is not a denial of the inevitability of death, for when that time comes, you must let go. Caregiving is the recognition that in the face of vulnerability and mortality, you choose to help a loved one live as fully as possible. In order to do this well, as a caregiver you must make the choice of life for yourself as well.

Choose life

It is not in the heavens

That you should say

Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us

Neither is it beyond the sea

That you should say

Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us

No

This thing is very close to you

In your mouth

And in your heart

To observe it

See I have set before you this day

Life and death

Blessing and curse

Choose life – so that you ... may live.

Deuteronomy 30: 12-15, 19

It can happen to anyone. A father no longer speaks because of a stroke. Cancer weakens a vibrant mother. A car accident leaves a son wheelchair-bound. A partner develops AIDS. Suddenly family and friends are thrust into the world of caregiving and the swirling range of intense emotions and sometimes wrenching demands.

What words are there to comfort a caregiver during this time often filled with upheaval and isolation, financial challenge and frustration, stressful decisions and sadness?

With Sweetness from The Rock: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Caregivers by Rabbi Dickstein offers professionals and caregivers alike spiritual guidance drawn from the Jewish tradition. Each chapter includes selections from Biblical texts, rabbinical teachings, medieval prayers and contemporary poems and memoirs.

This spiritual guide provides thoughtful insights for caregivers who help a loved one day-to-day, from a distance, alone or with a support network. *With Sweetness from The Rock* is sure to be a source of comfort for someone in your synagogue, neighborhood, workplace or wider community.

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Rabbi Dickstein was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in 1989. She earned masters degrees in social work from Columbia University and in Jewish communal service from JTS. Rabbi Dickstein has served as spiritual leader of the United Synagogue of Hoboken, New Jersey and of Congregation Beth Ahm in Verona, New Jersey. She was the Assistant Dean of the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary as well as an instructor there and has worked as a nursing home and hospital chaplain for the United Jewish Federation of MetroWest, New Jersey.

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