The Physician’s Prayer

Compiled by Rabbi Professor Avraham Steinberg, MD
Translated by Professor Fred Rosner, MACP

ABOUT THE COMPILER

Rabbi Professor Avraham Steinberg, MD, is an associate clinical professor of medical ethics at the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem. He is the author of The Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics, published in seven volumes in Hebrew (two editions) and three volumes in English (translated by Dr. Fred Rosner), for which he was awarded the Israel Prize in 1999. Professor Steinberg is a senior pediatric neurologist at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem. He directs the Medical Ethics Unit at Shaare Zedek. Head of the editorial board of the Talmudic Encyclopedia, and Editor-in-Chief of the Talmudic Micropedia, he is also director of Yad Harav Herzog, and a member of national and international societies of child neurology, medical ethics, and Jewish medical ethics.

In Israel, Professor Steinberg is the co-chairman of the National Bioethics Council, chairman of the Dying Patient Committee, chairman of the Organ Transplantation Committee, chairman of the Altruistic Live-Organ Donations Committee, member of the Brain-Death Criteria Committee, member of the Status of the Fetus and Pre-Embryo Committee, and chairman of the Pathological Specimens Committee.

He is the author and editor of 40 books and public reports in 59 volumes, and over 280 articles and chapters in scientific journals and books on Jewish medical ethics, general medical ethics, the history of medicine, medicine and law, and pediatric neurology. He has given over 4,000 expert witness opinions in court cases on pediatric neurology and medical ethics.
ABSTRACT

I compiled a long prayer and a short prayer from prayers composed by physicians who preceded me and adapted them to our times as an ethical code from a Torah and halakhic perspective. As a segulah (spiritual remedy), this edited English translation of the longer Hebrew prayer is recommended to be recited once a week to help physicians know their place and responsibilities toward the Almighty, their patients, and their colleagues. Both the short and long prayers in Hebrew appear in the Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics, second Hebrew edition, 2006, vol. I, mavo A:29–36.¹ The shorter Hebrew prayer appears here on page 55.

MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, WITH YOUR WISDOM

You created the human body, spirit and soul, man and woman, fetus, child, adult, and the elderly. You imbued us with breath and planted thousands of cells, tissues, organs, and systems with orifices and cavities functioning ceaselessly, quietly, orderly, in coordination and harmony to safeguard the life and the physical and mental health of Your creations.

But, with Your Divine Providence You also bring suffering and pain, illnesses, disabilities, and wounds to the body and the soul. You are the G-d of truth, the living G-d, Who rules with righteousness and justice, and Who heals with loving-kindness and mercy. Nothing is beyond Your power and nothing is hidden from You, for You can heal every malady and even revive the dead, as You have said: “I am the L-rd that heals you,” and “I have wounded and I shall heal.”

You are the true Healer, supervising all the inhabitants of the Earth. You have created remedies to heal all human beings and have instilled physicians and medical researchers with wisdom, knowledge, and discernment to understand the normal as well as abnormal functioning of the body, to extract the essence of medications, to study their beneficial effects, to synthesize them, and to apply them according to the nature of each illness. You gave us permission to heal the sick, and we are Your messengers on Earth, as it is written in the Torah, “and heal you shall heal,” which the Talmud interprets as the basis for giving physicians

¹. The full text of previous prayers by and for physicians can be found in the Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics, pp. 16–29.
the right to heal. The Rishonim rule that this Divine permission is a commandment, and the physician who withholds medical skills from the ill is guilty of shedding blood.

Because You graciously endowed my brain with a small amount of medical knowledge, and Your eternal providence has chosen me to be Your messenger to guard the health of Your creations, I therefore wish to fulfill this mission, even though I know that You are the healer and not I. I am only clay in Your hands. You are the Creator of everything, and I am but a means through which You can cure Your creations.

I trust in You, Who teaches knowledge and implants resourcefulness to heal in the hearts of wise, and makes the herbs of healing sprout. Please attribute merit to me but cause me no liabilities. Keep me from harming anyone, not even a single limb or organ. Let me not be the cause of the death of any person, neither unintentionally nor intentionally, and do not count me among “the best of physicians...destined to hell.”

Master of the Universe, encourage me to learn the depths of the secrets of medicine from textbooks and teachers. Do not allow me to entertain the notion that my knowledge is sufficient, but give me the strength, time, and desire to incessantly add to my knowledge, and grant me new insights so that I can better serve as Your trusted and skilled messenger to heal the sick and to stand by patients in their distress at any time of day or night. Give my heart the wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to teach the mysteries of medicine to many students.

Grant me patience to listen to the suffering and worries of the sick and wounded. Help me understand my patients’ souls so I can raise their spirits in intelligent, loving ways and give them and their families correct information in appropriate measure with sensitivity and compassion.

Please G-d, allow me to see the good side but not the faults of every patient. May I honor the humanity of every human being, and may I tell only the truth, while remaining loyal to those who trust in me not to reveal their secrets and become a gossip.

Master of the Universe, give me the sense and the sensitivity to preserve each patient’s dignity and respect his privacy. You, Who created all human beings, sustain them whether they are rich or poor,
good or bad, whether they love or hate, whether they are honorable or contemptible. Therefore, purify my thoughts and guard me from sin, so that I may be able to heal the sick without making distinctions or showing favoritism. May all the sick and suffering be equal before me, whether they are rich or poor, elite or common. May their well-being and health always be my primary concern.

L-rd of all flesh, please strengthen my memory, so that whenever I see a patient I will be reminded immediately of the appropriate treatment for his illness, if I have already learned it. If I have not, please enable me to learn from medical texts or from consultation with other physicians how to heal the patient. May You endow me with grace, loving-kindness, and mercy. Fill the hearts of my patients with trust in me so that they listen to my advice and do as I instruct them, for healing both body and spirit.

Master of the Universe, please guide me, according to Your holy Torah, how to treat patients on Sabbaths, festivals, and fast days. Help me in all issues concerning male and female fertility. Guard me from any impure thoughts and from following my eyes, so I shall live by Your mitsvot.

Master of the Universe, if I receive a mortally-wounded patient whose time has nearly come, may it be Your will that I not hasten his death, Heaven forbid, by even a moment, but enlighten me to treat him properly, as the halakham dictates, to minimize his pain and suffering. If the time of his demise is near, may I not be suspect in the eyes of his friends or family. Do not let them consider me the cause of his death; rather, may they understand that the King of Kings decreed the patient’s death, since in His hand is the soul and life of every human being. However, if out of loving-kindness You are causing him to suffer in order to motivate him to do complete tshuvah (since You do not want us to die but to repent and live), then may I merit to be Your trustworthy messenger to relieve his pain and suffering, whether by the use of speech or medications and treatments. Guide my words to help bring him to complete tshuvah and to accept his suffering with love so that it can atone for his sins.

Master of the Universe, please save me from hatred and competition. May I not envy others, and may others not envy me. Instead, establish peace between other physicians and myself, with mutual love,
friendship, and camaraderie. May I not be put to shame or humiliated before them. Enable me to preserve the honor of my colleagues. Let me not rejoice when my colleagues stumble. If physicians more knowledgeable or expert than I correct my ways or rebuke me, let me listen to them and thank them. Enable me to benefit from the good in their advice, since the scope of the medical profession is immense and not everyone can see what his colleague sees. But if those who rebuke me are arrogant and ignorant, please strengthen my spirit like iron, in the love of my profession, to stand steadfast before them and protect the truth, without taking into account the age or greatness of those who oppose me.

May it be Your will, L-rd, my G-d and the G-d of my forefathers, that You grace me with wisdom, knowledge, and discernment, and illuminate my mind to understand and to perfectly recognize the illnesses of each individual who comes to me for treatment. Show me how to treat each patient with correct individualized therapy, according to his constitution and current condition. Assist me in healing every patient. Support me, and I will be saved from any mishap, and let no harm come to any patient because of me. Be benevolent with me, since for the sake of benevolence I entered the practice of medicine. Therefore, assist me and redeem me from shame or ridicule. Please, my G-d, I put my faith in You. May I not be shamed, and may my enemies not rejoice on my account. Give me strength and understanding to serve the sick and care for them with expertise and compassion. May the cure and recovery of every patient be complete, with honor and respect.

And You, G-d, Who knows the feelings and thoughts of every person, it is revealed and known before You that my entire desire and intent is to glorify Your Great and Holy Name, to do Your will. Therefore, guard me and purify my thoughts so that I not sin before You. Assist me in completely curing the sick. Keep me from failure and danger, as is written: “He who performs amitsvah will not know anything bad.”

I beg you, G-d, heed my supplication. Help me, strengthen me, fortify me, and bring me success in my vital role, for without Your assistance no one can succeed in even the smallest task. Fill my soul with love for my profession and for Your created beings. Do not let greed or the desire for praise or honor contaminate my work, for these traits are the enemies of truth and brotherhood. “When I call upon You, answer
me, L-rd of righteousness. You have helped me when I was in need; have mercy on me and listen to my prayer.” Amen, may it be Your will.

THE SHORT HEBREW PRAYER (RECOMMENDED TO BE RECITED DAILY)

תפילה קצרה לבריאות

In the short Hebrew prayer (recommended to be recited daily)

רבונהше לעולמנו, המשגיח עלי כל ביהותי, והמותם והורפות כ"ז, ואשר הי בברחתishmentsי
על יהיה צידך הבריות, כלל ישון ורונות כל פיקים שלחתיות בברחתishmentsי, והנני
עשתה להלמנה את ספרואתי, אוצי ידעתי כי אהת היא הורפת לא אנ.
ואנה, להלנה כי יisodes עולמנו, ולהלנה כי שיש חובה בעולמנו, והל
תמציתי лидר רודע, ולר אצדר מקהלות, על ידי, ולא איה הנורמה להימרות של שום
אסם עולמנו, ולא זכרכי יבואר מאבורי, ולא בשוגג ולא במד.

רבוןше עלולנו, אנה כי אמתה הסבלנות לך כרחייםotropic התודעה והפתיעים,
כלבלב ולדהנגתה, ונה בולב שאריאי מלוכלך כחלילה אלה חסורה, שיאמבאכ אל אמס
באהו את אמס, ויהי כל החולים וישיםלפין, יהודה חליטה יבואר ברוש חמצני
פליפי.

רבוןше עלולנו, חוטבי יאמהיגה למלד, לפי ליום וי נמק כיוון הרוצה המשכון
ספורי פספורים, ונה בך,詈ים תלספסי בך חור על דעון, ולמען כלגלת
שלחו הנאתו הימים מלה את חולי בו האמס, ולמעון כל חולה בעמקה במל
עת בכל שנה שעה.

אמא, אנה שאלת הخلاص, שהשדנק הוה רבוד, וישראל בלבר איה תדהלה,
הזכיך מימי רפואת הריאה, וליה רזון מצלפים שתחנונך ול祲 החסד והanime בעיון
בראני כל אריה ישומי, וליהי בלה חיים יומייב וsmarty תעתיה, ויש את התודעה
מה ישאצוהו ובחonna דעון רפואת במק במק.

רבוןше עלולנו, אנה ישראל זמן ושואנה התודעה, ולא יאנת באמרי, ולא להיה קנטת
אוחרי על, אלא משכה בבי רני מצא וייחוס האמנת, אחותה, שולמה וורשה, ושלא
אווה שו אולאם בבריחה.

אותה ה', בוה בית וירד intervening, שלה וידוע פלפון שלח רזון ווגותי שמע
המד הלודוג/os עותש רזון, על פי שמרני תוהי ריעוני דגוס אל הפשת, ולעómo
נגל ליאאנה אט קלור בשמל, ושומרי שיא השלאות אל אספס עצום בינא מוה
כductibn: 'שומר מזונת לא גיד לבר ים.'

אמא, 'תקשות לב 홈 שור עולש מלך עולש, כי אליך אתחל', צידך יומני
וזלتحسين את תוקידיMono, כי בצל_rad תוהי אל עלותי ואתון 오ילן השטרועי. אלא
את התハウス את תמקומי וליפורים, ולא בות לוחות שבע, התודעה הבודד ללהורבד
בכלי, כי אתה הב שיאני אתתם אוメンת האזד, וללא יסווניות תוקידי תודעה
למנור תוב עס עיורי, 'בראר עניי אליק צדק', בבר הרחבת לו תונני, ושומת טפלתי,'
אמרנו ופיו ריון.