

**Temple Israel**  
**Rabbi Adam Grossman**  
**Summer 2009**  
**“A Moral Obligation”**

This past April, Rabbi Greenstein, Barb Gelb, our Brotherhood V.P., Howard Manis, our former Youth Advisor, Celia Mutchnick, and I led our Junior and Senior class to Washington DC to tour the city, speak with our Congressman, and attend Reform Judaism’s Religious Action Center’s conference the Consultation on Conscience. The theme this year was on health care and one of the keynote speakers was Memphis’ very own Rev. Scott Morris of the Church Health Center. In listening to his discussion about the center and the impact they had on this community, I realized why Rabbi Greenstein always says the Church Health Center is one of the most “Jewish” institutions in Memphis.

The issue of health care is apparent in all facets of our Jewish consciousness. For example, it plays a vital role in our liturgy. At the beginning of our service this evening, we said borei prei hagafen and followed with the exclamation “l’chayim” – to life. “To life” is more than just an affirmation that we are alive, but also encourages us to remove obstacles that prevent us from experiencing life such as health concerns. On Shabbat mornings, we say the Asher Yatzar, which blesses the human body’s sophistication and prays for the continued health of this complex network. And soon, we will say the mishabayrach, a benediction for those suffering in our midst, which offers prayers of healing to encourage their wellbeing.

Yet, while prayer has been proven to strengthen our immune systems, proper health care cannot simply depend on prayer. It takes the action of individuals, which has led so many of our members to serve as volunteers at the Church Health Center. First, physicians have an obligation to heal their patients. According to the Shulhan Aruch, the 16th century book that organizes and clarifies Jewish law, doctors are required to reduce their rates for poor patients, and when that is not sufficient, communal subsidies are established.

As for patients, we too have a responsibility. We are required to seek medical attention when needed, as our Talmud states, "Whoever is in pain, lead him to the physician." But, providing health care is not just a physician or patient's responsibility, it is our society's duty, as well. Maimonides, the 11th century Jewish scholar and physician, would rank health care first on his list of the ten most important communal services a city should offer to its residents.

There is no doubt that our country and state have been greatly affected by the economic downturn. It has led to pay cuts, loss of jobs, and difficulty finding new ones. Yet, as Jews, even in the midst of these challenging times, we are bound by the concept of mipnei tikkun ha-olam meaning that we are obligated to repair the world in which we find ourselves.

Unfortunately, our health care system is not adequately addressing the needs of our day. We all know that the costs of individual health care are continually rising. It prevents too many of us from acquiring affordable health care and causes many to neglect medical attention.

Simultaneously, doctors and hospitals are handcuffed by rules and regulations inhibiting them from offering the care to those in need. One in ten of us are without health insurance right now. So out of the 200 people here this evening, about twenty of our family, our friends, and our community are not receiving necessary health care.

The health care issues, which plague us, might not be solved today or tomorrow, but the problems must be addressed. While solutions are currently being discussed in the political arena, this is not a Republican or Democratic issue. This is not a liberal or conservative issue. This is not a uniquely Jewish or Christian issue. It is a people issue. Like the demands of our tradition from 400 years ago, today in this time of crisis, we can do no less.

Shabbat Shalom.