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*Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today*, by David L. Freeman and Judith Z. Abrams. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

Decades ago, when I first entered the pulpit rabbinate, I began to appreciate the key role the rabbi plays in the healing process and how woefully unprepared I was to deal with this dimension of my work. Clergy meetings, institutes, hospital seminars, and personal life experiences all helped me to become a more effective pastor. Yet, to my dismay, really good material that reflected Jewish approaches to illness that could enrich me and also provide material for my congregants to read was hard to find. The usual pamphlets prepared for distribution to hospital patients and shut-ins were useful, but not really adequate. Fortunately, David L. Freeman, an instructor at Harvard Medical School and Judith Z. Abrams, the Director of Maqom, a school for adult Talmud study in Houston, Texas, have combined their extensive talents to produce a book that can provide source material for the rabbi, thoughtful ideas for the congregant, and inspiration for both of them.

The varied selections that appear in *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition: Writings from the Bible to Today* come not only from classic Jewish sources, but from survivors of life threatening diseases, rabbis reflecting on their role in the healing process, Jewish physicians pondering over their responsibilities to their patients, as well as ethicists trying to reconcile modern medical practices with Jewish tradition. The various movements in Judaism are represented, and all opinions are respected. Under one cover there is the wisdom of Nachman of Breslov,

Immanuel Jakobovitz, Mordecai Kaplan, Harold Kushner, Nina Beth Cardin, and Roland Gittleson.

The various prayers for healing have been chosen with care. However, they only appear in English translation. From my own congregational experience, I have found that the Hebrew language adds special dimensions of sanctity and timelessness to such petitions that are invariably lost when they are only recited in the vernacular.

Perhaps one of the most touching selections in the book is the diary of a young colleague, Hirshel Jaffe, who describes his battle with leukemia, and how he, his family, and his congregation react to his illness. He concludes his piece with the words:

My physical life is diminished, my bone marrow is overrun with diseased cells, and my immune system is vulnerable. But I feel spiritually I'm more of a person now . . . I'm holding up my family. I feel more in command of things. I've yielded something to eternity, which is my medical fate. You can't change that. But strangely, somehow I feel more alive. By facing death I am learning to live.

His sobering comments remind us that although our congregants may think that we are not subject to the laws of nature, we do get ill. Often the thoughts and experiences of colleagues can be of enormous support in our own moments of distress. Hirshel Jaffe's selection should be read by all of us whose role is to help others and who may very well seek answers to our own questions.

The authors are to be commended for producing a sensitive anthology that can be of immense help to pulpit rabbis who are called upon to be of comfort during

the most trying of times in the lives of congregants and who also might need some personal spiritual comfort as well.

*The Search for a Usable Past*, by David G. Roskies. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Although the word "myth" often has pejorative connotations, it is a highly sophisticated means of explaining complex phenomena, of making sense of the physical universe and the role that a people must play in the world around them. If myths are not true, they nevertheless contain vital truths that reflect the inherited values of the group.

In considering David Roskies' work, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, I was anxious to see how, in his own areas of expertise, the idea of myth, collective memory, and what Yael Zerubavel calls "collective amnesia"—those memories of past events which a people chooses to suppress—interact with each other.

For the academician as well as for the serious lay student of Jewish history, David Roskies provides us with an imaginary tour of memory sites. Each one in itself is a rare treat to be savored and to be applied to the construction of a whole new approach to the understanding and appreciation of our people's past. As a gifted scholar and as an engaging writer, Roskies draws us into areas that we thought we understood, and he then provides us with new insights and new historical perspectives.

My favorite memory site in the book is the shtetl, the Jewish market town of Eastern Europe, which Roskies believes is "the greatest invention of Yiddish literature." He notes:

What the Western is to American popular culture, the shtetl novella is to the Yiddish imagination. Its symbolic landscape is etched into the Yiddish psyche. Main street is dominated by the marketplace and is occupied solely by Jews. Instead of the saloon there is the *besmedrash* (the house of study); instead of the church, the shul. The

*kohol-shtibl*, where the Jewish notables meet, replaces the sheriff's office. And of course there is the train depot, either nearby or somewhat removed, through which unwelcome news and travelers arrive in town.

Yet, unlike their Hollywood counterparts who invented the Wild West, those who fashioned the shtetl were one step removed from the poverty-stricken towns of Eastern Europe. What they chose to write about owed little to the "real" past. Roskies believes that those who fled the shtetl conjured up "a place more perfect and durable than ever existed. Out of its very destruction and long before its end had come, the shtetl was reborn as a myth." As a stand-in for the actual Jewish town, the shtetl became "at one and the same time a neo-Platonic Model City and an Augustinian City of God."

Roskies believes that Jews, through memory and counter-memory, have the rare ability to combat tyrants who want to obliterate the past or who seek to control the means of memorial production. In his chapter on the meticulously prepared records preserved by the doomed defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto, he elevates the need to bear witness, to remember, and to record—to a level beyond the data itself.

Roskies' interest in Jewish memory sites goes beyond the usual parameters of historical studies. He clearly sees the need to bring the spiritual into any analyses of the past. Only then will such travels have a positive effect upon the Jewish future. Thus, he concludes his book with the words:

History, language, custom, and culture occupy but one, horizontal, axis. The other is vertical. The Jewish pilgrim's progress through modernity also follows a conventional compass.

Instead of separating myth from memory, Roskies, unlike most modern scholars who are interested in the "facts" of Jewish history, sees the need to combine the two in order to create a "usable past." By taking this refreshing approach, he has created a book that deserves a place in our libraries.

B.G.