



*The Cast-Off Rock Became the Cornerstone:*  
**Metaphor and Meaning in Medical Journeys**

Some Materials for Our Exploration

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## Torah, Parables, Stories...

Let not a man say, "The Psalms are not Torah;"  
they are Torah, and the Prophets, too, are Torah,  
and the riddles and the parables are also Torah.

*Midrash Psalms, on Psalm 78:1*

It was truth, it was a parable.

*Rabbi Judah b. Ilai, Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 92b*

Do not underestimate the parable,  
for it leads to the Torah's true meaning.  
A penny wick may help to find a lost pearl.

*Shir HaShirim Rabbah, 1.1.8*

The world says that tales put people to sleep.  
I say that with tales you can rouse people from their sleep.

*Reb Nahman of Bratzlav (1770-1811), Hayye Moharan*

God made man because he loves stories.

*Elie Weisel, The Gates to the Forest*

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

*Muriel Rukeyser*

The object of the whole Torah is that man should become a Torah himself.

*Ba'al Shem Tov, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, 1700-1760*

Every living soul is a letter of the Torah,  
wherefore all souls taken together make up the Torah.

*Nathan of Nemirov, Disciple of the Bratzlaver, d. 1830*

"I am Ado-nai who heals you..." (*Exodus 15:26*)

God said to Moshe, "Say to the Children of Israel, 'The words of the Torah which I have given you are a source of healing for you and of life,' as it is said, 'They are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh' (*Proverbs 4:22*), and it says, '(Torah) will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones' (*Proverbs 3:8*)."

Rabbi Isaac said, "If they have no sicknesses (*NB: for it says, 'I will put none of these diseases upon you,' Exodus 15:26 – this very verse that we're talking about!*) why do they need healing!?"

But the words mean, "I will put no disease upon you in this world, and I will heal you in the world-to-come."

*Mekhilta, B'shallah, 1*

"Medicine can address symptoms, and it can even cure illnesses,  
but you need a Metaphor to make it through..."

*Paraphrase of Prof. Larry Hoffman of HUC-JIR in NY  
addressing the monthly "Jewish Healing Torah Study Group for Doctors"  
of the NYJHC, at St. Vincent's Medical Center in New York, March 2001*

**From A.Word.A.Day (Wordsmith.org) with Anu Garg**

*Guest Wordsmith Mardy Grothe (drmgrothe@aol.com) writes:*

Whenever people describe one thing in terms of something else, they are engaging in metaphorical thinking (as when Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage"). When people speak metaphorically, they make a connection between two conceptual domains that, at first glance, don't appear to have much in common with each other. A metaphor is a kind of magical mental changing room, where one thing, for a moment, becomes another, and in that moment is seen in a whole new way.

A popular recent metaphor is carbon footprint. There's no intrinsic relationship between the amount of energy one consumes and the size of one's foot, but as soon as this metaphor was coined, it immediately replaced the previous metaphor on the subject (energy hog). When Howard Cosell said, "Sports is the Toy Department of Life", he helped us look at the sporting world in a fresh and highly original way. Comedian Paul Reiser did the same thing when he once looked over at his wife breastfeeding their first child and thought to himself, "What was once an entertainment center has become a juice bar."

Robert Frost said, "An idea is a feat of association, and the height of it is a good metaphor." Metaphorical thinking is one of the oldest activities of humankind, and one of the most useful when it captures essential features of certain types of people, as in terms like stool pigeon, stalking horse, rainmaker, or the first water.....

*(Dr. Mardy Grothe is a psychologist, author, platform speaker, and quotation anthologist. His most recent book is I Never Metaphor I Didn't Like: A Comprehensive Compilation of History's Greatest Analogies, Metaphors, and Similes, published 2009. For more, go to [drmardy.com](http://drmardy.com)).*

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...But it's more complicated than this. What is traumatic does not inhere in events (no matter how brutal or terrible), or in words and what they signify, but in both and beyond both. Trauma is evoked through what Lacan calls the Real, something unbearable that is impossible to represent. When the Real erupts in our lives, we dream a response. Our dreams find signifiers for the Real, for something traumatic, giving us words and connections impossible to find in any other way. It's possible to find these connections through psychoanalysis and sometimes through art.

But here's the rub: There will always be something that can't be represented in dreams or a symbolic process of making art, something that escapes the network of signifiers and therefore must keep seeking a form. This something, the Real, will seek expressions in the body. In other words, there is no way around or beyond the trauma of language. Language is incomplete and faulty when it comes to saying what is most vital.

*From Annie G. Rogers, PhD, The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma  
(New York: Random House, 2006; pages 262)*

**Just Some of the Tools for Telling the Story**  
**(with examples from Jewish sources)**

*Assembled by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2009;  
Please relay suggestions to [sweintraub@jbfcs.org](mailto:sweintraub@jbfcs.org)*

**Allegory:** A story in which people, things, and/or happenings have another meaning; generally used for teaching  
*Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37)*

**Apostrophe:** A digression or turning aside from the course of a speech in order to make a short address to a person or thing (present or absent).  
*"What ails you, O sea, that you flee? You Jordan, that you are driven back?"*  
*(Psalm 114:5)*

**Euphemism:** The use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful or less offensive than another.  
*"I am to be gathered unto my people...." (Genesis 49:29) (?)*

**Fable:** A fictitious narrative intended to teach some moral truth or precept in which animals and sometimes inanimate objects are represented as speakers and actors.  
*Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22?*

**Hyperbole:** Exaggeration for effect, not meant to be taken literally  
*About King Hezekiah: "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." (II Kings 18:5)*

**Metonymy:** Use of the name of one thing for that of another associated with, or suggested by, it.  
*"And he said to Gehazi, 'Gird your loins and take my staff in your hand...'" (II Kings 4:29)*  
*"Of You my heart has said, 'Seek my face.'" (Psalm 27:8)*  
*"You have a mighty arm, strong is Your hand..." (Psalm 89:13)*

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other; implied comparison  
*Reb Nahman's "All the world is but a narrow bridge..."*

**Onomatopoeia:** The formation of a word by imitating the natural sound associated with the object or action involved.  
*"The glump of the cholent on my plate had already begun to warm my innards..."*  
*(Simkha Weintraub, undetermined date)*

**Parable:** A short, simple story from which a moral lesson is to be drawn.  
*Beruria's parable of the items deposited for temporary safekeeping in Midrash Mishlei/Proverbs 31:10 (many, many parables in Rabbinic and Hasidic sources...)*

**Personification:** A figure of speech in which a thing, quality, or idea is represented as a person.  
*"... they heard the voice of Adonai God walking about in the garden in the breeze of the day..." (Genesis 2:8)*

**Satire:** A literary work in which vices, follies, stupidities, abuses, etc. are held up to ridicule and contempt.

*The Parable of the Bramble of King Jotham in Judges 9 vv. 6ff*

**Simile:** A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, dissimilar thing by the use of "like," "as," etc. (made explicit unlike metaphor)

*"As a hart pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after You, O God..."*

*(Psalm 42:2)*

**Symbol:** Something that stands for or represents another thing, especially an object used to represent something abstract

*The rainbow in Genesis 9:13ff*

**Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which the whole of a thing is put for a part, or a part for the whole.

*"Human does not live by bread alone..." (Deuteronomy 8:3)*

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**M'shalim**, in Biblical Hebrew, includes proverbs, parables, riddles, and allegories. They could vary from pithy folk maxims to longer artistic compositions, such as Job's discourses\* and the contents of the Book of Proverbs. They also included taunt songs mocking a foe, such as Numbers 21:27-30, which recalls the gloating of the newly defeated Amorites over the previously defeated Moabites...

*(adapted from Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary, page 891)*

\* Never used for the discourses of Israel's classical prophets, **mashal** is used for Balaam's oracle in Numbers 23

## LARYNX

by Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

Now this is it, said Death,  
and as far as I could see  
Death was looking at me, at me.

This all happened in hospital,  
in washed out corridors,  
and the doctor peered at me  
with periscopic eyes.  
He stuck his head in my mouth,  
scratched away at my larynx –  
perhaps a small seed  
of death was stuck there.

At first, I turned into smoke  
so that the cindery one  
would pass and not recognize me.  
I played the fool, I grew thin,  
pretended to be simple or transparent –  
I wanted to be a cyclist  
to pedal out of death's range.

The rage came over me  
and I said, "Death, you bastard,  
must you always keep butting in?  
Haven't you enough with all those bones?  
I'll tell you exactly what I think:  
you have no discrimination, you're deaf  
and stupid beyond belief.

"Why are you following me?  
What do you want with my skeleton?  
Why don't you take the miserable one,  
the cataleptic, the smart one,  
the bitter, the unfaithful, the ruthless,  
the murderer, the adulterers,  
the two-faced judge,  
the deceiving journalist,  
tyrants from islands,  
those who set fire to mountains,  
the chiefs of police,  
jailers and burglars?  
Why do you have to take me?  
What business have I with Heaven?  
Hell doesn't suit me –  
I feel fine on the earth."

With such internal mutterings  
I kept myself going  
while the restless doctor  
went tramping through my lungs,  
from bronchea to bronchea  
like a bird from branch to branch.  
I couldn't feel my throat;  
my mouth was open like the jaws of a suit of armor,  
and the doctor ran up and down  
my larynx on his bicycle,  
till, serious and certain,  
he looked at me through his telescope  
and pried me loose from death.

It wasn't what they had thought.  
It wasn't my turn.  
If I tell you I suffered a lot,  
and really loved the mystery,  
that Our Lord and Our Lady  
were waiting for me in their oasis,  
if I talk of enchantment,  
and being eaten up by distress  
at not being close to dying,  
if I say like a stupid chicken  
that I die not by dying,  
give me a boot in the butt  
fit punishment for a liar.

*Translated by Alastair Reid*

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**LITTLE ELEGY:**  
**For A Child Who Skipped Rope**  
By X. J. Kennedy (American poet ;1929- )

Here lies resting, out of breath,  
Out of turns, Elizabeth  
Whose quicksilver toes not quite  
Cleared the whirring edge of night.

Earth whose circles round us skim  
Till they catch the lightest limb,  
Shelter now Elizabeth  
And for her sake trip up Death.

### ONE MORE TIME

By Patricia Goedicke, (American poet; 1931- )

And next morning, at the medical center  
Though the X-Ray Room swallows me whole,

Though cold crackles in the corridors  
I brace myself against it and then relax.

Lying there on the polished steel table  
Though I step right out of my body,

Suspended in icy silence  
I look at myself from far off  
Calmly, I feel free.

Even though I'm not, now  
Or ever:

The metal teeth of death bite  
But spit me out

One more time:

When the technician says breathe  
I breathe

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### REMISSION

By Linda Pastan (American poet, 1932 -- )

It seems you must grow  
into your death slowly,  
as if it were a pair of new shoes  
waiting on the closet floor,  
smelling of the animal  
it came from, but still too big  
too stiff for you to wear.  
Meanwhile you dance barefoot  
your shaky dance to pretence,  
and we dance with you,  
the pulses in our own wrists  
ticking away.  
In this small truce  
the body waits,  
having waged war on itself  
for years. You say  
the water tastes of flowers.  
You steal on tiptoe  
Past the closet door

**Just A Few Metaphors in Classical Jewish Texts Related to Illness/Suffering**  
(some more explicit, others more implicit...)

“And I will wait upon the Lord, who hides his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.” (Isaiah 8:17)

“Truly you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, who saves them. (Isaiah 45:15)

“Behold, He passes by me, and I see Him not; He moves on, but I perceive Him not.

“Behold, He snatches away. Who can hinder Him? Who will say to Him, “What are You doing?”” (Job 9:11-12)

“Why do you hide Your face, and regard me as Your enemy?” (Job 13:24)

“Know now that God has overthrown me, and has surrounded me with His net.”  
(Job 19:6)

R. Joshua ben Levi said: The Israelites are compared to an olive tree, because as the olive never sheds its leaves whether in winter or summer, so will the Israelites never cease to be, whether in this world or in the world-to-come. R. Johanan said: The Israelites are compared to an olive tree, because as the olive yields its oil only by hard pressure, so the Israelites do not return to righteousness except through suffering.  
*Babylonian Talmud, Menahot 53b*

When Moshe heard his fate, he summoned every argument to secure a remission of his sentence.

Among other things, he said, “*Ribbono shel Olam/Sovereign of the Universe!* Arise from the Seat of Judgment and sit on the Throne of Mercy, so that I do not die. Let my sins be forgiven by reason of the bodily sufferings which may come upon me. But put me not in the power of the angel of death. If you will do this, then will I proclaim your praise before all the inhabitants of the world, as David said, ‘I shall not die but live, and declare the works of Ado-nai’ (Psalm 118:17).”

Then God said to Moshe, “Hear the rest of the verse, ‘This is the gate of Ado-nai, through which the righteous shall enter.’” (Psalm 118:20)

For all creatures death has been prepared from the beginning.

*Paraphrase of Tanhuma, Buber edition, Va'ethanan 6a*

Once R. Judah HaNassi sat and taught Torah before an assembly of Babylonian Jews in Sepphoris, and a calf passed before him. It came and sought to conceal itself, and began to moo, as if to say, “Save me!” Then he said, “What can I do for you? For this destiny (i.e., to be slaughtered), you were created.” Hence R. Judah suffered toothache for thirteen years....After that, a reptile (*perhaps a weasel*) ran past his daughter, and she wanted to kill it. He said to her, “Let it be, for it is written, ‘His mercies are over all His works’ (from Psalm 145:9, the *Ashrei*). So it was said in Heaven: “Because he had pity, pity shall be shown to him,” and his toothache ceased.

*Midrash B'reishit/Genesis Rabbah, on Noah, 33:3;*  
*another version in BT Bava Metzia 85a*

From Midrash B'reishit/Genesis Rabbah:

AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THESE THINGS (*Genesis 48:1*).

It is written, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a broken spirit who can bear" (*Proverbs 18:14*)? When one's spirit has been broken from youth until old age, who can bear it?\* R. Ishmael b. R. Jose said: The stones upon which we sat in our youth fought against us in our old age.\*\* R. Jose used to charge his colleagues: Do not sit upon the outer benches of Bar Ulla's academy in winter, because they are very cold. R. Abbahu went down to bathe, leaning on two servants, one at his right and one at his left. They were about to fall, when he held them up. "Rabbi!" exclaimed they bystanders, "you are so strong, yet you require the services of these men!" "Shall we then leave nothing for our old age?" he retorted. The proof is that because it says of Jacob, "Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed me (*Genesis 39:40*), when he reached old age he was smitten with sickness. Thus it says, AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THESE THINGS, THAT ONE SAID TO JOSEPH: BEHOLD, YOUR FATHER IS SICK.

R. Judah b. R. Simon said:

\* Abraham requested [the appearance of] old age, pleading before Him: "Sovereign of the Universe! When a man and his son enter a town, none know whom to honor." Said the Holy Blessed One to him: "As you live, you have asked a good thing, and I will commence with you." Thus from the beginning of the Book until here (*Genesis 24:1*) old age is not mentioned, but when Abraham arose [the appearance of] old age was granted to him: "And Abraham was old, well stricken in age" (*ib. 24:1*).

\* Isaac demanded suffering, pleading thus: "Sovereign of the Universe! When a man dies without previous suffering, Judgment threatens him; but if You did cause him to suffer, Judgment would not threaten him." Said God to him: "By your life! You have asked well, and it will commence with you." Thus suffering is not mentioned from the beginning of the Book until here, but when Isaac arose, suffering was granted to him: "And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim (*ib. 27:1*).

\* Jacob demanded illness, saying to Him: "Sovereign of the Universe! A man dies without previous illness and does not settle his affairs with his children; but if he were two or three days ill, he would settle his affairs with his children." "By your life," replied God, "you have asked well, and it will commence with you": ONE SAID TO JOSEPH: BEHOLD, YOUR FATHER IS SICK.

R. Levi said: Thus Abraham introduced old age, Isaac suffering, and Jacob illness. Hezekiah brought in a new thing-repeated sickness. "Sovereign of the Universe!" he pleaded. "You have kept man in good health until the day of his death! But if a man fell sick and recovered, fell sick and recovered, he would fully repent." Said God to him: "By your life! You have asked well, and with you it will commence." Thus it is written, "The writing of Hezekiah, King of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness" (*Isaiah 38:9*). R. Samuel b. Nahman observed: This intimates that between one sickness and another he had an illness more severe than both.

\*How can one battle against the ravages of old age when his strength has been impaired by troubles throughout his life? Thus Jacob too, having experienced so much trouble in his earlier years, could not bear up in old age and so fell sick.

\*\*The hard life we led in youth, sitting upon stones, has left its mark upon us in old age.

## Metaphors in Medical Care

Here are some metaphors that have been used in discussing/exploring suffering and/or illness. Mark 3-5 that you think may be most helpful with a "Y" and 3-5 that may not be helpful with an "N", jotting down notes about why/why not on the line after each. (Remember that what health care professionals may see as healing/helpful -- surgery, medications, treatment... -- may also entail considerable pain or suffering.)

- \_\_\_ war, battle: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ journey, travel, excursion: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ struggle, fight: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ maze, puzzle: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ symphony, music, harmony: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ script, play, dramatic role: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ dance, choreography: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ race, competition, marathon: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ challenge, test, trial, exam: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ punishment, sentence: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ course of study, lesson, teacher: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ card (or other) game: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ exile/homecoming: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ purge, cleansing, purification: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ story, narrative: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ storm, earthquake, etc.: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ recipe, cooking, food, salad: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ burden, weight, cross to bear: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ language, vocabulary: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ film, photography: \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_ gardening, landscaping, pruning: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ light, illumination: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ bank account, ledger, debts/credits: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ building, construction, renovation: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ machine, factory: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ balance, scales, equilibrium: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ poem, verse: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Exploring the Exodus as Metaphor: Some Elements of the Story**

1. Etiology and Nature of Oppression/Bondage
2. Paradoxical Experience of the Burning Bush Calling
3. The Complementary Role Models of Moses/Aaron/Miriam
4. The Ten Plagues (incl. God as supreme over the Angel of Death)
5. Balance/Interplay of Human and Divine Agency in Liberation
6. The Four Verbs of the Exodus:  
*v'hotseiti*: I will take out.....*v'hitsalti*: I will rescue.....  
*v'gaalti*: I will redeem.....*v'lakhti*: I will bring to.....
7. The Splitting of the Sea
8. The Attack of Amalek
9. The Golden Calf Incident
10. The Revelation at Sinai
11. The 40 Years of Wandering
12. The Ongoing, Never-ending Retelling and Reliving of the Story

These are some of the **metaphors that have been used to describe the work of healers, health care professionals, and other caregivers.**

Which are most positive and ego-syntonic for you?

Rate them in order of most (1) to least helpful:

- \_\_\_ restorer of something lost or missing
- \_\_\_ repairer of something broken
- \_\_\_ active advocate and interventionist
- \_\_\_ intermediary, go-between
- \_\_\_ warrior-chief
- \_\_\_ choreographer, orchestra leader
- \_\_\_ guide, leader
- \_\_\_ accountant, setting accounts aright
- \_\_\_ surrogate, representative
- \_\_\_ teacher, instructor

## A Sampling of Metaphors in Classical Jewish Texts Re: Helping/Healing/Curing

The Rabbis say: Always drive away with the left hand, but bring near with the right. Do not act like Elisha, who drove away Gehazi with both hands (*NB: Proof-text supplied here – II Kings 5:23-26*). ...Elisha had three illnesses: one because he incited the bears on the children, one because he drove away Gehazi with both hands, and the one of which he (ultimately) died (*II Kings 13:14*).

-- *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b*

When a man falls into sickness or old age or troubles, and cannot engage in his work, lo, he dies of hunger. But with Torah it is not so; for it guards him from all evil while he is young, and in old age it grants him a future and a hope (*aharit v'tikvah*). Of his youth, what does it say? 'They that wait upon Ado-nai shall renew their strength' (*Isaiah 40:31*). Of his old age, what does it say? 'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age' (*Psalms 92:14*).

-- *Bab. Talmud, Mishnah Kiddushin 4:14 (last Mishnah in the Tractate)*

"In all their afflictions He was afflicted" (*Isaiah 63:9*)\*

So God said to Moshe: "Do you not notice that I dwell in distress, when the Israelites dwell in distress? Know from this place from which I speak to you, from a bush of thorns, it is as if I stand with them in their distress." -- *Midrash Sh'mot/Exodus Rabbah 2:5*

\*No verse is more quoted by the Rabbis, nor more frequently used, than this one! And, interestingly, it seems that they willfully choose to creatively misread it!

R. Johanan had the misfortune (lit., 'was chastised,' from heaven) to suffer from gallstones for three and a half years. Once R. Hanina went to visit him. He said to him: 'How do you feel?' He replied: 'My sufferings are worse than I can bear!' He said to him: 'Don't speak so, but say "The faithful God".' When the pain was very great he used to say 'Faithful God,' and when the pain was greater than he could bear, R. Hanina used to go to him and utter an incantation which gave him relief. Subsequently R. Hanina fell ill, and R. Johanan went to see him. He said to him, 'How do you feel?' He replied: 'How grievous are my sufferings!' He said to him: 'But surely the reward for them is also great!' He replied: 'I want neither them nor their reward.' He said to him: 'Why do you not utter that incantation which you pronounced over me and which gave me relief?' He replied: 'When I was out of trouble I could be a surety for others, but now that I am myself in trouble do I not require another to be a surety for me?'

*Song of Songs Rabbah II:46*

What are his (the sufferer of *ra'atan*) symptoms? — His eyes tear, his nostrils run, spittle flows from his mouth and flies swarm about him. What is his cure? — Abaye said: Pila, ladanum, the rind of a nut tree, the shavings of a dressed hide, *melilot* and the calyx of a red date-tree. These must be boiled together and carried into a house of marble, and if no marble house is available they may be carried into a house [the walls of which are of the thickness] of seven bricks and a half. Three hundred cups [of the mixture] must then be poured upon his head until his cranium is softened, and then his brain is cut open. Four leaves of myrtle must be brought and each foot [in turn] lifted up and one [leaf] placed [beneath it]. It is then grasped with a pair of tweezers and burned; for otherwise it would return to him.

R. Johanan announced: Beware of the flies of one afflicted with *ra'atan*.

R. Zera never sat [with such a sufferer] in the same draught. R. Eleazar never entered his tent. R. Ammi and R. Assi never ate any of the eggs coming from the alley in which he lived.

R. Joshua b. Levi, however, attached himself to these [sufferers] and studied the Torah; for he said, "'Let her be like a loving hind and a graceful doe':, if [the Torah] bestows grace upon those who study it, would it not also protect them?"

*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 77b*

**Who/What Am I?**  
**Seven Voices from the Trenches**  
*Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2009*

I. I'm an amputee. I don't mean that abstractly. I held him for two years. We were constantly hugging, he loved climbing on me, and, in this city, you had to constantly hold hands, on the subway, in parks and museums and stores or else! Now a limb is gone, and I feel it all day, every day -- even in my sleep.

*A bereaved parent*

II. I'm on my knees; an abject servant of the Almighty. I'll do anything He wants. But without my Mom, my world is collapsing. So I acknowledge my lowliness and seek only to do what the Master wants, if only He will spare her.

*The adult child of a woman, clinging to life in the ICU, after a horrible accident*

III. I showed up at the repair shop today. I arrived at 1:00 -- I was scheduled for 1:10, and at 1:07 the "1:20" checked in. The receptionist-foreman at the front desk didn't look up when I spoke my name to her. Moments later: "Shapiro! Co-pay \$ 20!" Soon, I was led to the examining room and hoisted myself up, waiting to have an oil change...

*A patient reporting on a recent medical appointment*

IV. I was on Cloud Nine. I was in there for less than 20 minutes -- but it was so loving, so unpretentious, and so appreciated. Though we had never met before, and I still don't know what precisely is wrong with him medically, I felt like I had somehow blessed him, brought him a pure gift of sincere, if temporary, light.

*A Bikur Cholim volunteer, debriefing after a gratifying visit in a medical center*

V. It was the death of my final dream. I had thought that I would be a mother, but didn't meet Al until I was 39. And, of course, he packed his bags just as I turned 43. And now, at 45, this diagnosis!? I am witnessing my own funeral.

*C., whose recent biopsies were positive.*

VI. I was determined to have her experience and assimilate the profoundly good news of the recent CT Scan. After I put the images on the screen, with some intentional drama, I reached for a pointer and, with a flourish, drew circles around the areas that were now free of disease. She said, "That's it?!" I leaned in, and like Moses dividing the Reed Sea, I lifted my pointer and said, "That...is...IT!"

*A well-regarded oncologist, about a gratifying post-treatment consultation in his office*

VII. Throughout Mom's illness, as throughout her life, I was subject to abuse. Though the community saw her as a generous, and even selfless, public servant, she treated me like \*%#!?%\$. She insisted that I do this and that, and then criticized anything I tried to do. She maligned me to everyone, and she pitted my brother and his family against me. She wiped her shoes on me. I was her doormat.

*A bereaved -- and abused -- daughter, whose mother was now in hospice care.*

### **Narrative and Illness**

#### *A Really Inadequate and Yet Well-Intentioned Preliminary Listing*

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### **Narrative and Therapy**

#### *A Brief, Initial, Absolutely Incomplete and Even Idiosyncratic Bibliography Attempted by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2000*

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**More than 18 Words to Help Us in Our Reach for Metaphor(s)**  
*Evolving and Unfolding; Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2009*

**Obstacles:**

**Metaphear:** The irrational, but also normal, aversion to encapsulating experience (one's own or somebody else's) in Metaphor.

**Metaphracture:** When an experience challenges or shatters the coherence of a Metaphor

**Metaphailure:** When a relied-upon, and often central, Metaphor loses its relevance or ability to contain or influence experience

**Metaphlat:** When a Metaphor that has been offered or considered emerges as empty or unhelpful.; this may lead to...

**Metaphlop:** The deflation and collapse of a Metaphor, which can, in turn, yield a kind of 'photographic negative' that is instructive and valuable.

**Metaphake:** When you just know that a Metaphor is corrupt, deceitful, contrived, and/or downright false....

**Metaphorced** When a Metaphor is offered in a coercive manner by family or friends; or by tradition, community; society, or convention; or by internal voices such as one's Super Ego; or by any other party – but is not indigenous, home-grown, syntonic, or ultimately integrate-able...

**Metaphreeze:** When a Metaphor becomes rigid and/or inflexible, even brittle, and can offer little or no meaning;

**Resources:**

**Metapheel:** (Probably) The impetus, inspiration, guide, and glue of ones Metaphor

**Metaphishing:** The search for the Metaphor(s), often free-roaming and involving 'dips' or sampling

**Metaphinding:** The moment of locating, defining, or anchoring a Metaphor

**Metaphlow:** The shifting, turning, evolving direction(s) of ones Metaphor, a moving target but also a rich depository and map of spiritual life.

**Metaphlux:** The shifts in meaning, weight, predominance, or priority of ones Metaphors

**Metaphun:** The joy, light, even ecstasy, derived from encountering meaningful Metaphors or appreciating their meaning.

**Metaphresh:** The quality of newness, blossoming and/or opening-out that a Metaphor may bring.

**Metaphreedom:** The God-given, inalienable right to uncover, define, and modify Metaphor

**Metaphix:** The opportunity to actively adjust, re-define, reshape, or reframe the content or contours of a Metaphor

**Metaphluidity:** The ability of a Metaphor to expand or contract, to recede or confront, to take on new dimensions of meaning and depth.

**Outcomes and Process:**

**Metaphluence:** The impact of a Metaphor on one's spiritual wholeness or direction

**Metaphabulous:** The stunning awe induced by arriving at a just-right Metaphor

**Metaphacilitate:** The task of a spiritual guide or spiritual fellow-traveller in helping one to excavate, express, explore and expunge Metaphors

**Metaphoundation:** The deep rootedness of a Metaphor; The home of a Metaphor in ones spirit, but also its placement in some very profound core of life.

## Some Notes about Jewish Spiritual Assessment

*Very Much A Work in Process*

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**Jewish spiritual assessment** entails a shared exploration of an individual's life -- its structure, meaning, purpose, direction, challenges and blessings -- through the values, vocabulary, norms, and resources of Jewish tradition and community.

Participants may include:

*Rabbi/Moreh / ah Derekh*

Jew

*Haver / ah / Companion*

It may be broached/approached in various ways -- some examples:

- open-ended questions (as when R. Johanan and colleagues, in *Talmud, Berakhot 5b*, asks the sufferer, "Are your sufferings beloved to you?");
- the use of stories (personal, biblical, Hassidic, etc., etc.);
- the analysis of *mitzvot* and their personal resonance (Rabbi Simcha Weinberg's annual "spirituals");
- the exploration of Psalms;
- original writing to set a spiritual agenda (Hassidic *kvitlach*);
- the interpretation of the present juncture of the Jewish year and its meaning for the individual (e.g., Pesah, High Holidays, weekly Torah portion, etc.)

It may result in a Jewish spiritual profile that may include descriptives such as:

vulnerable (*pagi'a*) and exposed (*m'guleh*, *'arom*)  
strengthened (*hit'azer oz*) and shielded (*hugan*)

despair (*ye'ush*) and hopelessness (*hoser tikva*)  
hope (*tikva*) and trust (*bitahon*)

bitterness (*m'rirut*) and sadness (*atzvut*)  
joy (*simha*) and contentment (*sameah b'helko*)

disconnection (*hafradah*) and loneliness (*b'didut*)  
relatedness (*kirva*) and at-oneness (*ahdut*)

disintegration, disarray (*m'vulbal, hit'porerut*)  
 and fragmentation, crushed (*m'kuta, m'duka*)  
 re-instated (*shav al kano*) and reinforced, rebuilt (*m'zuyan*)

abandonment, neglect (*'azoov, zilzul*) and rejection (*saruv, mius*)  
 attended (*nishgah*) and received (*m'kubal*)

falling downward (*n'filah*) and plunging (*nital*)  
 soaring (*hit'rom'mut*) and climbing (*alah*)

overwhelmed (*nitzah, ayum*) and compressed (*dahus*)  
 awe-struck (*maleh yir'at kavod*) & expansive (*r'hav yadayim*)

encycled (*hukaf*) and linear (*m'surgal*)  
 spiralling up (*sh'vil p'tiltal*) and painterly (*tsiyyuri*)

wounded, attacked (*pagua*) and besieged (*tsur*)  
 bound up (*kashur, masur b'lev*) and released (*shihrur*)

obscured, ignored (*satum, nitnaker*) and devalued (*hafhet erekh*)  
 known (*yadua, muvan*) and validated (*kuyam*)

withdrawn (*n'sigah*) and imploding (*parotz p'nimah*)  
 exploring (*hoker*) and overflowing (*shif'a, r'vayah*)

alienated (*'ituk, harhakah*) and aberrant (*galuz, soteh*)  
 familiar (*mukar*) and normal (*bari b'ruah*)

starved (*ra'ev*) and desperate (*no'az*)  
 nurtured, satisfied (*s'va ratzon*)

meaninglessness (*hoser mashma'ut*) and emptiness (*reikut*)  
 significance (*hashivut*) and fullness (*shefa*)

chaos (*tohu va-vohu*) and aimlessness (*hoser matarah*)  
 wholeness (*shleimut*) and direction (*kivun*)

guilt (*ashmah*) and missing-the-mark (*het*)  
 return, responsiveness, responsibility (*t'shuvah*)

These understandings are critical to both the immediate Jewish spiritual response and to designing and maintaining an ongoing relationship/ intervention and are intended to further:

- a holistic, flexible understanding of the person/situation;
- a sense of challenge, purpose and direction that is shared by the different parties;
- and
- an opportunity to “differentially diagnose” and continuously re-shape agenda, foci, and strategies.

### Small Enough...

After an evening of talk, perhaps about the fringes of knowledge, or some new possibility of climbing into the minds and senses of animals, we would go out on the lawn, where we took turns at an amusing little astronomical rite. We searched until we found, with or without glasses, the faint, heavenly spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus, when one or the other of us would then recite:

“That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda.

“It is as large as our Milky Way.

“It is one of a hundred million galaxies.

“It is 750,000 light-years away.

“It consists of one hundred billion suns,  
each larger than our sun.”

After an interval, Colonel Roosevelt would grin at me and say: “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

We must have repeated this salutary ceremony forty or fifty times in the course of years, and it never palled.

From *The Book of Naturalists* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944, page 234); quoted in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) volume V, page 436, in connection with Isaiah 40:12-17.

#### Isaiah 40:12-17

12. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,  
and marked out the heavens with a span,  
and enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,  
and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?
13. Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor, has taught Him?
14. With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him,  
and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge,  
and showed to Him the way of understanding?
15. Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,  
and are counted as the small dust of the balance;  
behold, He takes up the islands as fine dust.
16. And Lebanon is not sufficient for fuel,  
nor are its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.
17. All nations before Him are as nothing;  
and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity....

### **Why/How Do Metaphors Matter?**

*A listing generated from ca. 35 participants in a workshop called "The Cast-Off Rock Became the Cornerstone: Metaphor and Meaning in Medical Journeys" at the Midrash & Medicine Conference of the Kalsman Institute on Judaism & Health of HUC-JIR and the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center.*

Opens up creativity and imagination  
Offers a common platform-language  
Second chance  
Captures the essence of an experience  
Gives some distance to observe,  
and makes connections  
Identifies and utilizes particular culture(s)  
Provides guidance and framework  
Relieves uncertainty  
Organizes many aspects of an experience  
Piece things together  
Provides perspective  
Engages the listener  
(Enables) Mirroring with your own language  
"Having a baby"  
Relieves the gravity of a situation  
Can allow lightheartedness  
Creates boundaries – encapsulates, contains  
Multi-dimensional, many senses  
Facilitates dialogue  
Gives some safety  
"Imaginal" healing  
Naming the Unnamed