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**Beth Chayim Chadashim
Los Angeles**

Drash by Ginger Jacobs

Shabbat Shalom!

This is my 20th anniversary of being cancer free! For a couple of years now, I have thought about how I wanted to acknowledge this wonderful milestone. I knew I wanted to do it within my Jewish community, at my temple. After all, we say a mishberach for those who are ill, we say kaddish for those who have died. What do we do to affirm health? Giving the drash and having Lisa and Fran give me a blessing sounded like a wonderful idea.

The first thing I had to do was pick a date. It could have been either this week or next week, so I checked both parashot. Naso, this week's parasha coincidentally was the same parasha on which I gave the drash last year, celebrating with Josh and Julie Weyser on their first Shabbat together. I wasn't sure I wanted to repeat the parasha, until I heard Michael Main give a drash saying it was the 3rd or 4th time he had given a drash for that parasha, each time was different because he was different. That made sense to me.

After all, there are lots of good discussion points in NASO, such as the Birkat Kohanim, the Blessings of the Priests, how women are put through an ordeal to prove their faithfulness to their husbands, and the rites of the Nazerites.

Before I could make a decision though, I had to check out next week's portion. In BEHA'ALOTCHA, Moses recites the shortest prayer in the Torah, El Na Rafana la, God Please Heal Her, for Miriam when she was struck ill. He was able to recite this prayer to God since God struck Miriam sick.

At first, I thought that would be great, the healing prayer and I'm celebrating health. Yet, I had to think back 20 years. Did I pray to God to heal me? el na rafana la

No, I did not. If I believed in a God who could heal me, I had to believe in a God who had given me my cancer. I could not accept that. I still can't accept that. My God has other things to do than strike people sick. Maybe that was what God did in Biblical days, but not MY God and not today. I looked at NASO where the specific duties of the tribes are spelled out in detail. Each had their role to do so the whole community could function smoothly. 20 years ago, I recognized the different roles each doctor had in my recovery and I do remember praying that the doctors all knew what they were doing, that they were skilled and that God was with them. My family and friends and community were there as well, supporting me, each in their own way, doing what they each were supposed to be doing.

A few weeks ago, I saw my oncologist and reminded him that it was 20 years and I thanked him for each one of those years. He helped me more than just with his medications. He was the first truly Jewish doctor I ever had. He helped me put my treatments in a Jewish context. When I asked if I could fast on Yom Kippur during chemo, his response was: "I understand that it is spiritually important to you to fast, but don't go beyond what your body tells you, eat if you need to fulfill pekuach nefesh", the saving of a life.

He showed me the path for healing, both physically and spiritually.

Okey, are there other elements within NASO that could be stretched for my situation?

NASO details what happens if a man thinks his wife has been unfaithful to him. The woman goes through an ordeal of drinking bitter waters so her guilt or innocence can be determined. This is done in front of the community. If she is innocent her husband will forgive and hopefully forget and learn to trust her again. The Torah even promises a baby, the ultimate gift to a woman.

My ordeal was about infidelity in a sense, the infidelity of my body. My body betrayed me, I had taken decent care of her all my life and she betrayed me by getting cancer. So, what did I do? I treated my body with bitter waters which made me sick, the chemotherapy. And my ordeal was also done within my community. In time, I have learned to understand, appreciate, and trust my body again. We are now good friends, where before cancer, I think I took her for granted.

Last year, I participated in the Avon Breast Cancer 3Day Walk, from Santa Barbara to Zuma. I was one of 200 survivors among the over 3000 walkers. The weather was miserable, rained the whole last day, but I felt on top of the world when I finished. Not only had I learned to trust my body again, I had brought her to new heights. I could do anything. I am more than a survivor. I have made a great life for myself.

This year, I am doing the walk again, this time with my daughter. Hopefully, Lisa and Fran will be there for Shabbat Services again, as they have for the past 2 years. Can you imagine how wonderful it felt to have walked for 8 hours and go to Shabbat Services with my Rabbi and my Cantor?

I have heard it said that "cancer is the best thing that has happened to me." I'm not sure I would say that, but I can say that cancer has changed me for the better and the way I try to live.

A dear friend from Miami came to help after my surgery. She hoped that someday I would again feel that petty things are important. She meant that the cancer would have receded as the top priority in my life. I understood that, but realized that I never wanted to go back to believing that petty things are important. I want to always keep things in perspective, petty things are petty and there are plenty of important things around. After Cancer, I try to look at things differently, see what is really important and shed the rest of it, as I shed my hair during chemo.

Cancer helped me appreciate life and the beauty that surrounds me. I do stop and smell

the roses and enjoy the sunsets over the park behind my house. I thank God for the color purple.

Birthdays are wonderful things, we all have them. Too often we complain because we are getting older. I'm not as old as I'm going to get and I want to get a lot older! I want to continue to grow, to pray, to study, and to open myself to new ways of living.

Many of you know that I attend the UAHC Kallah in Santa Cruz. The first summer I was there, I studied with Deborah Lipstadt. Among other things, we studied the morning blessings. For the first time, I realized that these blessings were for ME. I was thanking God for allowing me to see, to have clothes to put on, food to eat, and freedom in which to enjoy life. These were not some Reform Social Action imperative telling me to clothe the naked and feed the hungry. I was the hungry and God was feeding me, physically and spiritually.

At the time, I was going through hot flashes. Not fun. What I did was create a blessing to recite each time I had a hot flash. It didn't change them or make them better, but it put me in a better frame of mind and therefore I didn't mind them so much. My prayer: Thank you God for allowing my body to function the way she should, for helping me realize that she too has her times and her seasons.

This reminded me that after everything my body had gone through with breast cancer, radiation, and chemotherapy, she was still doing what she was supposed to do. She and I had come full circle and were connected once again.

NASO details the rites of the Nazirites. It speaks about separateness, separating the holy from the profane, for a set period of time only, not for a lifetime. Rabbi Schulweis, during a Havdalah service, once asked if God could create anything profane? Shouldn't, he asked, we say Havdalah separates the holy from the everyday?

I look back on the time of my cancer treatments as a separation from my everyday life. It was a time of sacrifice and struggle. The Nazirites sacrificed parts of their everyday life, to live the totally holy life. I discovered that there is life after chemo, just as the Nazirites returned to a normal everyday life after their vows were completed.

Can I truly separate cancer from my life? The cancer itself has been separated from me, but can its effects be removed from my life? No! Nor do I want them to be. I want to remember how grateful I am to be here, I want to remember all my blessings. I want to always remember to tell those special people in my life how special they are, how much they helped me through the rough times and how much better the good times are shared with them. I want to remember that I can do anything - I beat cancer and I walked 60 miles. I almost feel like the song: "I am WOMAN, hear me roar!"

I beat cancer! What does that mean? I am still here 20 years later. But cancer is still here too. Can we ever beat it? Maybe some day, the medical world will have abolished cancer and other diseases. Until that time, we must individually beat it. We must take care of ourselves, learn about our bodies, work with our doctors to keep us healthy. In the face of cancer, or any life threatening illness, we must not give up. We must continue to live and love and say to the illness: You cannot beat me,

even if you kill me physically! By affirming life God will bless us.

God blesses us through the Birkat Kohanim, which is in this parasha. Each of the 3 blessings begins with God. According to Nehama Liebowitz, the first blessing refers to the physical, the second blessing to the spiritual and the third blessing moves us to peace, both inner peace and peace throughout the world.

Adonai bless you and keep you!
Adonai deal kindly and graciously with you!
Adonai bestow favor upon you and grant you peace!

The blessings are singular, written for us individually. But we are also blessed as a people. We stand as individuals and as part of a community. We are always linked with each other and with God. The line following the 3 blessings is: "Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

God has blessed me, with 20 years of health, with a new understanding of my body and the magnificence of the world around me. God has blessed me with my family and my friends, my community. God has blessed me with the power to laugh, to study, to pray and to love.

Please join me in the Shehechi-anyu.

Shabbat Shalom!