YD 335:4
Rabbis Daniel Greyber & Micah Peltz

When Should a Person Come Off the Communal Prayer List?

Approved on May 18, 2023 by a vote of 19-0-1. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Jaymee Alpert, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, David J. Fine, Judith Hauptman, Joshua Heller, Barry Leff, Daniel Nevins, Micah Peltz, Joel Pitkowsky, Avram Israel Reisner, Tracee Rosen, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Ariel Stofenmacher, Ellen S. Wolintz-Fields. Voting against: None. Abstaining: Rabbi Rachel Safman.[1]

Question:
What guidance can traditional Jewish sources offer about when one should and should not pray for someone who is ill? What about mental, terminal, or chronic illnesses? When should we stop including someone's name in prayers for healing because they have crossed the threshold from illness to health? When should we stop praying for someone's healing because it cannot be reasonably expected?

Response:
A few years ago, Rabbi Greyber's wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. He prayed for her recovery before her surgeries and during her chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but it was unclear when to stop praying for her. Her hair was growing back; her strength was returning except she still had a port, and she was still getting infusions every three weeks and even when those were done, effects lingered, and they carry the fear of cancer's return.

Cancer is one of many illnesses that raise the question of what it means to be "healed." Mental illness, terminal illness and chronic illnesses, as well as other ongoing health challenges, are other examples that challenge our definition of "healing." During the pandemic, the experience of "long COVID" has been added to this already long list.

In traditional sources, praying for a person who is ill is included within the *mitzvah* of *bikkur holim*, of visiting the sick. Rabbi Moses Isserles writes in the Shulhan Arukh that one who visits the sick and does not pray for him/her has not fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *bikkur holim.*[2] He goes on to say that one can pray in any language while visiting that person.[3] This is a recognition that healing is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual. Indeed, the words of the *mi shebeirakh* prayer itself reflect this when we pray for *refuat hanefesh u'refuat haguf* – a complete healing of soul and body.

Jewish tradition places great value on our praying for healing on behalf of those who are sick. One of the earliest sources for the importance and effectiveness of such prayer is

---

[1] *The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.*
[2] Shulhan Arukh Yoreh De'ah 335:4, Beit Yosef in the name of Ramban
[3] SA YD 335:5. But when someone is praying for the sick not in the presence of the person who is ill, it should be in Hebrew.

found in the story of Abraham. In Genesis 20, Abraham and Sarah journey to Gerar and Abraham says Sarah is his sister, not his wife (Genesis 20:2). King Abimelekh of Gerar has Sarah brought to him, but God visits him in a dream and tells him he will die because Sarah is, in fact, a married woman. Abimelekh is forgiven, and then Torah says:

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱ-לֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאַמְהֹתָיו וַיֵּלֵדוּ: כִּי־עָצֹר עָצַר יי בְּעַד כָּל־רֶחֶם לְבֵית אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרָה אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָהָם:

> *Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his female servants, so that they bore children; for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.*[4]

Immediately afterward, chapter 21 begins with word that God remembered Sarah as God had promised. Rashi comments:

סָמַךְ פָּרָשָׁה זוֹ לְלַמֶּדְךָ, שֶׁכָּל הַמְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹתוֹ דָּבָר, הוּא נַעֲנֶה תְּחִלָּה (בבא קמא צ"ב), שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל וְגוֹ', וּסְמִיךְ לֵיהּ וה' פָּקַד אֶת שָׂרָה, שֶׁפְּקָדָהּ כְּבָר קֹדֶם שֶׁרִפֵּא אֶת אֲבִימֶלֶךְ:

> "This section is juxtaposed to teach you that whoever prays for mercy on behalf of another when that person him/herself is also in need of that very thing for which s/he prays on the other's behalf, will him/herself first receive a favorable response from God, for it is said (at the end Genesis 20), "And Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his wife and they bore children" and immediately afterwards it states, "And God remembered Sarah," i.e. God had already remembered her before God healed Abimelech."[5]

While this teaching seems to argue for the instrumental or utilitarian value of praying for another (if I pray for someone else, my prayers will be answered), we can understand the teaching more broadly as telling us the prayers for others are praiseworthy and of inherent value. This is just one of many examples from our tradition about the importance of praying for those who are ill.

We will begin with a brief review of ways of saying a *mi shebeirakh* for those who are ill. Then we will address who should be included in our traditional prayers for healing, and other options for those whose illnesses may not resonate with the prayer. Finally, we will discuss what "healing" might exactly mean, and how to determine when to remove someone from a communal prayer list.

At the end of the *teshuvah* there are four appendices with *mi shebeirakh* prayers that speak to different healing needs. As we will show, these prayers may be said in private or public settings.

---

[4] Genesis 20:17-18
[5] Rashi on Genesis 21:1

How Do We Pray for Someone who is Ill?

We often describe praying for someone who is ill with the words: "I'll say a mi *shebeirakh* for you." While the words "*mi shebeirakh"* literally mean "May the One who blessed…," and it can refer to several prayers for people's welfare that begin this way, colloquially throughout the Jewish world this has come to specifically refer to the *mi shebeirakh* for healing.[6] This is what we mean when we refer to a "*mi shebeirakh"* in this paper.

While visiting the sick and praying by their side is an important *mitzvah*, our questions here are about praying in a communal prayer setting for those who are ill . Our liturgy provides us with two opportunities for doing this, which we will call communal prayer and individual prayer. Communal prayer refers primarily to the practice of reciting a *mi sheberakh* for those who are ill as part of the Torah reading. The standard practice is that the rabbi or gabbai recites the liturgy and then reads a list of names kept by the community – often the synagogue administrative staff – after which people in the congregation can offer additional names either by approaching the bimah and whispering them to the gabbai who repeats them aloud, or by remaining in place and saying names aloud as the gabbai signals to people in the congregation that it is their turn, after which the gabbai concludes the prayer.

Individual prayer refers to individuals praying for the healing of others, either by including people's names in the eighth blessing of their recitation of the Amidah, or by means of informal prayer such as the recitation of psalms on a sick person's behalf, or just keeping a person's need for healing in mind and carrying them in their heart. Individual prayer for a person who is ill can take place either with or without anyone else's knowledge, including the knowledge of the person who is being prayed for.

Though not required, it is a widespread custom to say the name of the person who is ill when saying a *mi shebeirakh.* Most commonly we use the person's name with his mother's name. So if the *holeh* is named Yaakov and his mother is Rivkah, we would pray for Yaakov ben Rivkah. Using the mother's name for a *mi shebeirakh* is based on a situation described in the Talmud.[7] Commentaries offer many reasons as to why this is, many of which have to do with associating motherhood with mercy and healing.[8] According to Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, if one does not know the mother's name, one may use the father's name instead.[9] In our egalitarian context, using both parents' names is preferred.

Who should we be praying for?

It is worth considering the following rabbinic text:

---

[6] There are *mi shebeirakh* prayers for B'nai Mitzvah, conversions, *aufrufs*, anniversaries, soldiers at war, general well-being and many other occasions. See pages 439-445 in *Siddur Lev Shalem* for examples.
[7] Shabbat 66b
[8] Ben Ish Chai, Sefer Ben Yehoyada Brakhot 55b. See Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's critique on this in Yabia Omer OH 2:11.
[9] Rabbi Ovadia Yosef Yabia Omer Orah Hayim 2:11. Hazon Ish adds that one may also use a person's surname if necessary (Orhot Rabbeinu 1, page 64).

כִּי נָפֵיק, אוֹמֵר: "בָּרוּךְ. אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה, וּבָרָא בּוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים, חֲלָלִים חֲלָלִים, גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ אִם יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשָׁר לַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ" מַאי חָתֵים? אָמַר רַב: "רוֹפֵא חוֹלִים". אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: קָא שַׁוִּינְהוּ אַבָּא לְכוּלֵּי עָלְמָא קְצִירֵי. אֶלָּא: "רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר". רַב שֵׁשֶׁת אָמַר: "מַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת". אָמַר רַב פָּפָּא: הִלְכָּךְ נֵמְרִינְהוּ לְתַרְוַיְיהוּ — "רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת".

> Upon exiting [a bathroom], one says: Blessed…Who formed a human being in wisdom and created in him many orifices and cavities. It is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory that were one of them to be ruptured or blocked, it would be impossible to survive and stand before You. The Gemara asks: With what should one conclude this blessing? Rav said: One should conclude: Blessed…Healer of the sick. Shmuel said: Abba [Rav] has rendered everyone sick! Rather, one should say: Healer of all flesh. Rav Sheshet said: One should conclude: Who performs wondrous deeds. Rav Pappa said: Therefore, let us say them both: Healer of all flesh, Who performs wondrous deeds.[10]

This text illustrates how the rabbis avoided describing normal bodily functions as illness in our prayers. It may be instructive for this text to be taught to a community, so that members avoid asking to be prayed for, or praying for others, when the body functions normally. Not every scrape or cold requires a prayer for healing.

With that said, we should pray for whomever asks us to, or whomever we think needs healing. Do we need consent from the person who is ill, or from a proxy, to pray for them? Additionally, should physical and mental illnesses be covered by the same prayer? Chronic illnesses? What if someone is diagnosed with a terminal illness, should we still say a *mi shebeirakh*? We will discuss each of these situations below.

Consent

The Mishnah in Yoma 8:5 at first seems to indicate that whether a person is sick or not is not left up to the person themselves but rather to medical experts:

> חוֹלֶה מַאֲכִילִין אוֹתוֹ עַל פִּי בְקִיאִין. וְאִם אֵין שָׁם בְּקִיאִין, מַאֲכִילִין אוֹתוֹ עַל פִּי עַצְמוֹ, עַד שֶׁיֹּאמַר דַּי

"One who is ill, we feed him under the guidance of experts, and if there are no experts present, we feed him until he says "enough".

Our colleague, Rabbi Josh Cahan, has demonstrated that rabbinic texts are more nuanced:

> [W]e find that patient self-knowledge, as a counterweight to physician expertise, has played a not insignificant role in at least one corner of Jewish law. At least from this

[10] Berakhot 60b

> Talmudic discussion, the understanding of autonomy in the Jewish legal tradition should be regarded as nuanced…[11]

In the rabbinic discussion about fasting on Yom Kippur, the rabbis' use of the statement, "The heart knows its own bitterness" was "not meant merely to put the patient on par with the experts." Rather, the patient possesses "relevant knowledge and should be able to participate in the decision." "It conveys that the patient possesses knowledge about his own condition that is of a totally different nature than any expert's knowledge about it." "[T]he patient knows something about herself that no one else, no matter how skilled in the medical arts, can know."[12]

In the case in Yoma, the stakes are high: if a person is allowed to define themselves as not ill, they may fast on Yom Kippur and put their health in jeopardy. One can assume this is the reasoning behind the Mishnah's ruling to deny patient autonomy in determining whether or not they are ill.

In our case, at least when it comes to individual prayer, we may say that the stakes are lower. We seek to determine who decides when a person is ill and should thereupon become the object of our prayers. Unless we assume a direct causal connection between our prayers and a person's physical health – i.e., that person must let us pray for them, otherwise they will die! - we cannot presume that our allowing a person to define themselves as not ill will put them at physical risk. If a patient defines themselves as not ill and we pray for them anyways, we can assume that our "extra" individual prayers undertaken by people in the community do no harm. If I care about a person and am worried about their health, even if they do not see themselves as sick, my individual prayers on their behalf – even without their knowledge or consent - can hardly be seen to be harmful.

But when it comes to communal prayer, the situation becomes more complicated. If a patient does not define themselves as ill and we include them in communal prayers, we are denying a person agency in how they define themselves within the community and risk embarrassing them publicly, a sin the rabbis equated to the shedding of blood.[13] One concept that should guide our thinking therefore is: a person should only be the object of communal prayers with their consent.

For this reason, community members should not call the synagogue office and place people on the public *mi shebeirakh* list without the knowledge and consent of the person who is being prayed for. When people are being prayed for, they should be asked if they want their names listed in Hebrew or English or both. If the communal list is used both orally during services and also publicly displayed – in the lobby, in synagogue printed publications or emails, or on the synagogue website, patients must give consent for where

---

[11] Zackary Berger and Rabbi Joshua Cahan, "Patient Autonomy in Talmud Context: The Patient's 'I Must Eat' on Yom Kippur in the Light of Contemporary Bioethics. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27357582/
[12] Ibid.
[13] Bava Metzia 58

and how they are to be listed. The only exception would be in the case of a public figure whose illness is well known in the public square.

Chronic and Mental Illness

Earlier in this *teshuvah*, we noted how the traditional *mi shebeirakh* prayer asks for *refuat hanefesh u'refuat haguf*, a healing of soul and a healing of body. Many see this covering all bases. In other words, by asking for "a healing of soul and a healing of body," we are asking for healing for mental and/or physical illness.[14] There are others, however, who have suggested that chronic and mental illnesses are not best served through the traditional prayer. The words of the prayer, along with the traditional wish for a *refuah shelaymah,* a complete healing, might not apply with a person in this situation. Given that there is a long history of writing *mi shebeirakh* prayers for different situations (examples below), these modern prayers are welcome additions to our liturgy.

Regarding chronic illness, our colleague, Rabbi Julie Pelc, wrote a moving article where she described her own health struggle that eventually resulted in a permanent disability, and how the traditional *mi shebeirakh* prayer falls short. She writes:

> "I think of my co-worker with diabetes, a friend with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, an aunt struggling with chronic clinical depression, a classmate with lupus and ulcerative colitis and an acquaintance living with HIV. I think of my own incomplete recovery. To pray for "complete healing" for those whose ailments cannot or will not ever be completely "healed" seems audacious and even offensive. My co-workers, colleagues, family, friends, and I will negotiate medications, medical appointments, dietary needs, and fears throughout our lives. We will face unexpected side effects, professional and personal repercussions of our special needs, and stigma from many well-meaning strangers every day. Our everyday reality is one of incomplete health; yet, we are not entirely "sick", either.
>
> To pray for the "complete healing of body and spirit" is to misjudge the realities of many people's lives. To understand or redefine "healing" as "making peace with one's fate" is to alter the meaning of the prayer and it may also serve to ignore our specific kind of suffering and its ever-changing realities."[15]

---

[14] In his synagogue, Rabbi Greyber preserves the language of the traditional Hebrew *mi shebeirakh*, but when reading the translation of the prayer, he adds language that explicitly names other types of illness in an effort to help as many people as possible feel acknowledged by the prayer. "May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless and heal all those who suffer from illness, from physical, spiritual and emotional distress, from illness both acute and chronic, including…"

[15] Rabbi Julie Pelc, "Jewish Prayer for Persisting: Moving Beyond Misheberach." http://kalsman.huc.edu/articles/Julie%20Pelc%20-%20Jewish%20Prayer%20for%20Persisting%20Aug.%2008.pdf accessed August 2022

Rabbi Pelc goes on to provide a new prayer, rooted in narratives from the Tanakh, that better speaks to those who are chronically ill. This prayer is included in Appendix 1 and is an appropriate option to recite in individual or communal prayer.

Mental illness is another area where some might feel that the traditional *mi shebeirakh* prayer falls short. The recent mental health crisis has also led to the creation of new *mi shebeirakh* prayers specifically for those with mental health challenges. These prayers, too, included in Appendix 2, are appropriate options to recite in individual or communal prayer settings.[16]

The Terminally Ill – Tefillat Shav?
Is there a point where saying a *mi shebeirakh* is not appropriate? In the ninth chapter of Mesekhet Berakhot , the Mishnah describes a *tefillat shav,* or "vain prayer:"

> הַצּוֹעֵק לְשֶׁעָבַר, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפִלַּת שָׁוְא. כֵּיצַד. הָיְתָה אִשְׁתּוֹ מְעֻבֶּרֶת, וְאָמַר, יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁתֵּלֵד אִשְׁתִּי זָכָר, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפִלַּת שָׁוְא. הָיָה בָא בַדֶּרֶךְ וְשָׁמַע קוֹל צְוָחָה בָּעִיר, וְאָמַר יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיוּ אֵלּוּ בְּנֵי בֵיתִי, הֲרֵי זוֹ תְּפִלַּת שָׁוְא

> And one who cries out over the past [in an attempt to change that which has already occurred,] it is a vain prayer. One whose wife was pregnant and he says, "May it be God's will that my wife gives birth to a boy!" This is a vain prayer. One who was walking on the path home and heard the sound of a scream in the city, and says, "May it be God's will that this is not from my house!," This is a vain prayer.[17]

A *tefillat shav* is a prayer over something that has already been determined, and therefore cannot be reversed. Many diagnoses of terminal illness can involve conditions where a person can live consciously, even in relative comfort, for months and even years. In these cases, we would say that saying a *mi shebeirakh* for the person with the terminal illness is not a *tefillat shav*. Even though a complete physical healing might be impossible, a spiritual healing certainly is not. Additionally, it provides language for the loved ones of the terminally ill person to express their emotions. Yet there is a risk for loved ones who continue to say a *mi shebeirakh* in this case. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach articulates this:

> Our master counseled not to increase public communal prayer, etc. where the doctors had already abandoned hope of healing the ill person naturally, even where it was a great figure... If their prayers would not be answered and the patient would not be healed, there is concern, God forbid, for weakness of faith. And he instructed those who asked that in such cases they should pray "that He help the patient and

[16] The Blue Dove Foundation has produced many contemporary *mi sheberakh* prayers in addition to the included prayer for mental health. They also have *mi sheberakhs* for those with eating disorders, grief, recovery for substance abuse, and even overworked camp counselors!
https://thebluedovefoundation.org/mental-health-mi-sheberach-prayers/
[17] Mishnah Berakhot 9:3

> help his family", and that they not ask for healing, specifically, and God will do that which is good in His eyes.[18]

While saying a *mi shebeirakh* for someone with a terminal illness is not a *tefillat shav*, it can come with risks. Prayers like the one Rabbi Auerbach suggested, or similar prayers of support for the patient and family, would also be appropriate. See appendix 3 for examples.

While brain death is not a terminal illness, comfort in its diagnosis can be found in prayer.[19] Would that be a *tefillat shav*? Professor Moshe Halbertal reports how Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv applied *tefillat shav* to brain death.

> I was told that when Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who is widely considered to be the greatest living rabbinic authority in Israel, was asked whether one could pray for the recovery of someone who was brain dead, he immediately answered, "This is a vain prayer!" In that ruling, he followed his principled position that praying for miracles is not allowed.[20]

If, God forbid, someone is braindead, the rabbis' understanding of *tefillat shav* can be an important guide. While a conversation about whether or not such a person should be kept on a communal list is unimportant in such a context, if the family asks, the rabbi can use *tefillat shav* as a framework for helping family members begin the process of mourning and letting go of their loved one. In a case where someone will be removed from life support and the *viddui* prayer is being recited by the rabbi or another, the prayer should not include the phrase, "שֶׁתִּרפָּא אֶת _____ הָחוֹלֶה הַמִּסְכֵּן הַזֶּה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה" / "May You heal ___a dangerously ill person with a complete healing."

When should someone come off the *mi shebeirakh* list?

The short answer to this question is: when a person passes away or when they say so. A community should have a regular practice of reaching out to people on the list, or those who asked that names of loved ones be added to the list, first and foremost to ask after the welfare of the person and what needs they might have and what support can be provided. We remind readers that praying for someone who is ill falls under the rubric of the mitzvah of *bikkur holiim*, to visit and care for those who are ill. Such calls should also inquire as to whether the patient's name should remain on the list. It should be emphasized that such calls should not become rote. Staff and volunteers should receive training so that the calls are made with the utmost care and sensitivity. If a person reaffirms that they want to remain on the communal list, their name should be kept on. If a person chooses to come off because they understand themselves to have healed, the caller can offer gratitude and should reinforce that the community is here for them in case, God forbid, illness returns.

---

[18] Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Halihot Shlomo, Tefillah 8:15 footnote 56

[19] Though in Jewish law it can be more complicated. See the addendum that Rabbi Daniel Nevins wrote to his own teshuvah Rabbi Daniel Nevins, "*Ad Haikhan Hu Bodek?* Contemporary Criteria for the Declaration of Death," approved by the CJLS on September 8, 2004 (12-0-1).

[20] Moshe Halbertal, "The Limits of Prayer," Jewish Review of Books (Summer 2010). See also https://rabbiweiner.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Verapo-Yerape-Is-Prayer-Ever-Futile-PDF.pdf

Depending on the severity of the illness, the caller can offer the patient an opportunity to receive an Aliyah and recite *birkat hagomel* for having recovered from illness.

Such an open-ended stance does create problems. A patient must give consent to be listed on our communal list and, once s/he does so, s/he should remain on the list until s/he is ready to be removed. But the community has rights too! In some communities, rabbis and gabbaim are handed a list of names to read that reaches 40, 50, even 60 or more names. Such a list takes a significant amount of time to read such that it becomes a *tirha detzibura*, a burden upon the community.

One of the primary sources for the concept of *tirha detzibura* is a Mishnah in Yoma 68b where we learn that the High Priest read two sections from his *sefer* Torah, one from *Aharei Mot* and the other from *Emor*, after which a third section from Parashat *Pinhas* was read by heart. The Torah was not rolled to the relevant location [in Pinhas] "because of the honor of the congregation." Rashi explains there that the concern was "on account of the congregation's honor, for they would have to wait in passive silence [while the Torah was rolled]." Rambam in Laws of Prayer 12:23 rules that a Sefer Torah must not be rolled during prayers in order to avoid *tirha detzibura.*[21] In our case, a community passively listening to a long list of names being read can be considered a *tirha detzibura* and therefore avoided.

Reading a long list of names should also be avoided because how we enact prayer in our community is a living manifestation of our theology. Reading a long communal list of names risks saying things about prayer and God that we do not mean. Why? If the communal list is collected by the synagogue staff, it inevitably includes names of people who are unrelated to the community of people present on any particular Shabbat morning. For example, a member of the congregation [x] may have a family member [y] in another town who is ill and asks that that person's name be added to our communal list. If [x] is not present in synagogue on a Shabbat morning and [y]'s name is read on the communal list, it is likely that nobody in the congregation who is listening will have any idea who [y] is – whether their name is read in Hebrew or in English.[22] Reading [y]'s name – and a long list of such names that are disconnected from the lived, present prayer community - risks having our prayers appear as magical incantations, that somehow by saying a name it will magically activate healing within God that will make its way to that person in another part of the world. It is true: nobody knows the mind of God or whether and how our prayers may in fact "work" this way. But how we structure our communal prayers sends important messages about what we believe about God, and we believe we should avoid teaching our communities such "magical thinking."

---

[21] This ruling is affirmed in Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 144:3

[22] In Rabbi Greyber's congregation, congregants are invited to say a person's name in Hebrew and/or in English and, if a person feels comfortable, to add their relationship to the person. But including so much information on a publicly read communal list would only add to the length of time dedicated to reading the list and therefore to the *tirha detzibura*. Rabbi Peltz's congregation gives people the option to say a person's name in Hebrew or English out loud or privately during the public prayer.

It is acceptable for the prayer leader to pause when saying a *mi shebeirakh* and ask people to add names privately at their seats. Another option is to go around the room and ask people to say the name of the person out loud. Though this takes time, it is more engaging and personal than reading a list from the *bimah.* It also lets the community know of a need for comfort because people in the congregation should notice who is including names in the prayer and ideally offer to support them. Some congregations also ask people to add their relationship to the person they are praying for as well.

This resonates with the long history of communal *mi shebeirakh* prayers, and here we are not just referring to those for healing, of functioning less as speaking to God and more as speaking to each other. Two examples suffice to demonstrate the point. The first is a *mi shebeirakh* Prayer for those who refrain from the wine that the Sages have forbidden (Moravia):[23]

> May the One Who Blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon and all of the *tzaddikim* and pious, and all of those who abstain and restrain themselves according to the Commandments by which Israel has been commanded, may he bless and extol and exalt to the highest every man and woman of Israel who abstains from the wine prohibited by the Sages, of blessed memory. By merit of this commandment may the Holy One, blessed be He, give them children and grandchildren to the end of all generations who are sages and intellects who occupy themselves with Torah and commandments for their own sake. May they be teachers of wisdom in Israel, meriting that bounteous good that is hidden away for the *tzaddikim* in the world to come and meriting that wine that is reserved for them. May no obstacle, sin, or mishap occur through them and may He protect and save them from all harm, illness, and pain, sending blessing and success to all of their deeds, giving life and peace now and always. And we say, Amen.[24]

The second is a *mi shebeirakh* prayer for those who refrain from talking in the synagogue. (Buczacz)

> May the One Who Blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bless all of those who restrain themselves from talking in the synagogue during prayer from the time that the leader begins with "Baruch She'amar" through the end of the Amidah. On account of this merit may the Holy One, Blessed be He, hear their prayers and fulfill their hearts desires for good, Amen.[25]

One can reasonably conclude that a communal prayer blessing those who do not speak during prayers is at least as much a message from the communal leadership to the congregation as it is a message to God. Similarly, a communal prayer blessing those who

---

[23] CJLS's teshuvah on this subject renders this *mi shebeirakh* moot for us today. Rabbi Elliot Dorff, "The Use of All Wines," approved by the CJLS on December 4, 1985 (13-2-0).

[24]Cited in: אברהם יערי. "תפילות מי שברך השתלשלותן מנהגיהן ונוסחאותיהן" דפים 122, 241-242 Accessed March 20, 2023.

[25] Written by Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann ben Nathan Halevi Heller in the 17th century. For obvious reasons, this *mi shebeirakh* has settled into the dustbin of history. (Macy Nulman The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer 245)

refrain from a particular wine is as much as message to the community as it is speaking to God.

Our communal prayer for those who are sick serves an important communal purpose of notifying the community of who is sick and therefore who in the community should be the object of our *bikkur holim* efforts. Additionally, it calls attention to who in the community is praying for someone who is ill and therefore should be the object of our attention and care.

For these reasons, it is advisable to make the communal list public. Some communities include it in the printed Shabbat announcement sheets, others include it on their website or in their weekly email. Others post it in the lobby. As described above, names should only be included on this list with a person's consent, lest a person be publicly embarrassed[26]. Names can be listed in Hebrew and/or English. We also recommend including the relationship of that person to the community if the person is not in the community themselves so that others can reach out and be of support when a loved one is ill. How the name is listed must also be done with the consent of the person being prayed for.[27]

In an effort to balance the challenges of keeping up with those whose names are on the list and communal prayer realities, many congregations reset their *mi shebeirakh* lists regularly. By reset, we mean they clearly communicate to the congregation that everyone will be removed from the list unless instructed otherwise. Though there is no set amount of time for someone to remain on the list, there are different customs that have developed to reset the list. Some have a custom of doing it every month, on Rosh Hodesh, while others do it twice a year, on Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Whatever the reset timeframe is, it is advisable to determine a reset routine that can make sure that the list is as up to date as possible, while also not becoming too long.

Psak

1. Individuals recovering from illness can consider themselves healthy and therefore no longer in need of prayers for healing. Nevertheless, we should include whoever asks us to in our public prayers and, individually, we may pray for whoever we think needs healing.

2. A person must give consent to be included in communal lists for *mi shebeirakh* prayers. That consent must include whether that person's name should be said in Hebrew or English and their relationship to a member of the congregation. If the sick person is unable to give consent, then it can be granted by a loved one or trusted friend. Otherwise, the privacy of the person must be respected, and the name not recited aloud.

---

[26] As stated above, illness not something about which to be embarrassed but a person must be allowed to define for themselves what physical and emotional/mental ailments they want disclosed to a community.
[27] One person in Rabbi Greyber's congregation wanted her name to be on the communal list but she chose to have her name listed in Hebrew because she did not want the congregation to be aware of her illness.

3. It is appropriate to include those with chronic or mental illness with communal *mi shebeirakh* prayers. *Mi shebeirakh* prayers that have been composed for these or other specific illnesses may also be used if the individual or/community chooses, and ought to be considered for inclusion in future RA publications.

4. One may recite a *mi shebeirakh* for one who is terminally ill, but it may be advisable, based on the situation, to instead pray for that person's and their family's needs.

5. A community should determine a fixed time to reset their communal list.

The prayers in these appendices are meant to serve as resources for use in private or public settings.

Appendix 1

Jewish Prayer for Persisting
Rabbi Julie Pelc

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת _____ בֶּן/בַּת _____
חַזֵּק אֶת לִיבּוֹ/לִיבָּה וְתַרִים אֶת יָדוֹ/יָדָה בִּבְרָכוֹת שְׁנָתַתָּ לְיַעֲקֹב, לְיוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד,
לְדָנִיאֵל הַנָּבִיא, לְתָמַר אִמּוֹ שֶׁל פֶּרֶץ וְזָרַח, לְתָמַר בִּתוֹ שֶׁל דָּוִד, לְמִרְיַם הַנְּבִיאָה,
וּלְנָעֳמִי. הוּא יִתֵּן חֵן וַחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים; אַהֲבָה, אַחֲוָה, שָׁלוֹם, וְרֵעוּת. בִּמְהֵרָה ה' אֱ-
לֹהֵינוּ, שְׁמַע קוֹלֵינוּ קַבֵּל נָא תְּפִילַתֵּינוּ, וּשְׁמוֹר אֶת רוּחוֹ/רוּחָה, נַפְשׁוֹ/נַפְשָׁה,
וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ/נִשְׁמַתָּה, בִּכְבוֹד גְּבוּרָתֶךָ, חַסְדֶּךָ וְרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרָבִּים, הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ אוֹמְרִים
לוֹ/לָהּ: "חֲזַק וֶאֱמַץ." וּפְרוֹשׂ עָלֵינוּ סֻכַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ. וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

"Misheberach avotenu v'imotenu, hu yivarekh et _____ben/bat _____. Hazek et libo/libah ve-tarim et yado/yadah bivrakhot she-natata l'Ya'akov, l'Yonatan ve-David, l'Daniel ha-Navi, l'Tamar imo shel Peretz v'Zarah, l'Tamar bito shel David, l'Miriam ha-Neviyah, u'l'Naomi. Hu yiten ota/oto hen vahesed v'rahamim; ahavah, aha'ava, shalom, v'reut. Bimheira Adonai Elohenu, sh'ma kolenu, kabel na tefilateinu, u'sh'mor et ruho/ruhah, nafsho/nafshah, venishmato/nishmatah. Bikhvod gevuratekha, hasdekhah, ve-rahamekhah harabim, hinei anahnu omrim lo/la: "Hazak v'Amatz." U'fros aleinu sukkat sh'lomekha. V'nomar: Amen."

"May the One who blessed our fathers and our mothers, bless _____ son/daughter of _____: strengthen his/her heart and raise up his/her hand, with the blessings you gave to Yaakov, to Yonatan and David, to Daniel the Prophet, to Tamar mother of Peretz and Zarah, to Tamar daughter of David, to Miriam the Prophetess, and to Naomi. May God give him/her grace, compassion and loving-kindness; love, harmony, peace, and companionship. Speedily, Adonai our God, hear our voices, take up our prayers, and watch over his/her life-force, spirit, and soul. With respect to your power, your loving-kindness, and your great compassion, behold we say to him/her: "Be strong and of good courage." Spread over us all Your shelter of peace. And let us say: *Amen*."

Appendix 2

Mi Shebeirakh for Mental Health from The Blue Dove Foundation
https://thebluedovefoundation.org/resource/mi-sheberach-for-mental-health/

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר קָרָא לָנוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱ-לֹהִים" הוּא יְבָרֵךְ וִירַפֵּא אֶת אֵלּוּ מִבֵּינֵינוּ הַנֶּאֱבָקִים בָּרְוָחָה הַנַּפְשִׁית. יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁיַּכִּירוּ בְּכוֹחָם וּבְחָסְנָם, וְיִתְיַחֲסוּ לְעַצְמָם בִּסְלִיחָה וּבְסַבְלָנוּת. שֶׁיִּמְצְאוּ עֶזְרָה, חֶמְלָה וּמַשְׁאַבִּים בְּעֵת צָרָתָם. הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא יַעֲנִיק לָאֵלּוּ מֵאִתָּנוּ שֶׁאֵינָם חוֹוִים קֹשִׁים נַפְשִׁיִּים אֶת הַכֹּחַ, הַחֹסֶן וְהַיְכֹלֶת לְהַקְשִׁיב לְלֹא שִׁפּוּט וּמִתּוֹךְ כַּוָּנָה, וְלַתֶּת לָהֶם אֶת הַיְכֹלֶת לְהַבְחִין בַּאֲנָשִׁים אֲחֵרִים שֶׁנֶּאֱבָקִים. יְהִי רְצוֹן שֶׁנִּצּוֹר קְהִלּוֹת שֶׁמְּקַבְּלוֹת, מְרוֹמְמוֹת וְתוֹמְכוֹת בְּאֵלֶּה שֶׁבֵּינֵינוּ הַנֶּאֱבָקִים. הַשְּׁתָּא בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

May the One who blessed our ancestors and named us *Yisrael,* as it is said, “for you have striven with divine beings” (Genesis 32:29)] bless and heal those among us who struggle with mental well-being. May it be Your will that they acknowledge their own strength and resilience, treat themselves with forgiveness and patience, and find help, compassion, and resources when they need them. And, may the Blessed Holy One grant those of us who aren’t experiencing mental health issues the strength, resilience and capacity to listen without judgment and with intention, and the ability to notice when others are struggling. May it be your will that we create communities that accept, uplift, and support those among us who are struggling Now, speedily, and in a time soon to come. Let us say: *Amen*.

Appendix 3

Prayers for Terminally Ill by Rabbi Robert Scheinberg

Mi shebeirakh for a terminally ill person:

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הָרֹפֵא לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעַצְּבוֹתָם, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ וְיִשְׁמוֹר עַל הַחוֹלֶה _____ בְּעֵת צָרָתוֹ. הקב"ה יְמַלֵּא רַחֲמִים עָלָיו וְיִשְׁלַח לוֹ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם בִּרְכַּת שָׁלוֹם וְשַׁלְוָה וְהַשְׁקֵט וָבֶטַח, רְפוּאָת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְאִמּוּץ הָרוּחַ וְחִיזּוּק נִשְׁמָתוֹ הַטְּהוֹרָה, בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאוּמוֹת הָעוֹלָם. וְיֶחֱזַק אֶת כֹּל שֶׁעוֹסְקִים בְּצָרְכָיו, וְיָגֵן עָל קְרוֹבָיו הָיְקָרִים אָשֶׁר נַפְשׁוֹ קְשׁוּרִים בְּנַפְשָׁם, הַשְׁתָּא בָּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

May the One who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, the One who is the Healer of broken hearts and binds up our wounds, may God bless and watch over _____ during his time of need. May the Kadosh Barukh Hu bestow mercy upon him and send him from heaven the blessings of peace, tranquility, quiet and security. May he achieve a healing of the soul, strengthening of spirit and of his pure soul, with all others who are ill in Israel and among the nations of the world. May God strengthen all those who are taking care of his needs, as well as his dear family whose souls are bound up in together, we hope and pray that healing is at hand. And let us say: Amen.

Insertion into the *refuah berakhah* of the Amidah, for terminally ill person:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֵאלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,הָרֹפֵא לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעַצְּבוֹתָם, שֶׁתִּשְׁמוֹר עַל הַחוֹלֶה _____ בְּעֵת צָרָתוֹ, בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאוּמוֹת הָעוֹלָם. וְיֶחֱזַק אֶת כֹּל שֶׁעוֹסְקִים בְּצָרְכָיו, וְיָגֵן עָל קְרוֹבָיו הָיְקָרִים אָשֶׁר נַפְשׁוֹ קְשׁוּרִים בְּנַפְשָׁם.

May it be your will Adonai our God and God of ancestors, the One who is the Healer of broken hearts and Who binds up our wounds, that you watch over _____ in his time of need, along with all others who are ill in Israel and among the nations of the world. May God strengthen all those who are taking care of his needs, as well as his dear family whose souls are bound up in together.

Appendix 4

A Prayer for Those in Need

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב,שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ וִירָפֵא אֶת הַחוֹלִים_____

(Names to be added from the congregation, then pause before continuing)

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא יִמָּלֵא רַחֲמִים עָלֵהֶם,לְהַחֲזִיקָם וּלְרַפֹּאתָם, וְיִשְׁלַח לָהֶם מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְכֹל אֵבָרֵהֶם וְגִידֵהֶם, בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, רְפוּאַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ, וּרְפוּאַת הַגּוּף, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

Mi shebeirakh avoteinu Avraham Yitzhak v'Ya'akov, Sarah Rivkah Rahel v'Leah, Hu y'vareikh v'y'rapei et ha-holim:

(Names to be added from the congregation, then pause before continuing)

HaKadosh Barukh Hu y'malei rahamim aleihem, l'hahazikam u'l'rapotam, v'yishlakh lahem m'heirah refuah sheleimah l'khol eivareihem v'gideihem b'tokh sha'ar holey yisrael, refuat hanefesh u'refuat ha-guf, v'nomar amein.

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless and heal all those who suffer from an illness from which they can recover, help our community to provide medical aid and emotional support to those suffering from a chronic illness, and grant us wisdom to provide care and company for family and friends coping with a terminal illness.

May the Merciful One grant strength to all those who care for others, and may all these forms of medical, emotional, and social support ease the pain and suffering of those who are ill. And let us say, Amen.