

Jewish Healing Rituals

What does healing mean?

In the Jewish liturgy we speak of both Refuat Ha-Guf (cure) and Refuat Ha-Nefesh (healing). The former is linked to the body, while the latter relates to the human being as spirit. As a person is unified, body and spirit, the two are inextricably linked.

Similarly, illness presents itself on two levels; on a physical level it is manifested through pain, and on spiritual level it is experienced by suffering. A cure is a clinical term, which addresses a specific diagnosis. One may receive a cure to one's diagnosis and still not be healed. In Judaism, it is a holy obligation to alleviate pain, and the illness which has brought this about; medical professionals spend most of their days in this work. However, it is also an obligation to combat suffering, refuat Ha-Nefesh

Jewish healing has to do with the existential human quest for sheleimut, or wholeness within ones self, ones community, and ultimately one's God. While the brokenness of illness often brings all of these needs to consciousness, each creature yearns for this wholeness and integration every day. Teshuva- erroneously called repentance- is really the attempt of the human beings to return to his or their original sense of equilibrium within themselves, their families, their environment, and God Full healing undoubtedly includes a physical cure, but healing is never limited to this.

Jewish healing on a practical level is a project to raise up our personal stories into a larger integrated framework of reality. Our own personal narrative -even of loss- is placed on a larger canvas than ourselves. We do this through the creative use of ritual, text, liturgy to create a 'reframing' of one's life and experiences. In this process, a person hopefully gains new perspective on their own life. In doing so, they gain resilience to face the challenges in front of them with dignity, fortitude, and acceptance.

- Rabbi Frederick L Klein