

Kavannah/Mindfulness in the Clinical Encounter Midrash and Medicine

May, 2009

I. Talmudic kavannah for rabbis preparing to teach

Berachot 28b: "On entering what does a man say? May it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that no offense may occur through me, and that I may not err in a matter of *halachah*, and that my colleagues may rejoice in me, and that I may not call pure impure or impure, pure and that my colleagues may not err in a matter of *halachah*, and that I may rejoice in them.

[Note that the standard translation of this passage is based on Rashi, who connects the phrase "*yesmechu bi chaverai*" with "*lo akashel bedevor halachah*," thereby interpreting it: "So that my colleagues may rejoice over me, i.e. over my discomfiture, and so bring sin upon themselves." I suspect (as my translation shows) that these two phrases are a request that the Torah one teaches and learns should bring only joy to speakers and hearers alike – *Rabbi Benay Lappe*]

I give thanks to Thee, O Adonai my God, that Thou hast set my portion with those who sit in the Beth Ha-Midrash and You has not set my portion with those who sit in street corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labor and they labor, but I labor and receive a reward and they labor and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction..."

II. Maimonidean prayer:

God, the most High, before I engage in my sacred vocation, healing those formed by your hands, I submit my plea before your throne of glory. Grant me strength of character and great vigor to perform my work in faith. Let not avarice blind my eyes from beholding the truth. Grant that I see in each patient only the person, without distinction between rich and poor, friend and foe, good and evil. In those afflicted, show me only the human being. If physicians more knowledgeable than I wish to teach me wisdom, give me the will to learn, for the study of medicine is limitless... May my love for my calling strengthen my spirit. Let only truth be my guide, for yielding therefrom can cause disease or even extinction of your creatures. If you please, compassionate and gracious God, grant me strength and good courage, and implant within me an unblemished spirit." *Thus prayed Moses ben Maimon, according to tradition, each day before beginning to engage in his practice of medicine.*

III. Chevra Kadisha "Anna Elohe" Meditation (adapted)

"O God of lovingkindness and mercy... You have commanded us to practice lovingkindness and truth with the dead... therefore, Adonai our God, may our courage and strength be the effects of our will, that we may engage in this sacred task as is appropriate, whether in performing *Taharah*, dressing, or burying the deceased. And keep us from any injury or obstacle such that the work of our hands not be disrupted... Help us attain the privilege of the mitzvah of *gemilut chesed v'emet* – the granting of true kindness.. and may God's lovingkindness grace us forever. (From Rabbi Stuart Kelman, *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness, Guidelines for Taharah*)

IV. Talmudic prayer for Healing

" On going in to be cupped one should say: 'May it be Thy will, O Adonai, my God, that this operation may be a cure for me, and mayest Thou heal me, for Thou are a faithful, healing God, and Thy healing is sure.'" *Berachot 60a*

VI. Treating a Patient

You have created me in Your image and blessed me with the capacity and opportunity to be a healer. Like you, I do not heal alone. You have imbued me with a desire to learn and have blessed me with teachers whose wisdom I have acquired. You have inspired those who came before me to create miraculous healing tools that I now can use for good. You surround me with all those who support the healing work to which I dedicate my life. Help me to see my patients as covenantal partners, help me to open my eyes to see each patient I meet as a whole human being. May I extend the dignity and quality of patients' lives and honor their uniqueness and infinite value. Baruch atah Adonai, rofei cholim. Blessed are You, Source of Healing.

Meditation*: Help me to bring healing to my patients even as I accept, with humility, the finite quality of life. Let me be altogether present to my patients.

Ritual: Pause before encountering a patient. Acknowledge how you are joined in your healing work by the Divine Presence, the *Shekhinah*, at the head of the bed.

Blessing: Heal us, Source of Healing, and we shall be healed. Save us and we shall be saved, for You are our song. Bring to us a healing of mind, heard and body, from all that hurts us, for You are a true and compassionate healer. Blessed are You who send Raphael, the messenger of healing, to guide my hand and my mind to care for Your creations. (p. 144-145)

* **“A meditation, or kavanah, is a classic Jewish way of preparing ourselves for a sacred moment. It quiets us, aligns us, focuses our concentration, and enables us to become more attuned to the Divine Presence. (p. 3)”**
(From *The Book of Jewish Sacred Practices: CLAL's Guide to Everyday and Holiday Rituals & Blessings*, edited by Rabbi Irwin Kula and Dr. Vanessa Ochs.)

V. God Is In The Moment by Velvel "Wally" Spiegler
(<http://www.jewishealing.com/godinmoment.html>)

Chapter two of *Berachot*, the first tractate of the Talmud, opens with the following Mishna, “He who was reading in the Torah, and the time for reading [the Shema] arrived, if he has directed his heart, he has fulfilled his obligation.” The Hebrew word that best typifies “directed his heart” is kavannah. ...Kavannah is the art of living in the moment. As Maimonides put it, “any prayer without kavannah is no prayer”. Kavannah is a state of mind that’s rarely achieved; it’s the split second of the present moment—here it is; now it’s gone. Yet with this apparent paradox, the present is where we face God. Some definitions of kavannah are: attention, awareness and mindfulness, but more precisely it is the ability to concentrate on one single object for extended stretches of time, rather than being scattered. ...The practice of concentrating on one thing at a time has always helped me to center myself. Most of the time we’re in such a frenzied state of *doing*—that we’ve lost sight of our alternate state of existence, *being*. Kavannah is the short-term state of being. How can we cultivate kavannah? A simple meditation practice comes first to mind. It requires nothing more than sitting comfortably, with eyes either open or closed, and just focusing on one solitary object at a time. ...Listening carefully to what others are saying without busily constructing thoughts in response. When you can concentrate entirely on someone else’s words, you nullify your own ego, another form of kavannah. In Hebrew, kavannah appears to originate allegorically from a root that means, “to take aim”, as in directing the heart. It is the essential ingredient in religious disciplines. ...Special meditations (kavannot) were introduced before performing certain Mitzvot, often beginning with ‘Behold I am prepared and ready to fulfill the command of my creator...’

VI. Kavannah Melodies

Ma nora hamakom haze, ma nora hamakom haze (melody by Rabbi Shefa Gold, words from Genesis – “How awesome is this place”)

B'shem Hashem elohei Yisrael, mi yemini Michael, mi s'moli Gavriel,
U'mil'fanai Uriel, u'mi-achorai Refael, V'al roshi, v'al roshi Shechinat El.
(lullaby by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, from Sh'ma al hamita, the bedtime
Sh'ma: “In the name of the God of Israel, on my right is Michael, on my left
is Gabriel, in front of me is Uriel, behind me is Refael and above my head
is the Shechinah, the Divine Presence”

Elohai neshama shenatata bi, tehorah hi
(God the soul which you have given me is pure; various composers)

Ahava v'rachamim chesed v'shalom (Melody by Bon Singer, words mean:
love, compassion, lovingkindness, and peace)

El na r'fa na la (Words from Exodus: Please, God, heal her, please!)

Kol haneshama t'hallel Yah, Halleluyah (From Psalm 150: Everything that
has breath, praise God!)

V'im ruchi g'viati, Adonai li v'lo ira
(From Adon Olam: Even if my spirit leaves, God is with me, and I am not
afraid OR – “And with my spirit, my body, God is with me, I shall not fear”)