

Jewish Prayer for Persisting: Moving Beyond Misheberach - excerpt from the article printed from "Spirituality and Health" by Rabbi Julie Pelc Adler

At a prescribed moment during Jewish prayer services every week in synagogues around the world; the Torah is unrolled and the reader pauses so that prayers for healing might be offered. The misheberach is offered by individuals and by communities: hearts and sanctuaries overflowing with requests for healing of body and healing of spirit. The text of the traditional misheberach requests, "a complete healing – healing of the soul and healing of the body – along with all the ill, among the people of Israel – soon, speedily, without delay..."

I think of my co-worker with diabetes, a friend with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, an aunt struggling with chronic clinical depression, a classmate with lupus and ulcerative colitis and an acquaintance living with HIV. I think of my own incomplete recovery. To pray for "complete healing" for those whose ailments cannot or will not ever be completely "healed" seems audacious and even offensive. My co-workers, colleagues, family, friends, and I will negotiate medications, medical appointments, dietary needs, and fears throughout our lives. We will face unexpected side effects, professional and personal repercussions of our special needs, and stigma from many well-meaning strangers every day. Our everyday reality is one of incomplete health; yet, we are not entirely "sick", either.

To pray for the "complete healing of body and spirit" is to misjudge the realities of many people's lives. To understand or redefine "healing" as "making peace with one's fate" is to alter the meaning of the prayer and it may also serve to ignore our specific kind of suffering and its ever-changing realities.

I believe we need a new congregational prayer. We need a prayer that acknowledges the reality of chronic illness. We need a prayer that asks God for the strength to persist even in the face of challenges that may seem insurmountable. We need a prayer asking that we be granted the courage to continue in life even as we face the reality of our death; to rage and to praise, to bless and to curse, to accept and to reject diagnoses simultaneously.

Misheberach for an individual who is chronically ill

Misheberach avotenu v'imotenu, hu yivarech et _____ben/bat _____. Chazek et libo/libah ve-tarim et yado/yadah b'birchotam she-natata Ya'akov¹, shel Yonatan² ve-David³, shel Daniel ha-Navi⁴, shel Tamar⁵ imo shel Peretz, shel Miriam ha-Neviyah⁶, ve-shel Naomi⁷.

Hu yiten ota/oto hen vahesed v'rahamim; ahavah, achava, shalom, v'reut. Bimhera, Adonai Elohenu, sh'ma kolenu, kabel na tefilatenu, u'sh'mor et rucho/ruchah, nafsho/nafshah, venishmato/nishmatah. Bich'vod gevurat'cha, ve-chasdechah, ve-rachamechah harabim, hinei anachnu omrim lo/la: chazak v'ematz. U'fros aleinu sukkat sh'lomecha. Venomar: Amen."

May the One who blessed our fathers and our mothers, bless _____ son/daughter of _____: strengthen his/her heart and raise up his/her hand, with the blessings you gave to Yaakov, to Yonatan and David, to Daniel the Prophet, to Tamar mother of Peretz, to Miriam the Prophetess, and to Naomi. May God give to him/her grace, compassion and loving-kindness; love, harmony, peace, and companionship.

Speedily, Adonai our God, hear our voices, take up our prayers, and watch over his/her life-force, spirit, and soul. With respect to your power, your loving-kindness, and your great compassion, behold we say to him/her: be strong and of good courage. Spread over us all Your shelter of peace. And let us say: Amen."

(This prayer can also be adjusted according to the type of illness, or the particular wishes of that specific person for whom the prayer is being offered. Example: May the One who blessed our foremother Miriam, who was forced to leave the camp in her illness and then was welcomed in time back to the community, also be with our friend, Esther, daughter of Reuven v'Elisheva, with the blessing of being able to return, soon, to our community...)

Rabbi Julie Pelc Adler received master's degrees from the University of Judaism and from Harvard Graduate School of Education and was ordained as a rabbi by Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in 2006. She is currently the spiritual leader at Aitz Hayim Center for Jewish Learning and a JHN Advisory committee member.