



growth requires the special relationship of a mentor, a rabbi, a teacher, a spiritual director—whatever you call him or her. We all need a supportive caring and guiding friend who will walk miles with us, who will talk and listen, who will study and pray with us, ever willing to let us climb on his or her shoulders to reach higher and heavenward.

A spiritual teacher helps us learn how to reach out to others, inward to self, and upward to God in order to gain inner strength, tranquility of spirit and healing of body and soul.

Rabbi Isaac Meir or Rothenberg (1799 - 1866), known as the Rim and the founder of the Ger Hassidic dynasty, taught: "If one knows and feels that God is hiding God's face, then one naturally longs for the *Shekhinah* [God's immanent presence] and through that intense longing will eventually be able to smash all barriers to get to her." It takes time to break through those barriers. Like so many others, we often take our spiritual journey for granted, but when confronted with a challenge such as cancer, we are often reminded of our need to follow that path to find wholeness, peace and Divine love.



The Opportunity to Rediscover the Divine

The opportunity to rediscover the Divine is not restricted to a distant time and place, as some might interpret religion, the Torah/Bible or the *siddur*/prayer book. Rather, it is always present. Such discovery is dependent only on what we do with the Torah we have been given and the Torah we have learned.

We can learn to celebrate the miracles of love and relationship that mirror the Divine. And we can learn to appreciate the miracle of everyday, what the Rabbis and Sages of our tradition wanted us to understand when they suggested that we look for the opportunity to say one hundred blessings each day. Indeed, we can thank God each day that we are alive to celebrate the miracle of our being. May we all find strength in the journey and faith along the way.

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Facing Cancer as a Family

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Facing the Unexpected

"You have cancer." To say that the life of a family changes in those few seconds may seem like a hackneyed phrase, but that day in the doctor's office and the journey of the spirit that follows are the greatest challenges of one's personal faith in God.

Learning from the Torah of Life

One learns Torah when confronting illness. Of the many things one comes to understand, three may prove most helpful and effective:

1. All human beings, even rabbis, struggle, have doubts and have lapses of faith.
2. Like others, our faith is often in desperate need of repair. Perhaps it is the courage and conviction in the face of illness that allows us to pray unabashedly to God. Through prayer and the process of spiritual renewal, our faith can literally be restored to us.
3. We all need a rabbi, someone to lead us through our crises of faith, a *madrikh ruhani* (spiritual mentor) to support us in our journeys. The Rabbis of the Talmud teach (TB *Gittin* 43a): "One cannot fully understand Torah unless one has stumbled in it." Cancer causes us all to stumble, but we need not fall.

Practice Faith in God

Spirituality is the quest for meaning and purpose in life; and for many, it is in the context of connecting with something greater than one's self, such as God, creation, or the sacred. But, by definition, that "something greater" is beyond our full understanding since we are finite and fallible human beings. Since we cannot know everything, we must place our faith in that source of all in the universe for support, inspiration, knowledge and truth. In the face of life's mysteries, we can accept that it is okay to have doubts, but let's try to find the answers together.



Faith means not to passively accept what life deals us; rather, we must seize life and struggle with it, using the force of disease against itself, not against the self, which we are prone to do. Physicians do not set the parameters for our struggle. We set the terms, always striving to remain in control, trying not to allow the disease to get the upper hand. This posture is bolstered by faith in ourselves, reflective of faith in God and the covenant we share with the Divine.

Faith is the force in the world that makes for healing.



Invite the Prayer of Your Heart

Ironically, the relationship between faith and prayer is something that many of us take for granted. But while many of us recite a formal liturgy (*siddur* means "order" of the prayer service), often it lacks essential *kavvanah* (an inclination of the heart) and feels hollow, uninspired and insufficient. In addition to the fixed rite of prayer, we can learn to nurture our individual relationships with God through personal, deep-felt, spontaneous prayer. In the face of cancer, perhaps even because of it, we can allow the words articulated by those who came before us to truly sing through our own souls—while adding our own essential words—and then our prayers can become the powerful force in the universe that we always hoped and prayed they would be.

Find a Spiritual Mentor to Help Your Way

In order to grow spiritually, we have to exercise, to stretch our souls, all the time. We forget about it when we are healthy, but it is particularly important when facing such a challenge as cancer. Nurturing such