Unconventional Therapies and Judaism

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I. Introduction

More and more patients who traditionally sought healing from conventional physicians are seeking out alternative therapies or more natural forms of therapy. Such unorthodox therapies may include naturopathy, acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, herbal remedies, metabolic therapies, and vitamin and mineral therapies.\(^1\)

Alternative and unorthodox medicine have a long history,\(^2\)-\(^3\) particularly in relation to cancer prevention and treatment. Unproven or questionable dietary and nutritional methods in cancer prevention are those which have not been "responsibly, objectively, reproducibly, and reliably demonstrated in humans" to be efficacious and safe.\(^4\)


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Despite some progress in cancer therapy, unorthodox treatments continue to hold a fascination for cancer patients. More than fifty per cent of patients undergoing conventional cancer therapy simultaneously pursue unorthodox programs, often from an early stage of their illness. A substantial proportion of such patients ultimately reject conventional treatments. Such widespread use by patients of unorthodox or unproven cancer treatments represents an important social, economic and clinical problem. The public spends billions of dollars annually on unproven cancer cures labelled as metabolic (e.g., laetrile or hydrazine), dietary (e.g., grape diet or macrobiotic diet), immunologic (e.g., fetal vaccines), megavitamin (e.g., high dose vitamin C), and imagery (e.g., Simonton technique).

Contrary to stereotypes, patients who seek unproven methods tend to be well-educated, upper middle class, and not necessarily terminal or even beyond hope of cure or remission by conventional treatments. Many practitioners of unorthodox cancer care are licensed physicians who specialize in homeopathic or naturopathic medicine.

Why do people seek out such alternative therapies? People may be discouraged and despair about the realities of conventional cancer treatment. Fear, side effects, previous negative experience, and a desire by the patient for more supportive care are other reasons. People are unhappy with the "disease-oriented technologic authoritarian health care system." People may reject conventional care because they are attracted to the ideology which includes "an emphasis on self-care, a systemic rather than a localized view of pathology and of health, and belief in the fundamental importance of nutrition and whole-body fitness."

Today’s physician is many times more effectual than his predecessors of previous generations, but his practice has changed from intensely personal service to an objective and highly intellectualized approach. “The quack may return in the role of comforter — the provider of hope at small cost and of death in natural dignity.”

In addition to operating in areas of legitimate medical practice, unorthodox therapies involve irregular practitioners and medical sects and groups all engaged in medical practice. The legal struggles to establish the legitimacy of these nonorthodox practices form a fascinating chapter in medical history. In 1987, the American Medical Association, the American College of Radiology, and the American College of Surgeons were found guilty of anti-trust violations in a suit brought against them by American chiropractors. This case, which has been before the courts for twelve years, is currently under appeal.

How does Judaism view the healing arts, be they “conventional medical,” alternative, or unorthodox therapies? How does Judaism view the practices of chiropractic, homeopathy, naturopathy and similar medical sects? Even if these are acceptable as alternative or additional or supplementary methods of healing, how does Judaism view health quackery? Are faith healing or spiritual healing acceptable modes of therapy in Judaism? In Judaic teaching, can amulets, incantations, and/or prayers be substituted for conventional therapy?

In order to examine alternative therapies in Judaism, one must first discuss the physician’s obligation to heal and the patient’s obligation to seek healing. Biblical license is given to a human physician to heal, and biblical mandate is given the patient to seek healing from a human healer. What does this mandate include?
Does this mandate specifically exclude unconventional or unorthodox therapies? Is a patient allowed to supplement standard medical treatment with holistic or with spiritual healing? Is quackery condoned in Judaism?

The Physician’s Obligation to Heal

Specific permissibility, sanction, and even mandate for the physician to practice medicine is given in the Torah, based on the rabbinic interpretation of the biblical phrase “and heal he shall heal” (Exodus 21:19). The Sages in the Talmud interpret the duplicate mention of healing in the phrase “heal he shall heal” to mean that authorization was granted by G-d to a physician to heal (Baba Kamma 82a). The biblical view is that there are two physicians; one is Almighty G-d, the true Healer of the sick, and the other is the human physician who serves as an instrument of G-d or an extension of G-d in the ministrations to the sick.

Many biblical commentators echo this Talmudic teaching. By the insistence or emphasis expressed in the double wording, the Bible opposes the erroneous idea that having recourse to medicine shows lack of trust and faith in divine assistance. The Bible takes it for granted that medical therapy is used and actually requires it. Moses Maimonides and others derive the biblical sanction for a physician to heal from the scriptural commandment “and thou shalt restore it to him” (Deuteronomy 22:2) which refers to the restoration of lost property. In his Mishnah commentary, Maimonides asserts:

> It is obligatory from the Torah for the physician to heal the sick and this is included in the explanation of the scriptural phrase “and thou shalt restore it to him,” meaning to heal his body.”

Thus, Maimonides states that the law of the restoration of a lost object also includes the restoration of the health of one’s fellow man. If a person has “lost his health” and the physician is able to

restore it, he is obligated to do so. Maimonides' reasoning is probably based upon a key passage in the Talmud which states: "Whence do we know that one must save his neighbor from the loss of himself? From the verse "and thou shalt restore it to him." Thus, even if someone is attempting suicide or refuses treatment for illness, one is obligated to intervene to save the person's life and health.

The second scriptural mandate for a physician to heal is based on the phrase "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16). This passage refers to the duties of human beings to one another. One example cited in the Talmud is following:

> Whence do we know that if a man sees his neighbor drowning or mauled by beasts or attacked by robbers, he is bound to save him? From the verse "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Sanhedrin 73a).

Maimonides codifies this Talmudic passage in his famous Mishneh Torah as follows:

> Whoever is able to save another and does not save him transgresses the commandment "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." Similarly, if one sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by a wild animal and is able to rescue him... and does not rescue him... he transgresses the injunction "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor."\(^\text{12}\)

Such a case of drowning is considered as loss of one's entire body and one is obligated to save it. Certainly one must cure disease which often afflicts only part of the body.

In summary: It is evident in Jewish tradition that divine license is given to a physician to heal, based on the interpretation of the biblical phrase "heal he shall heal." Many Jewish scholars such as Maimonides claim that healing the sick is not only allowed but is

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obligatory. R. Joseph Karo’s *Shulchan Aruch* seems to combine both thoughts:

The Torah gave permission to the physician to heal; moreover, it is a religious precept and is included in the category of saving life; and if he withholds his services, it is considered as shedding blood.13

The Patient’s Obligation to Seek Healing

It is thus clear that a physician is divinely licensed and biblically obligated to heal the sick because of the Jewish concept of the supreme value of human life. Is a patient, however, authorized or perhaps mandated to seek healing from a physician? Is a patient allowed to rely solely on faith healing? Is a patient who asks a physician to heal him denying Divine Providence? Is a person’s illness an affliction by G-d that serves as punishment for wrongdoing? Does one forego atonement for one’s sin by not accepting the suffering imposed by Divine Judgment and seeking medical care from a physician? Are alternatives to medical treatment allowed in Judaism?

The strongest evidence in Jewish sources that allows and even mandates a patient to seek healing from a physician is found in Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, as follows:

A person should set his heart that his body be healthy and strong in order that his soul be upright to know the Lord. For it is impossible for man to understand and comprehend the wisdoms [of the world] if he is hungry and ailing or if one if his limbs is aching.14

He also recommends,15 as does the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 17b), that no wise person should reside in a city that does not have a physician. Maimonides’ position is further expanded and codified as follows:

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15. Ibid 4:23.
Since when the body is healthy and sound [one treads] in the ways of the Lord, it being impossible to understand or know anything of the knowledge of the Creator when one is sick, it is obligatory upon man to avoid things which are detrimental to the body and to acclimate himself to things which heal and fortify it.\textsuperscript{16}

There are numerous Talmudic citations which indicate that patients when sick are allowed and even required to seek medical attention. One who is in pain should go to a physician (\textit{Baba Kamma} 46b). If one is bitten by a snake, a physician is called even on the Sabbath because all restrictions are set aside for possible danger to human life (\textit{Yoma} 83b). If one’s eye is afflicted, one may prepare and apply medication even on the Sabbath (\textit{Avoda Zara} 28b). Rabbi Judah the Prince, compiler of the Mishnah, suffered from an eye ailment and consulted his physician, Mar Samuel, who cured the ailment by placing a vial of chemicals under the rabbi’s pillow so that the powerful vapors would penetrate the eye (\textit{Baba Metzia} 85b).

From these and other Talmudic passages, it is evident that an individual is not only allowed, but probably required to seek medical attention when he is ill. In Jewish tradition, the patient is obligated to care for his health and life. He is charged with preserving his health. He must eat and drink and sustain himself and must seek healing when he is ill in order to be able to serve the Lord in a state of good health.

A rather negative attitude to the question of the patient’s obtaining medical assistance is taken by Moses Nachmanides, known as Ramban, who, in his commentary on the scriptural phrase “My soul shall not abhor you” (Lev. 26.11) states that G-d will remove sickness from among the Israelites as He promised, “for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” During the epochs of prophecy, continues Ramban, the righteous, even if they sinned and became ill, did not seek out physicians, only prophets. Only people who do not believe in the healing powers of G-d turn to physicians for their

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid 4:1.
cure, and for such individuals the Torah sanctions the physician to heal. The latter should not withhold his healing skills lest the patient die under his care, nor should he say that G-d alone heals.

Ramban seems to stand alone in his apparent discouragement for some patients to seek medical aid. It is certain that he refers only to the wholly righteous, who are free of illness because of their piety, and who do not require human healing. Alas, the general populace, even devout believers in G-d, are not on a level to be saved by prayer alone, and thus are allowed to seek human healing. Such an interpretation of Ramban’s discussion is found in the commentary of Rabbi David ben Shmuel Halevi (popularly known as Taz or Turei Zahav) on the Shulchan Aruch. 17 It may also be that Nachmanides refers only to heavenly illnesses, but for man-induced wounds and sickness, healing may be sought.

Prayer and Faith Healing

The tradition of healing which combines elements of religion or spiritual healing with classical scientific medicine has probably always existed. In some parts of the world, such techniques range from religious faith healing to nutritional faddism, witchcraft, and ceremonies of the occult. All these treatment forms rely to a considerable extent on faith and belief of the patient in the practitioner. Faith healing includes those healing efforts for which there is no scientific evidence to support purported “cures.” The scientific community, including the medical profession, tends to dismiss such healing as quackery. To true believers in faith healing, the explanation is simple — it is a miracle.

Recourse to prayer in Judaism during pain or illness is not necessarily an indication of despair in the efficacy of traditional medicine. In fact, the majority of mankind prays for the sick at one time or another. The prayers may differ in content, in the manner in which they are offered, or in the person or deity to whom they are addressed, but both religious and non-religious people offer

17. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 336.
prayers for recovery when they are sick.

The Patriarch Abraham prayed for the recovery of Abimelech (Genesis 20:17), and G-d healed him. David prayed for the recovery of his son (II Samuel 12:16), but his son died. Elisha prayed for the recovery of the Shunamite woman’s son (II Kings 32:34), and the boy recovered. King Hezekiah prayed for his own recovery (II Chronicles 32:24), and G-d added 15 years to his life. Moses prayed for the recovery of his sister Miriam, who was afflicted with tzara’at. Said Moses: El na refa na la (O G-d, heal her, I beseech thee), and she recovered. (Numbers 12:13)

Regarding the specific question of the efficacy of prayer in the Talmud, one may cite the following (Berachot 32b):

Rabbi Eleazer said: Prayer is more efficacious even than good deeds, for there was no one greater in good deeds than Moses our teacher, and yet he was answered only after prayer... Rabbi Eleazar also said: Prayer is more efficacious than offerings....

Another circumstance in which prayers are said to be efficacious is the need of the community for the sick person. Thus the Talmud states (Eruvin 29b):

It once happened that Rabbi Hanina ate half an onion and half of its poisonous fluid and became so ill that he was on the point of dying. His colleagues, however, begged for heavenly mercy, and he recovered because his contemporaries needed him.

One should never be discouraged from praying even under the most difficult and troublesome conditions. The Talmud says that “even if a sharp sword rests upon a man’s neck, he should not desist from prayer” (Berachot 10a). On the other hand a person should never stand in a place of danger and say that a miracle will be wrought for him (Shabbat 32a). One should not count on being cured by direct intervention by G-d without the patient’s seeking healing from traditional human medical practitioners.

The relevant references to prayer in the Codes of Jewish law
are cited by Rabbi Jacobovits, who concludes:

These laws indicate unmistakably that while every encouragement was given for the sick to exploit their adversity for moral and religious ends and to strengthen their faith in recovery by prayer, confidence in the healing powers of G-d was never allowed to usurp the essential functions of the physician and of medical science.

Amulets

From the earliest times people have attempted to ward off misfortune, sickness, or “evil spirits” by wearing on their person pieces of paper, parchment, or metal discs inscribed with various formulae which would protect or heal the bearers. Such artifacts, known as amulets or talismans are frequently mentioned in Talmudic literature. To the Jews, the amulet is called kemiya and consists either of a written parchment or of roots (Tosefta Shabbat 4:9) or herbs (Yerushalmi Shabbat 8b). It is worn on a small chain, or in a signet ring or in a tube. A kemiya is considered to be of proven efficacy if it cures a sick person on three different occasions or if it cures three different patients (Shabbat 60a). An assurance by a physician who prescribed or wrote such an amulet was considered part of the legitimate therapeutic armamentarium of the physician.

There is no objection in Jewish religious law against the use of amulets for healing purposes. Amulets are apparently deeply rooted in our tradition. Although a long list of acts falling in the category of idolatrous customs is found in the Talmud (Tosefta Shabbat, Chapters 7 and 8), anything done for the sake of healing is specifically excluded. Hence, it is permitted even on the Sabbath “to carry as amulets the egg of a certain species of locust [against earache], the tooth of a fox [against insomnia or drowsiness], or the

nail from the gallows [against swelling].”

The rabbinic responsa literature of the past several hundred years is replete with references to amulets as preventives to ward off the “evil eye,” to avert demons, to prevent abortion as well as to cure a variety of diseases such as epilepsy, lunacy, fever, poisoning, hysteria, jaundice, and colic. A distinction is made in Jewish law between the prophylactic and therapeutic use of amulets as follows:

It is permitted to heal with amulets, even if they contain [divine] names; similarly it is allowed to wear amulets containing scriptural verses, but only if they serve to protect the wearer from becoming ill, but not to heal him if he is afflicted with a wound or a disease. But it is forbidden to write scriptural verses in amulets.

Amulets were usually pendants worn by the user at all times to prevent or to cure certain ailments. Talismans did not have to be carried or worn at all times. Other objects are also cited in Jewish sources as efficacious against specific complaints. A coin tied to the sole of the foot was worn to prevent or heal bruises. A preserving stone is mentioned in the Talmud (Shabbat 66b) which was widely believed in ancient times to protect the wearer against a miscarriage. In his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides discusses the subject of amulets and preserving stones which were thought to be efficacious.

One may also go out with a garlic skin, an onion skin, or a bandage over a wound — it is also permissible to tie or untie the bandage on the Sabbath — with a plaster, a poultice, or a compress over a wound, or with a coin or a callus, or wearing a locust’s egg, a

22. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 179:12.
23. Ibid, Orach Chayim 301:28, based on Shabbat 65a.
fox’s tooth, a nail from the gallows of an impaled convict, or any other article suspended on the body for medical reasons, provided that physicians say that it is medically effective (Shabbat 19:13).

A woman may go out wearing a preserving stone — or its counterweight which has been weighed accurately for medical use. Not only a woman already pregnant may wear such a stone, but any other woman also may do so as a preventive of miscarriage in the event of pregnancy.

One may also wear a tested amulet — that is an amulet which has already cured three patients, or was made by someone who had previously cured three patients with other amulets. If one goes out into a public domain wearing an untested amulet, he is exempt, because he is deemed to have worn it as apparel when transferring it from one domain to the other (Ibid. 19:14).

We are at a loss to explain the efficacy of amulets, although perhaps amulets and the like were efficacious because of their placebo effect. Patient attitude toward the physician and patient confidence in the treatment being used certainly play a role in the psychological if not physiological well-being of the patient.

Astrology

The work of astrologers was not confined to predicting the future from the stars. They claimed to be able to influence the future by changing misfortune into good fortune. They applied occult virtues of heavenly bodies to earthly objects. Their medicine was an image made by human art with due reference to the constellation. On this principle is based the method of curing diseases with figures especially made for this purpose. For example, Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Adret, known as Rashba, writes that to cure pains in the loins or in the kidneys, people used to engrave the image of a tongueless lion on a plate of silver or gold.24

The generally-prevalent belief in astrology during the Middle Ages was fully shared by the Jews, many of whom were convinced of the fundamental truth of the power of celestial bodies to influence human destiny. Moses Maimonides was one of the few who not only dared raise his voice against this almost universally-held belief, but even branded it as a superstition akin to idolatry. He unequivocally prohibited anyone to influence his actions by astrology, as an offense punishable by disciplinary flogging. In his treatise on idolatry and heathen ordinances, he categorically rejects astrology and other superstitious practices and beliefs.

In his famous Letter to Yemen, Maimonides denounces astrology as a fallacy and delusion. In his psychological and ethical treatise entitled The Eight Chapters (Shemonah Perakim), Maimonides again sharply inveighs against astrology, denouncing it as a deception that is subversive to the faith and teachings of Judaism: "I have entered into this subject so thou mayest not believe the absurd ideas of astrologers, who falsely assert that the constellation at the time of one’s birth determines whether one is to be virtuous or vicious."

In his Letter on Astrology, in answer to an inquiry from Jewish scholars of southern France, Maimonides exposes the foibles and fallacies of astrology. Noteworthy in this letter is the oft-quoted comment that the Second Temple was destroyed and national independence forfeited because the Jews were occupied with astrology. Maimonides told his correspondents that he did not take the matter lightly, but had studied it thoroughly and came to the conclusion that astrology was an irrational illusion of fools who

mistake vanity for wisdom and superstition for knowledge.*

Medical Charms and Incantations

The medical effectiveness of incantations was never in doubt in classic Jewish sources. Incantations to heal a scorpion's bite are permitted even on the Sabbath, as are snake or scorpion charming to prevent injury or harm by them.29 Maimonides points out that such incantations are absolutely useless but are permitted because of the patient's dangerous condition, so that he should not become distraught.30 The Shulchan Aruch is of the same opinion.31 However, in earlier sources we find evidence of belief in the effectiveness of these techniques. One whispered a spell to heal eye illnesses (Tosefta Shabbat 7:32). Rabbi Chanina healed Rabbi Yochanan by uttering an incantation (Song of Songs Rabbah 2:16). A bone stuck in the throat can be dislodged by an incantation (Shabbat 67a).

The main question concerning the permissibility of incantations in Judaism is whether or not they represent a form of forbidden heathen practice in that Jews are commanded not "to go in the ways of the Amorites" (Leviticus 18:3). Some Talmudic sages declare that if one whispers a spell over a bodily illness, one is deprived of everlasting bliss, i.e., the world to come. (However, we have noted that other rabbis certainly employed incantations). These sages further prohibit a person from calling another to recite a biblical verse to calm a frightened child (Yerushalmi Shabbat 6:8b).

* Editors Note: However, in contrast to the Rambam, the Ramban does not dismiss the efficacy of astrological forecasts, although he does not advocate seeking out astrological advice. This somewhat more benign attitude is reflected also in the normative halacha as encoded in the Shulchan Aruch. This is discussed more fully in Vol. XVI of this Journal, Fall 1988, pp.20-23

31. Shulchan Aruch, Ibid.
On the other hand, the Talmud clearly states that whatever is used for healing purposes is not forbidden on account of "the ways of the Amorites" (Shabbat 67a). This rule is codified by R. Asher ben Yechiel, known as Rosh, who states that charms used for the promotion of health are covered by the exemption of "anything done for the sake of healing." Rashba states that the prohibition on account of the "ways of the Amorites" is limited to those practices specifically enumerated in the Talmud (Tosefta Shabbat, Chapters 7 and 8).

Zimmels lists a variety of diseases cured by charms as found in the Responsa literature, including certain eye diseases, headache, infertility, and epilepsy. He also describes the custom of transference, whereby an illness can be transferred to an animal or a plant by a certain procedure with or without the recitation of an incantation. For example, patients with jaundice were told to put live fish under their soles to transfer the jaundice to the fish. In more recent times, pigeons were placed on the abdomen of the jaundiced patient to transfer the illness to the pigeons.

Sorcery and Witchcraft

Judaism categorically prohibits sorcery as the first and foremost abhorrent practice of the nations. These practices include those who augur, soothsay, divine, practice sorcery, cast spells, consult ghosts or familiar spirits, or inquire of the dead. "Anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Witchcraft in general is also outlawed: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:17). Crimes of sorcery are considered tantamount to idolatrous crimes of human sacrifices (Deuteronomy 18:10). The various forms of sorcery are defined in detail in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 65a).

Whether the use of sorcery for medical or healing purposes was exempted from the prohibition was a much-debated question in

32. Commentary of Rosh on Shabbat 6:19.
34. Ibid. pp. 141-142.
the writings of medieval Jewish authorities.35 One view is that the types of practices used in the Middle Ages were not of the idolatrous type prohibited in the Bible as sorcery.36 Another view is that the prohibition of sorcery can be waived in cases of grave danger to life.37 Yet another view is that sorcery or witchcraft may be resorted to but only for conditions thought to have been caused or induced by sorcery or witchcraft.38

The related topics of exorcism of demons, the "evil spirit" and the "evil eye," the "dreck-apotheke," and other superstitious, occult and scatological cures are discussed by Jakobovits39 and Zimmels.40

Quacks and Quackery

Judaism has always held the physician in high esteem. Ancient and medieval Jewish writings are replete with expressions of admiration and praise for the "faithful physician." Therefore, it is not surprising that the derogatory Talmudic statement "the best of physicians is destined for Gehenna" (Kiddushin 4:14) generated extensive discussion and commentary throughout the centuries.41

The Hebrew epigram "tau sheberofim legehinnom," is variously translated as "the best among physicians is destined to Gehinnom,"42 "the best of physicians is fit for Gehenna,"43 "the best of doctors are destined for Gehenna,"44 "to hell with the best

35. Zimmels. p. 221, note 90.
36. Habir, S. Respona Nachalat Shiva #76.
37. Ettlinger J. Respona Binyan Zion #67.
38. Luria S. Respona Maharshal #3.
42. Zimmels. p. 170.
of the physicians,"45 and "the best physician is destined to go to hell."46

According to Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, a Provencal writer and philosopher, in his ethical treatise Even Bochan (The Touchstone), the epigram "physicians are fit only for Gehenna" refers not to genuine physicians but to quacks because "their art is lying and deception; all their boasting is empty falsehood; their hearts are turned away from G-d and their hands are covered with blood."47

Based on many interpretations, Jakobovits concludes that "to hell with the best of the physicians" was never understood as a denunciation of the conscientious practitioner. Physicians are among a group of communal servants who have heavy public responsibilities and are warned against the danger of negligence or error. The Talmudic epigram with its curse is thus limited to physicians who are overly confident in their craft, or are guilty of commercializing their profession, or lie and deceive as do quacks, or who fail to acknowledge G-d as the true healer of the sick, or who fail to consult with colleagues or medical texts when appropriate, or who perform surgery without heeding proper advice from diagnosticians, or who fail to heal the poor and thus indirectly cause their death, or who fail to try hard enough to heal their patients, or who otherwise fail to conduct themselves in an ethical and professional manner.

Jewish law requires a physician to be skilled and well-educated. If he heals without being properly licensed, he is liable for any bad outcome. If he is an expert physician and fully licensed but errs and thereby harms the patient, he is exempt from payment of damages "because of the public good" (Tosefta Gittin 4:6). The divine arrangement of the world requires and presupposes the existence of physicians. If one were to hold the physician liable for every

46. Preuss. p. 26
47. Friedenwald H. p. 74.
error, very few people would practice medicine. The physician, however, is still liable in the eyes of Heaven.48

If a physician caused an injury deliberately or acted without a proper license, he can be sued for damages no matter how competent he is (Tosefta Gittin 3:13). A physician who kills a patient and realizes that he was in error, is exiled to the cities of refuge just like anyone else who kills another person through error (Numbers 5:11 and Deuteronomy 19:3).

Blamelessness in case of error only applies to a rophe umman, an expert or well-trained healer, who heals “at the request of the authorities,” that is to say, a licensed physician. A non-licensed physician is subject to the general law and can be sued and must pay for damages he inflicts. Error and ignorance are used as excuses by quacks whom Judaism looks upon with disdain.

Summary and Conclusion

Judaism considers a human life to have infinite value. Therefore, physicians and other health-care givers are obligated to heal the sick and prolong life. Physicians are not only given divine license to practice medicine, but are also mandated to use their skills to heal the sick. Failure or refusal to do so with resultant negative impact on the patient constitutes a transgression on the part of the physician. Physicians must be well-trained in traditional medicine and licensed by the authorities.

Patients are duty bound to seek healing from qualified healers when they are ill and not rely solely on divine intervention or faith healing. Patients are charged with preserving their health and restoring it when ailing in order to be able to serve the Lord in a state of good health. Quackery is not condoned in Judaism whether or not it is practiced by physicians. Those who deceive patients into accepting quack remedies “are destined for Gehenna.”

On the other hand, Judaism seems to sanction certain alternative therapies such as prayers, faith healing, amulets, incantations and their like, when used as a supplement to

traditional medical therapy. However, the substitution of prayer alone for rational healing is condemned. Quackery, superstition, sorcery, and witchcraft are abhorrent practices in Judaism, but confidence in the healing powers of G-d through prayer and contrition is encouraged and has its place of honor alongside traditional scientific medicine.