

# Judaism and Health

A Handbook of Practical, Professional and Scholarly Resources

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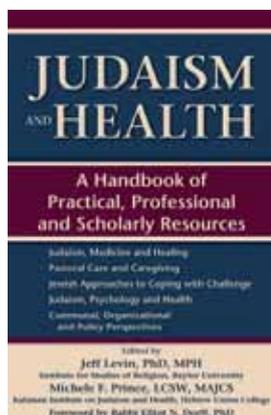
Foreword by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff PhD

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While over the years there have been publications about Jews and medicine and others about Judaism and medicine, the present book introduces the public to an approach heretofore relatively neglected – the interaction between Judaism and health. Health in its broadest definition, as expressed more than a half century ago by the World Health Organization, encompasses almost every facet of human existence, not only medical issues. Its attainment is one of the greatest challenges to humankind.

Whereas health is clearly a universal desideratum, every culture has some unique approaches and emphases. Since Jews and Judaism have had a long continuing and positive interaction with, and contributed to, medicine, it behooves us to examine the perhaps unique insights of Judaism. The present volume attempts to do this both from a theoretical and a practical approach.

When I was a medical student and physician in training my teachers and mentors paid little attention to many of the psychosocial aspects of medical care. The word “spirituality” was literally unheard of in medical conversations; however, in the last few decades more and more institutions have very gingerly begun to raise the issues of spirituality as a contributing element in the healing process for many patients. The present volume is a pioneer-



ing attempt to address spirituality in medicine from various perspectives – some practical and down to earth, others simply very personal and experiential. Personally I found the chapters uneven in quality, but perhaps not every approach will appeal to every reader.

Rabbi Simcha Weintraub takes some classic Talmudic and Midrashic sources and renders them tellingly relevant in modern therapeutic terms. I have always felt that if Judaism matters it should bring an added dimension to the care provided by a Jewish health professional. In a most moving manner Dr. Elizabeth Feldman describes how she and other health professionals consciously bring *kavanah* (intent) to each patient encounter. Would that we might all be able to function in such an inspiring manner, not just occa-

sionally, but in an ongoing manner. I believe that the care we would thus give would attain an added dimension.

There are two major sections of the book in which different authors describe their techniques in pastoral care and how they handle challenging situations. They describe the way they deal personally with the difficult task of counseling under trying conditions. I found it fascinating that of the sixteen authors of the chapters in these sections fourteen are women! Perhaps the experts on gender issues can comment on this phenomenon; it does seem to me that women are indeed different, for whatever reason, and they may be drawn in greater frequency than men to these roles. Women may indeed excel uniquely in meeting these difficult challenges. The final two sections are more practical in the conventional sense, with descriptions of psychological techniques, epidemiological data, as well as communal, organizational and policy perspectives.

The book will be found differentially useful by various health care personnel, and the authors are to be commended for this pioneering attempt to explore relatively new and important territory.

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## “There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest”

Elie Wiesel (born 1928), Romanian-born American professor, political activist and writer. A survivor of the Holocaust, Wiesel's writing is considered among the most important in Holocaust literature. When film director Orson Welles approached him about making *Night* into a feature film. Wiesel refused, saying that his widely read memoir would lose its meaning if it were told without the silences in between his words. On being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 for speaking out against violence, repression and racism, the Norwegian Nobel Committee called him a “messenger to mankind.” He has received many other prizes and honors for his work, including the Congressional Gold Medal, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the International Center in New York's Award of Excellence. Additionally, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters