

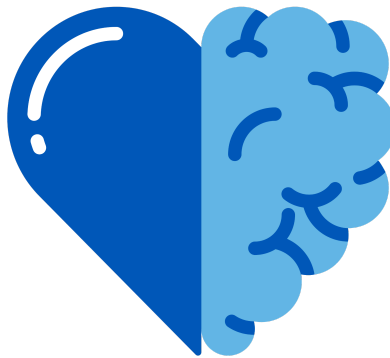
Imagine Life HVM | Cultivating Mental Wellness with the Jewish Prayer for Healing: Mi Sheberach for Mental Health

By Steven Mandel, MD, and the Blue Dove Foundation

Spirituality & the Mi Sheberach for The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs' (FJMC) Imagine Life Hearing Men's Voices (HVM) Program.

When it comes to mental health and substance abuse, the Jewish community wrestles with the same problems as the rest of society. Yet we too often have refused to acknowledge and discuss the issues. As a result, many individuals and their families suffer privately and lack the information necessary to address their struggles.

FJMC is pleased to partner with the Blue Dove Foundation on an innovative approach to cultivating mental wellness. Blue Dove's mission is to provide the Jewish community with tools to understand, support, and overcome the challenges presented by mental illness and substance misuse. Since 2018 the organization has educated communities across the globe, creating resources and platforms to share powerful ideas about mental wellness rooted in Jewish tradition and giving it a sense of practical significance and spiritual depth. Blue Dove has reached tens of thousands of Jews as well as other faith-based communities, raising awareness and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse.



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Questions for Open-Group Discussions about the Mi Sheberach

Before we get started, let's review the rules that apply to all HMV sessions.

BRIEF RULES:

1. Our goal is to have an open discussion where everyone's opinion is respected, not criticized. Conversation is encouraged; confrontation is not.
2. The conversation can be of a rather personal nature, so please respect everyone's privacy by agreeing that all comments made in this space stay in this space—what's said here stays here.
3. Please discuss only your own opinion from your own experiences.
4. Please allow others time to speak as well, and don't interrupt.
5. My role as a facilitator is to keep the conversation on track as well as to do my best to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak. In that role, it may be necessary to gently interrupt or redirect someone. Please try to be understanding.

ADDITIONAL RULES FOR VIRTUAL HMVS:

1. Enable your video so the other participants can see you.
2. Be sure to log in under your actual full name. Men aren't going to want to express themselves candidly with 'Sara's iPad.' If necessary "rename" yourself. If you need help, the host can do it for you.
3. Ensure no one else is in the room with you during the session.
4. Try to be in a quiet environment or keep yourself muted until it is your turn to talk.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

The following questions are designed to facilitate meaningful discussion. We invite you to select the questions that interest the group, and discuss them in whichever order fits your agenda.

1. What can you do to help create a welcoming and stigma-free culture to support mental wellness in your Jewish community?
2. How can you help place mental wellness front and center into your community?
3. What can you do to support increasing awareness and decreasing the stigma associated with mental illness and substance misuse in your community?

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4. What do you think about including prayers for healing on behalf of members of your community experiencing nonphysical ailments such as mental illness? Should the synagogue ritual of reciting the mi sheberach include prayers for mental wellness?
5. What would your own version of a traditional Jewish prayer for healing look like for you, your loved ones, and your community? Please take the next five minutes (don't overthink it) to write an interpretive mi sheberach that is personal, meaningful, and impactful in your own life.

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The “Mi Sheberach for Mental Health” Module

Hope is one of the greatest resources we have to change the culture of silence and stigma around mental health issues in the Jewish community. The Blue Dove Foundation wants to educate and inspire people to be courageous and confident in offering hope and support to those who struggle with their mental well-being and addiction.

This Imagine Life HMV module is based on the Blue Dove Foundation’s work and is dedicated:

- To those living with mental health struggles and substance use disorders and to those who have tragically lost their lives
- To the individuals who are struggling to find help—whether they are afraid to seek it or do not know where to turn. We hope the words of these prayers, adapted from the traditional mi sheberach, help you find comfort in yourself as you begin the journey of healing.
- To those who care for or simply about others who are struggling and support them as allies.

The History of the Mi Sheberach

The mi sheberach dates back to ancient Babylonia, initially as a blessing rabbis said over their congregations. The original mi sheberach—recited only on Mondays and Thursdays, never on Shabbat—asked G-d to “bless all those brothers and sisters who come to the synagogue for prayer and to give.” Only in the twelfth century did it start to be said for individuals for a variety of reasons, including illness. But until the 1980s, the traditional prayer for the sick could only be found in a rabbi’s manual; “regular” Jews did not have a copy in their prayer books and therefore could not read along. In most congregations today, the mi sheberach is recited as part of the prayer service with names of individuals in need of healing mentioned by the person leading the prayer or recited silently by congregants.

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The Meaning of the Mi Sheberach *(an excerpt from Mi Sheberach for Mental Health: Cultivating Mental Wellness with the Jewish Prayer for Healing)*

There are few prayers that resonate with so many people in such a meaningful way as the mi sheberach. On the one hand, it acknowledges there is a G-d, and G-d can enter the course of human history, both hearing our requests and, ultimately, granting them. In a time of need, even the most agnostic—those ordinarily predisposed to critiquing religion and scoffing at the idea passed to them from the generation before about the existence of G-d and the powers of G-d—will find themselves casting aside their postmodernism and, in a fit of hope or rage or helplessness, ask G-d to provide healing.

Though timeless, it is also uniquely contemporary. Our advancements in technology, culture, and medicine have given us the illusion of control. And yet precisely when we are humbled, unable to turn to the tools of our hands for a solution, do we turn to the tools of our faith. The mi sheberach is, at its core, a prayer that articulates “I wish my hands were able to do more, my resources were able to alleviate your pain and suffering, my knowledge able to give you a clear path to healing and recovery. As they are not, rather than finding myself helpless to positively impact the situation, I turn to words of prayer and acts of faith.” It is an acknowledgment of our own limitations: As much as we know, there is so much we do not know; as much as we have accomplished, we are still wildly unprepared to achieve our goal alone.

And yet it is more than an act of faith for the faithless, more than an act of humility from the accomplished. For the vast majority of us—those who turn to prayer...sometimes; those who believe in G-d...sometimes; those who are more unsure than sure—it is an offering of hope. We who offer a mi sheberach for healing are not sure if G-d can hear our pleas...but we are hopeful. We who turn to these words are unsure whether G-d can provide healing...but we are hopeful.

Hope is what this prayer has meant throughout time. The earliest mi sheberach, offered by Moses over Miriam, is as hopeful and tender and sincere as it is short: *El nah, r'fa nah lah*; please G-d, heal her, so she may be healed. Generations since have put their own language to these pleas, have allowed circumstance to dictate the terminology, or have offered a mi sheberach that is devoid of any word—that is more a feeling or a guttural cry.

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Mental Health Mi Sheberachs

The Blue Dove Foundation believes Jewish prayers and rituals can help to strengthen our mental well-being, resilience and recovery in the same way *middot*, or Jewish values, can promote them. Faith is an important part of healing for many, and Jewish thinkers and leaders historically have brought the two together.

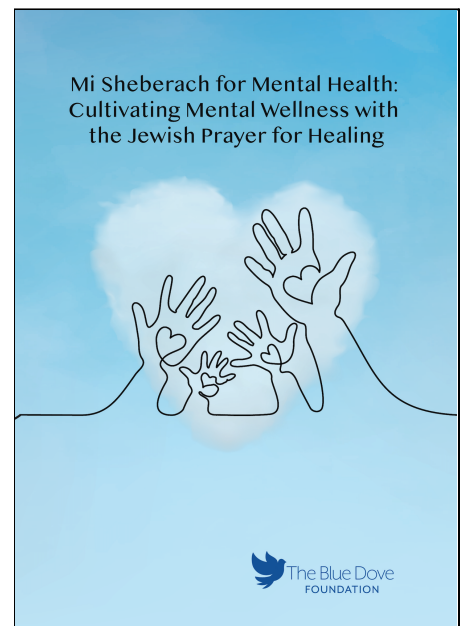
When someone is ill or recovering from illness or an accident, we often recite a mi sheberach to wish them a *refuah sheleimah*, a “complete healing” or “full recovery.” But Jewish tradition invites us to adapt and interpret texts in ways that create meaning for the needs of our times. Today, that need is wishing a “complete healing” for those struggling with mental health.

For more information, we recommend reading our book *Mi Sheberach for Mental Health: Cultivating Mental Wellness with the Jewish Prayer for Healing* with topics such as:

- Anxiety and Stress
- Depression, Loneliness, and Isolation
- Substance Abuse, Addictive Disorders, and Recovery
- Suicide
- Healing and Strength
- Self-Affirmations, Self-Love, and Self-Esteem
- Support from the Community
- Parents of Struggling Children.

Available at thebluedovefoundation.org/shop

The mi sheberachs shared in this book were written during the height of a global pandemic by individuals from around the world. We hope they bring comfort to those who are struggling with their mental health.



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The Traditional Mi Sheberach (Hebrew, Hebrew Transliteration & English Translation)

Please note: While the Blue Dove Foundation has committed to using the gender-neutral pronoun “they” in our materials, we make an exception for texts that come from other sources. The transliterated and translated text below presents the male and female forms of pronouns as used in Hebrew. The word before the slash is for males; the one after, for females. (MyJewishLearning.org)

מי שְׁבַרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ אֲבִרְהֵם, יִצְחָק, וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרַךְ אֶת הַחוֹלִים [Names] הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִמְלֵא רַחֲמִים עֲלֵיהֶם לְהַחֲלִימָם וּלְרַפְּאֵתָם וּלְהַחְזִיקָם וּלְהַחְיֹתָם, וַיִּשְׁלַח לָהֶם מִהֲרָה רַפּוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, רַפּוּאָת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּרַפּוּאָת הַגּוּף הַשְּׂתָא בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

<p>Mi sheberach Avoteinu: Avraham, Yitzhak, v'Yaakov, v'Imoteinu: Sarah, Rivka, Rachel v'Leah, hu yivarech virapei et hacholeh/hacholah _____ ben/bat _____ HaKadosh baruch hu yimalei rachamim alav/aleha, l'hachalimo/l'hachlimah, u-l'rap'oto/u-l'rap'otah, l'hachaziko/l'hazikah, bless and heal the one who is ill: _____ son/daughter of _____ . u-l'chay-oto/u-l'chay-otah. V'yishlach lo/lah bim-hera r'fuah shlemah, r'fu-at hanefesh u-r'fu-at hagoof,</p>	<p>May the One who blessed our ancestors — patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah — May the Holy Blessed One overflow with compassion upon him/her, to restore him/her, to heal him/her, to strengthen him/her, to enliven him/her. The One will send him/her, speedily, a complete healing — healing of the soul and healing of the body — along with all the ill,</p>
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b'toch sh'ar cholei Yisrael v'cholei yoshvei tevel, hashta ba'agalat u-vizman kariv, v'no-mar, Amen!	among the people of Israel and all humankind, soon, speedily, without delay, and let us all say: Amen!
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The Blue Dove Foundation's Mi Sheberach for Mental Health

May the One who blessed our ancestors and named us Israel bless and heal those among us who struggle with mental well-being.

May 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 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 we create communities that accept, uplift, and support those among us who are struggling. Now, speedily, and in a time soon to come. Amen.

מי שבברך אבותינו אשר קרא לנו ישראל שנאמר שרית עם אלהים, הוא יברך וירפא את אלו מבינינו הנאבקים ברוחה הנפשית. יהי רצון שיגירו בכותם ובחסנם, ויתיחסו לעצמם בסליחה ובסבלנות, וימצאו עזרה, חמלה ומשאבים בעת צרתם. הקדוש ברוך הוא יעניק לאלו מאתנו שאינם חווים קשים נפשים את הכח, החסן והיכלת להקשיב ללא שפוט ומתוך כוונה, ואת היכלת להבחין כאשר אחרים נאבקים. יהי רצונך שגזור קהלות שמקבלות, מרוממות ותומכות באלה שבינינו הנאבקים. השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב. ונאמר אמן

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Ways to Introduce the Mi Sheberach in Services

Today, we know the mi sheberach as the blessing we recite in services to wish those who are sick a full recovery. When we say the words and call out names, we generally think about those who are physically ill. But illness doesn't always mean a physical ailment; it can and often does refer to one's mental health.

Jewish prayer allows us to be creative in adapting and interpreting text in ways that are meaningful. Clergy can establish a more welcoming and inclusive environment by including those with mental illness, substance abuse and process disorders and other invisible illnesses in the congregational recitation of the mi sheberach.