

GUIDELINES FOR  
SPIRITUAL CARE OF  
JEWISH PATIENTS  
AND FAMILIES  
IN THE HOSPITAL

- ⦿ Jews constitute a religion, an ethnicity, a people, a nation, and a culture.
- ⦿ Abraham became the first Jew by virtue of his belief in one God and his covenantal relationship with that God. The record of Abraham and our founding history is contained in the Hebrew Bible. The Jewish people gave the world the Hebrew Bible — the Torah (the first five books, including the Ten Commandments), the Prophets and Writings — and introduced humanity to the God of the bible, the God of western monotheistic faiths

Emphasizing deed over creed, action over faith, the Jewish religion is traditionally focused on daily life and on the relationships between human beings.

Judaism urges us to be involved in making the world a better place and, since biblical times, has understood the importance of following the ways of justice.

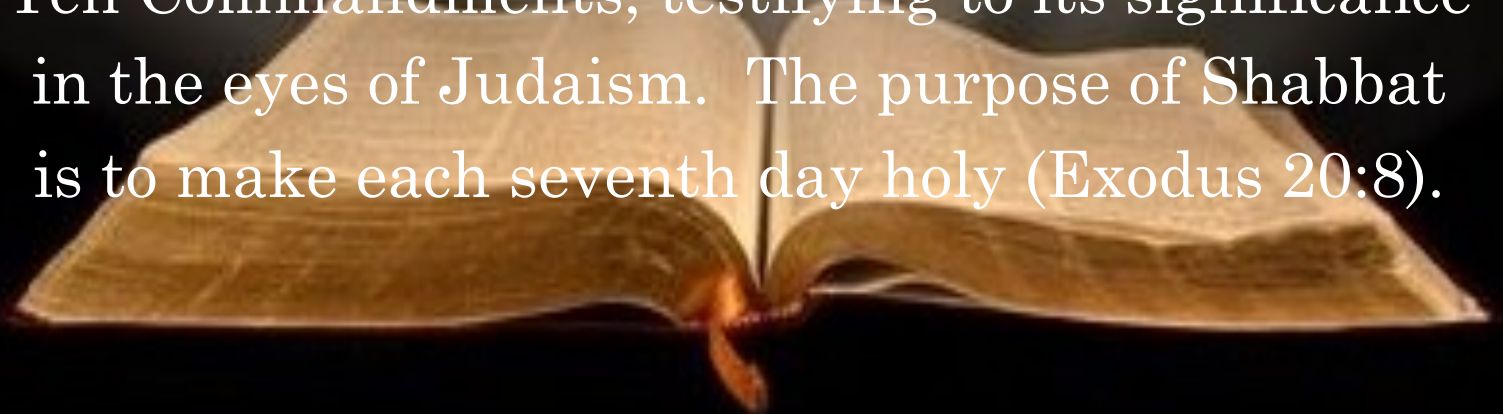
One of the central tenets of Judaism, “Justice, justice you shall pursue,” is exclaimed by the author of Deuteronomy. (Deuteronomy 16:20) And the words on the Liberty Bell, “Proclaim Liberty throughout the land...” are from the Torah. (Leviticus 25:10)

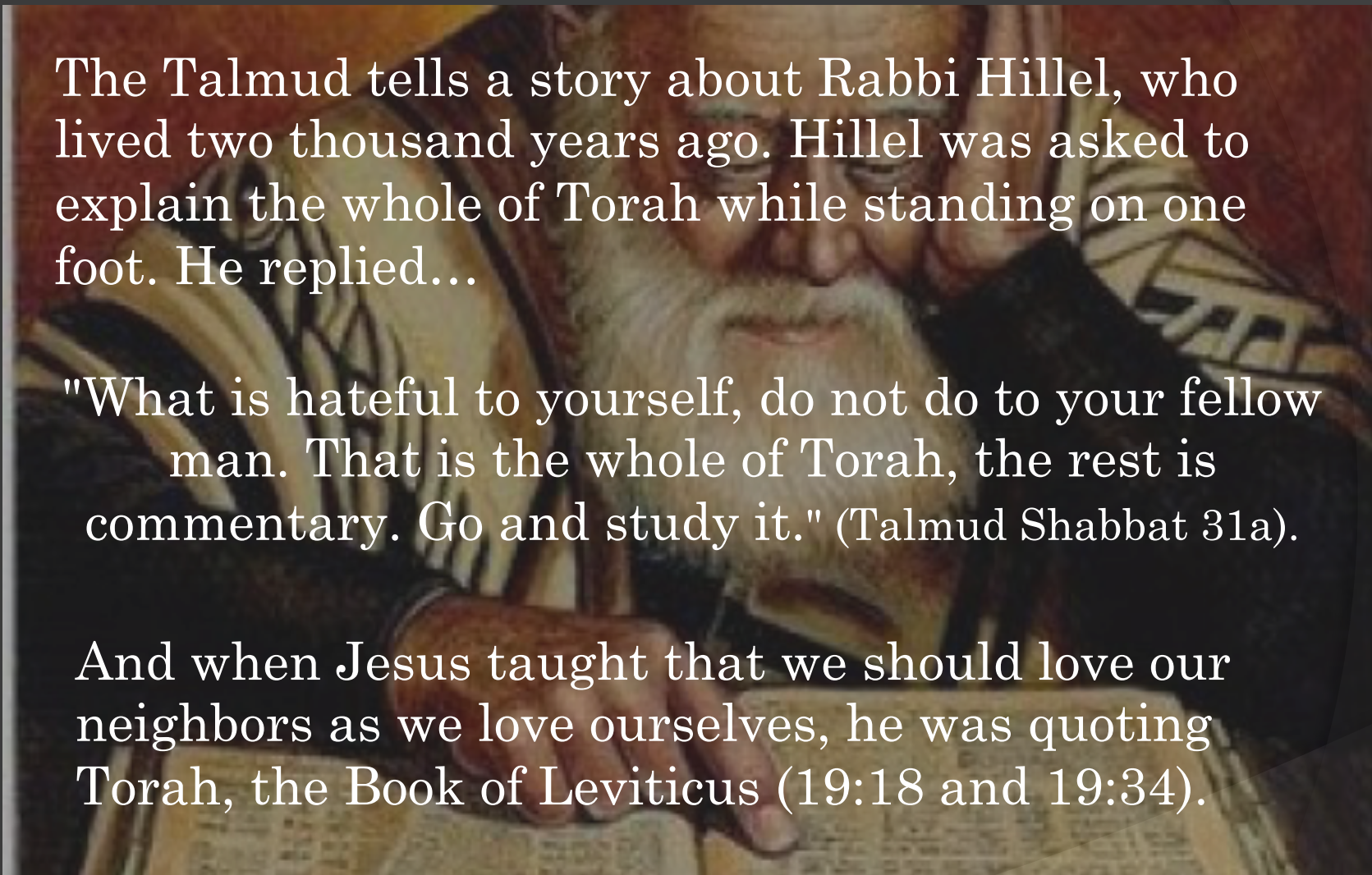
Judaism is also a religion of law. Broadly speaking, the different Jewish denominations, Orthodoxy, and the Conservative and Reform movements, are defined by their understanding of the origins of Holy Scripture and their relationship to Jewish law.

**“The purpose of the laws of the Torah is to promote compassion, loving-kindness and peace in the world.”**

Moses Maimonides.

The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath is called Shabbat in Hebrew. It begins just before sundown on Friday, and ends just after sundown on Saturday, at the time when three stars are visible in the sky. Shabbat is one of Judaism's unique contributions to civilization. Its observance is commanded in the Fourth of the Ten Commandments, testifying to its significance in the eyes of Judaism. The purpose of Shabbat is to make each seventh day holy (Exodus 20:8).





The Talmud tells a story about Rabbi Hillel, who lived two thousand years ago. Hillel was asked to explain the whole of Torah while standing on one foot. He replied...

"What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole of Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and study it." (Talmud Shabbat 31a).

And when Jesus taught that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves, he was quoting Torah, the Book of Leviticus (19:18 and 19:34).

“This is the written account of Adam’s family line. When G-d created mankind, he made them in the likeness of G-d.” (Genesis 5:1)

Everyone is equal. We are all descended from Adam, our first ancestor, so that no one can say my ancestor is better than your ancestor. We are all created in the image of God and each human life is equally valuable. The Talmud teaches, “Whoever destroys a life, it is as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved an entire world.” (Sanhedrin 37a)

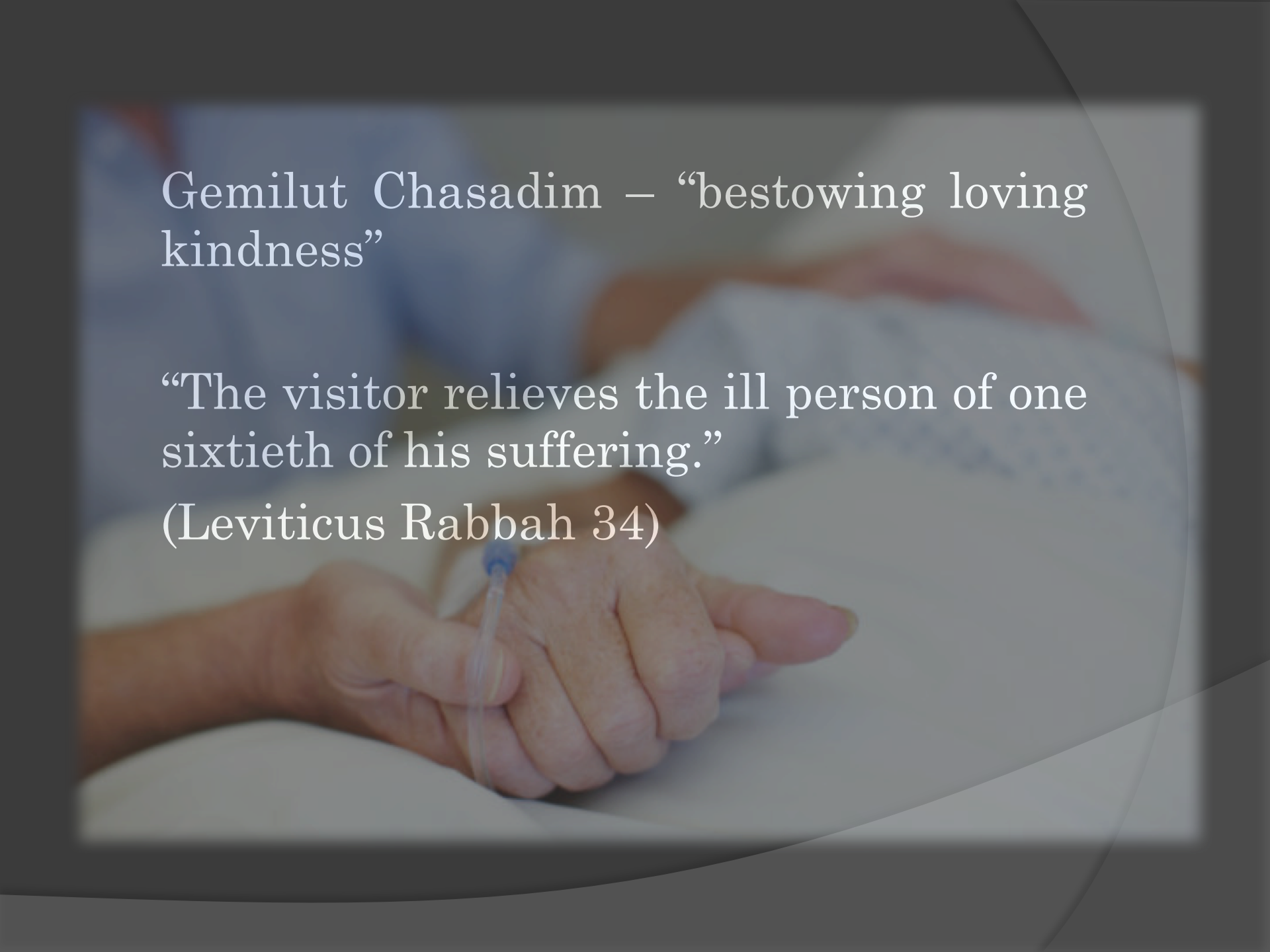
The efforts of the hospital:

saving lives  
and  
healing





Man called out to G-d,  
"Why is there so much  
pain and why don't you  
send help?" "I did," G-d  
answered, "I sent you."



Gemilut Chasadim – “bestowing loving kindness”

“The visitor relieves the ill person of one sixtieth of his suffering.”

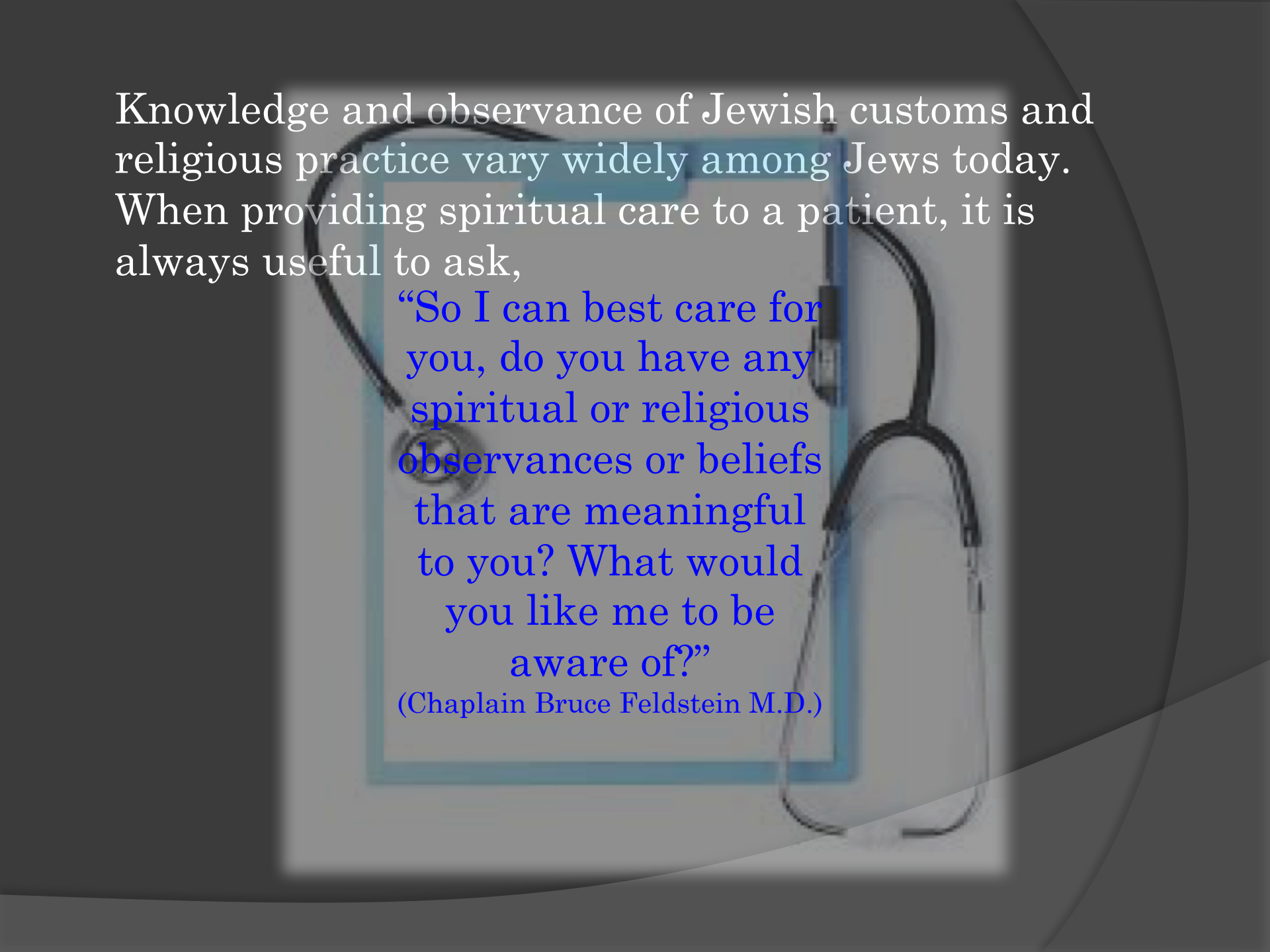
(Leviticus Rabbah 34)

*Bikur cholim* -  
“visiting the sick”

When Abraham was recovering from the painful surgery of circumcision at the age of 99, God came to visit him. (Genesis 18:1)

*Jewish  
Patients  
in the  
Hospital*

*Jewish patients, families and staff in the hospital come from northern California and from around the world. They represent a very wide spectrum of Jewish life and practice. They may be religious or secular, American born or émigrés – from the former Soviet Union, Israel, France, Iran and other countries. (Chaplain Bruce Feldstein M.D.)*



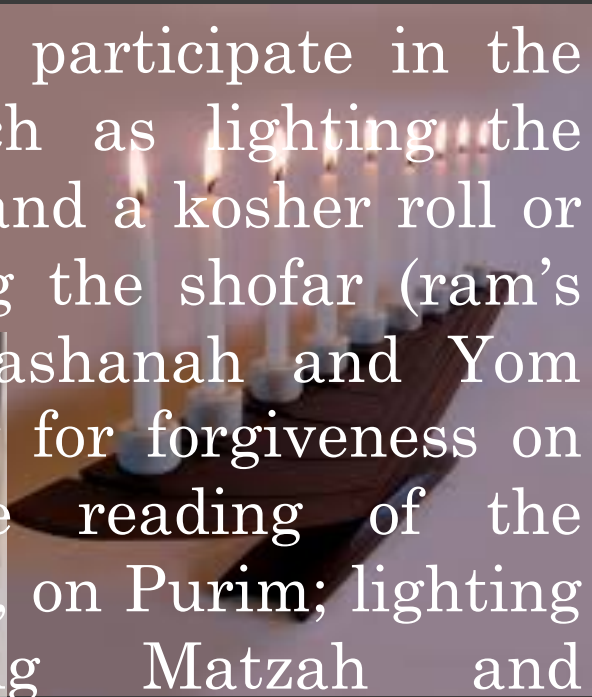
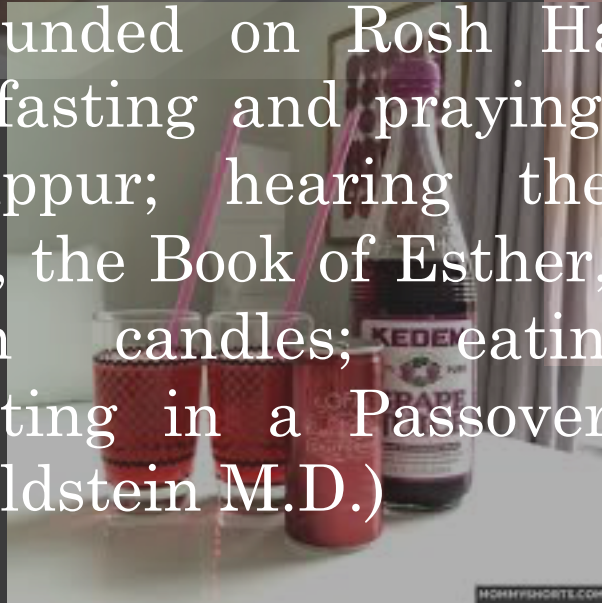
Knowledge and observance of Jewish customs and religious practice vary widely among Jews today. When providing spiritual care to a patient, it is always useful to ask,

“So I can best care for you, do you have any spiritual or religious observances or beliefs that are meaningful to you? What would you like me to be aware of?”

(Chaplain Bruce Feldstein M.D.)

While the majority of Jews do not follow dietary laws, for those who do, keeping kosher is very important.

For those who observe the Shabbat and Jewish holidays, it is important to participate in the rituals of the holiday—such as lighting the candles, kosher grape juice and a kosher roll or challah on Shabbat, hearing the shofar (ram's horn) sounded on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; fasting and praying for forgiveness on Yom Kippur; hearing the reading of the megillah, the Book of Esther, on Purim; lighting Hanukkah candles; eating Matzah and participating in a Passover Seder. (Chaplain Bruce Feldstein M.D.)





One way patients may — or may not — identify is according to the Jewish religious movements:

Orthodox  
Conservative  
Reform  
Reconstructionist  
Renewal

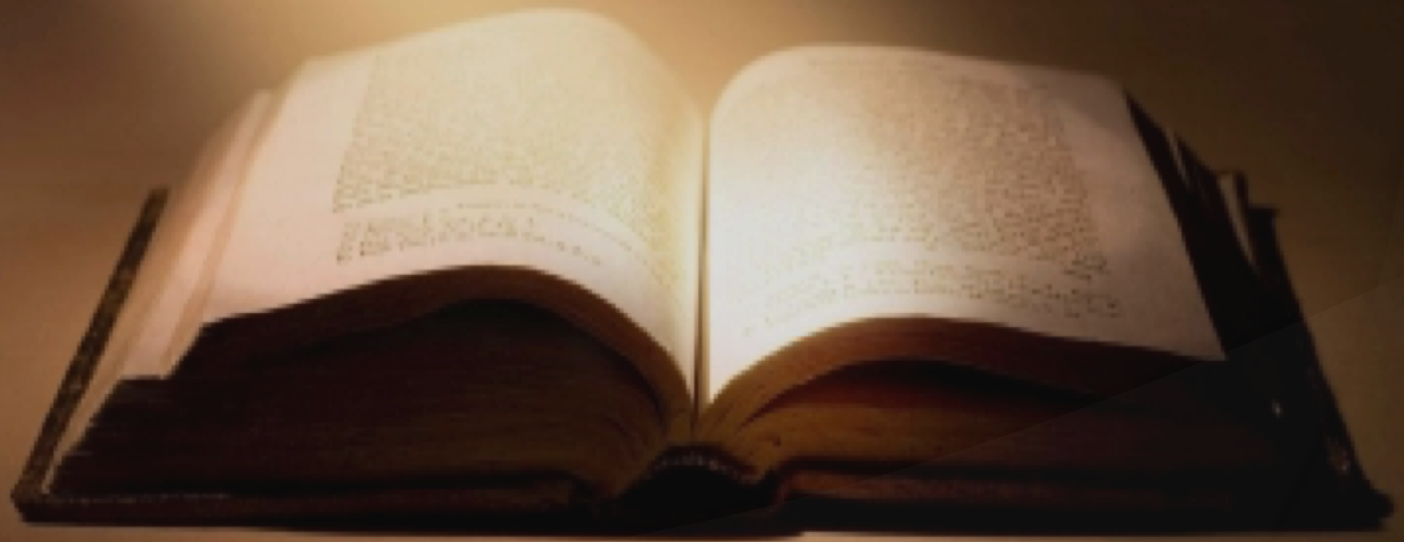
# Jewish Belief

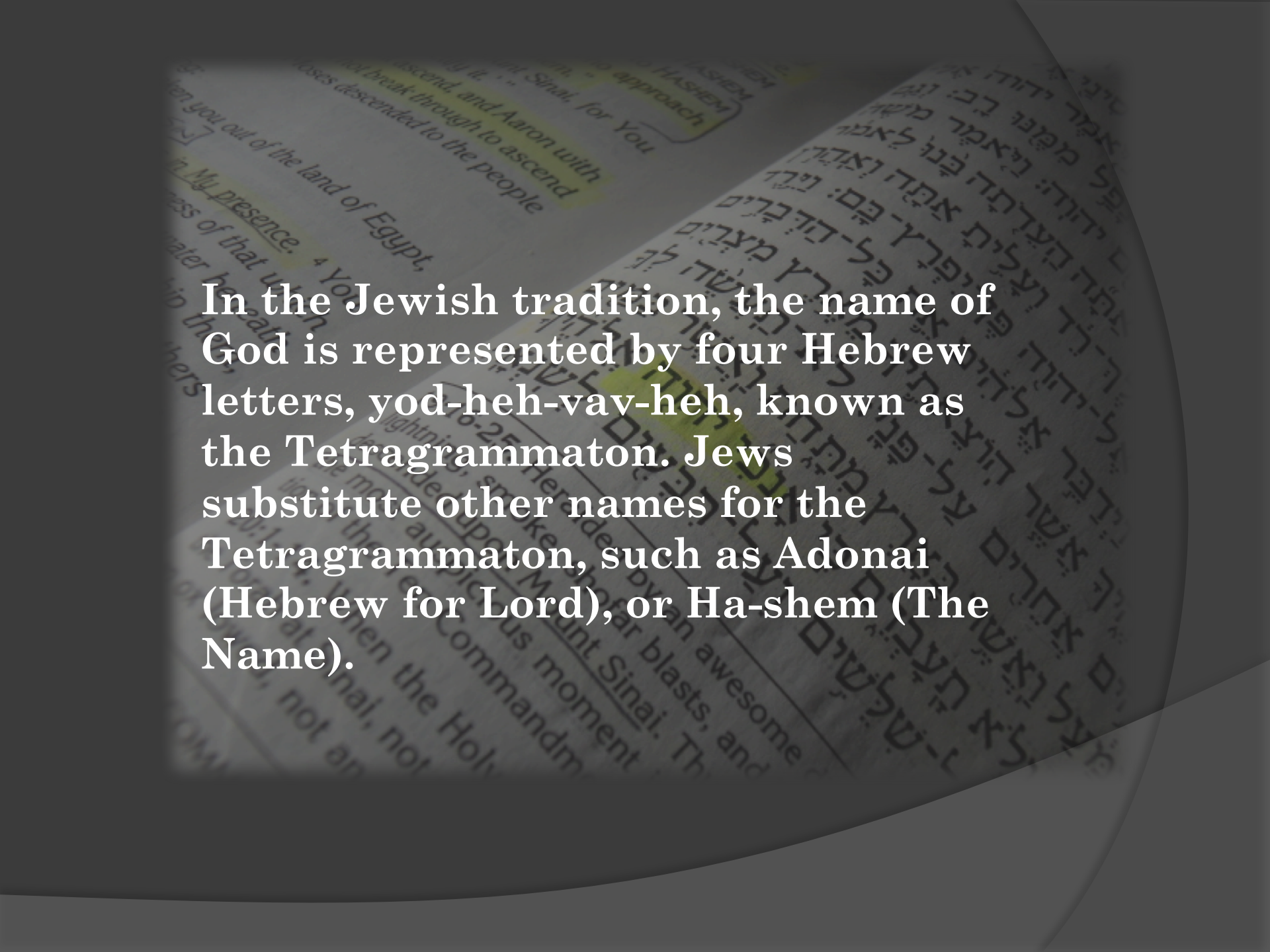
Where there are **two** Jews,  
there are **three** opinions.

Judaism believes that the way to achieve heavenly reward is through good works; anyone who lives a moral life—no matter what his faith or lack of faith—has “a portion in the world to come.” (Dennis Prager)

“Oh, man,” taught the prophet Micah, “God has told you what is good and what God requires of you only that you act justly, love goodness and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

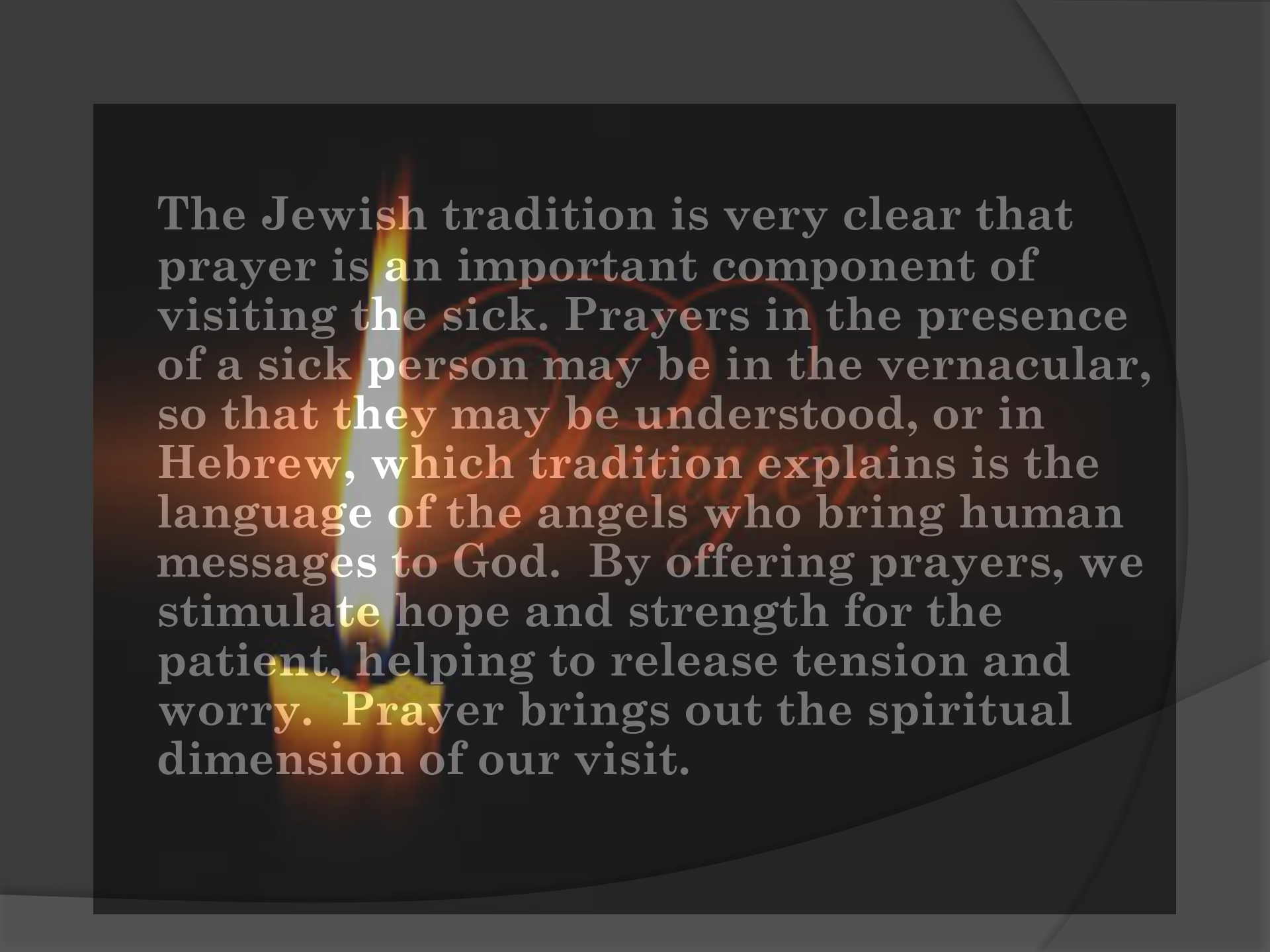
According to the Bible, the name of the Jewish people is Israel—Yisrael, which in Hebrew means to “struggle with God.” Arguing and struggling with God is not only Jewishly permitted, it is central to our tradition. The very first Jew, Abraham, argues with God, as does Moses.





In the Jewish tradition, the name of God is represented by four Hebrew letters, yod-heh-vav-heh, known as the Tetragrammaton. Jews substitute other names for the Tetragrammaton, such as Adonai (Hebrew for Lord), or Ha-shem (The Name).

# Prayer

A lit candle with a bright flame, set against a dark background. Faint, glowing Hebrew text is visible in the background, partially obscured by the candle's light. The text appears to be a prayer or a religious passage, with some words highlighted in a lighter color.

The Jewish tradition is very clear that prayer is an important component of visiting the sick. Prayers in the presence of a sick person may be in the vernacular, so that they may be understood, or in Hebrew, which tradition explains is the language of the angels who bring human messages to God. By offering prayers, we stimulate hope and strength for the patient, helping to release tension and worry. Prayer brings out the spiritual dimension of our visit.



The tradition implores the visitor to encourage the patient to hope—to hope for a full recovery, to hope for less pain, for the happiness of a surviving mate and children, for the family's continuation of the values that the patient has taught them — for the amelioration of whatever is the most fearful of concerns, for the power to endure what humans cannot understand, for the capacity to feel the love of family and friends, for courage — and for an awareness of God's love.

What to  
pray for?

Your own personal prayers can include words asking for both *refuat ha-goof*, a healing of the body and *refuat ha-nefesh*, a healing of the spirit and soul. When leaving the patient you may want to wish for a *refuah sheleymah*, a complete and whole recovery. This short expression asks God to bring healing and certainly conveys far more meaning than the usual “take care.”



The Afterlife  
Death  
and  
Burial

The return of one's soul to God at the end of its journey on earth may be the most profound moment in a person's life and the Jewish tradition established a special set of prayers, called Viduy or Confession, to be recited before one departs from this world. Viduy reminds us that what really matters is our relationship with God and our fellow human being, not material possessions or vain accomplishments.

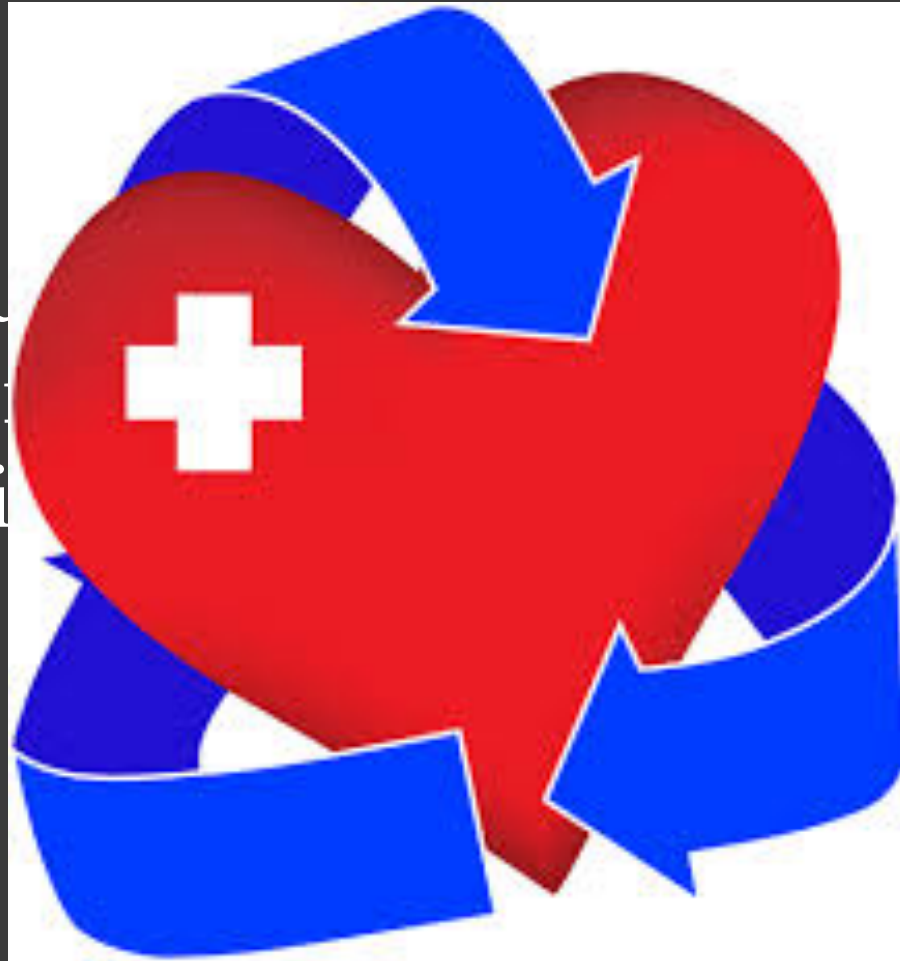
Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, teaches that at the moment of passing, every positive thought, word, or deed that occurred during the person's life is concentrated into a crystalline spiritual light, which is revealed in the world above the heavenly spheres, where it continues to exist and have an effect, for those above and below.



There is great holiness within the body after death and it must be treated with utmost awe, dignity, and respect. The *tahara*, or ritual purification, is a beautiful tradition of preparing the body for burial in a dignified and respectful manner. *Tahara* consists of three parts: the deceased is gently bathed, next the actual ritual purification is performed by pouring a continuous stream of water over the deceased. Finally, the deceased is dried and dressed in simple white shrouds, then placed in a coffin.

Chevra Kadishah,  
*the sacred burial  
team who prepares  
the body for burial.*

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The Encyclopaedia Judaica, notes in its entry on “afterlife,” “Judaism has always affirmed a belief in the afterlife.” This is articulated in the verse in Kohelet, “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to G-d, who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, would often point out that a basic law of physics (the First Law of Thermodynamics) is that no energy is ever “lost” or destroyed; it only assumes another form.



Has anyone ever lost a loved one and not wondered, where is he or she now? This is the ultimate question. Is it really all over after the last breath? Was my father a vibrant, thinking, feeling, imbued-with-meaning human being one minute, and then a bunch of inanimate molecules — no different than his equal weight in sand — a minute later? (Dennis Prager)

Sitting Shiva (“sheva” is Hebrew for seven) One does not have to be a religious Jew — or even a Jew — to appreciate this ancient wisdom. It is simply not good to feign normalcy immediately after the loss of a loved one. People who have not been allowed, or not allowed themselves, time to grieve suffer later on.



God's primary demand is that we treat each other with kindness — justly, morally and ethically. *Olam chessed yibaneh* — the world was created for the sake of the kindness and grace we are able to bestow upon each other.

May we all be privileged to  
participate in this act of  
chesed, uniting our actions  
with those of God.