

Medicine in the Form of Prayer

As a chaplain, I offer medicine in the form of prayer. In its purest and most personal expression, prayer deeply reveals who we are. It reflects how we are living — and how we might heal. Adding prayer to life adds sweetness and beauty and I cannot imagine a day without it. All of my endeavors begin with prayer.

In Hebrew, *l'hitpallel* / to pray is a reflexive verb, which also means, "to judge oneself." Prayer is a time for self-evaluation. We search our hearts and examine who we really are. We search for our personal truths. We engage in prayer with our eyes wide open to life's difficulties, to the pain and suffering we might face. We cannot avoid suffering — we are human and human beings suffer. As my rabbi says, "If pain were water the world would drown."

When pain and suffering is unexamined it seems to fester and hurt the body even more. When we share it with another or share it with a higher power — whether God or the universe — healing results. The challenges we face emerge from the dark into the light. Prayer allows us to see the fullness of our lives – the good and evil, love and hate, life and death. Prayer helps us cope and heal.

Prayer effects our thoughts, feelings and emotions, all of which influence our ability to heal. In a mystical and awe-inspiring way, prayer grounds us. It can instill a sense of calm while allaying anxiety and worry, giving us the fortitude and faith to live with life's challenges. It can provide the courage to face pain more calmly and with greater strength. Prayer lowers our heart rate and blood pressure. We make a conscious choice to pray and, in doing so, to actively engage in our healing. It takes work and effort. Just as with exercising, we cannot be lazy when it comes to prayer. But the effort is worth it because we can feel its benefits.

Through prayer, my hope is to guide others in finding their way toward healing. Talking and sharing helps. Having another whom you trust, such as a chaplain, share your pain and prayer eases the situation. Being heard is healing. I have walked into the room of a patient who is in pain and closed-off and, after talking and praying, light seems to enter their eyes. Something has changed, shifting in a positive direction. Sharing is therapy for the soul and the body. A sacred heartfelt connection is made. We are all connected and assisting others in healing through prayer forms a heart connection. New perspectives are discovered. Doors that we might not otherwise have seen may open. The Jewish tradition teaches that our sages used prayer to bring about miracles. Rabbi Chanina said, "Anyone who prays long enough, doesn't go away empty-handed."

I do not fully understand how prayer works but I have seen that it does. It works for me. Prayer helps me verbalize my thoughts. It reminds me to be grateful for being your chaplain and serving you. Reciting prayers makes me feel more connected to you. It touches a sacred space within me that I bring to my work. I believe that prayer is one of the secrets of medicine and it is my passion and gift to others.

