

## Healing From Abortion - Jewish tradition

### Opening

The ritual begins with one woman inviting all to take a few deep breaths. She then begins a niggun (wordless melody). Participants stand in a circle.

### Creating Supportive Space

The “focus” woman, for whom the ritual is being conducted, steps into the center of the circle, with one or two women near her to hold her hand and comfort her, and says:

Hinneni – Here I stand alone, as before, when I made my decision about childbearing in the uniqueness of my personal choice.

### All other participants approach and tighten the circle around the “focus” woman to support her. Women say together:

You are not alone now. In aloneness you made your choice, and in community you will be sustained.

### Affirming One’s Choices

**One woman says:** It is the blessing and the curse of being human that we have the capacity to make choices. Sometimes the choices are filled with pain, or it feels as though we have no choice at all. Nothing can make the ending of a pregnancy easy. We affirm you in your painful and difficult choice.

**Women say together:** Blessed are you, Creator of the Universe, who sustains us in times of decision. You have made it possible for us to consider with wisdom our lives and the lives of our loved ones, and you have granted us courage and intelligence to make choices about childbearing. As you have been with us in times of past decisions; so may you be with us today as we affirm the difficult decisions \_\_\_\_\_ [and her family] has [have] made.

### “Focus” woman says:

Barukh attah adonai eloheinu melekh ha’olam, asher natan lasekhvi vina lhavhin bein yom uvein lailah.

I bless you , Holy One, Sovereign Spirit of the Universe, who has enabled me to distinguish between night and day, who has given me the ability to make wise choices.

**Women respond:** Amen.

### Sharing the Pain

**One woman says:** We know that there is deep sadness within you. We know that you feel loss and sorrow and regret. We mourn with you.

**“Focus” woman is invited to share her own words about her grief. She may also wish to express any regret, guilt, doubt, uncertainty, or resentment that arose while making the decision to terminate the pregnancy. The intention here is for the focus woman to be heard and to “let go”.**

**Option A: In the event of a medically-recommended abortion, one woman says:** We know the Torah teaching: When we must choose between a being not yet born and the life of a mother, the choice is very clear. The being you were carrying could not be. No human hand caused this to happen; no human act could have allowed this being to emerge in health and wholeness. Still, in the shadow of such a choice, we feel small and limited and out of control.

**Women say together:** We who stand with you today are witness to the terrible choice that was no choice at all. We affirm you in choosing life. You made a choice, choosing life for you. We

grieve with you over the loss of this seed of life, and we affirm your essence, as a person gifted with the ability to nurture other life- within yourself, in your love for others, and in your connections to family, friends, and community.

**One woman chants an adapted El Maleh Rahamim:**

El maleh rahamim, shokhen bameromim, hamtzeh menuhah nekhonah tahat kanfei hashekhinah, et nishmat hatinoket/hatinok shelo noldah/nolad le'olameinu. Anna, ba'al harahamim, hastirehah/hastirehu b;eseter kenafekha le'olamim, utzeror bitzror hahayyim et nishmatah/nishmato, adonai hu nahalatah/nahalato, veyavi'cha/veyavi'chyu leshalom. Venomar amen.

O God filled with womb-like compassion, who resides in the high places, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence, to the soul of this being who was not born into our world. Please, compassionate Mother-God, shelter her/him beneath Your protective wings for all eternity and bind his/her soul to the Bond of Life. The Holy One is now his/her home and will bring her/him eternal peace. And let us say, Amen.

**Option B: In the event of a decision to terminate the pregnancy for reasons other than medical, women say together:** May You who share sorrow with Your creation be with \_\_\_\_\_ now as she experiences the loss of potential life. We are sad as we think of her painful decision, and support her as she and we imagine what might have been. Life is a fabric of different emotions and experiences. Now, O God, while \_\_\_\_\_ experiences life's bitterness and pain, be with her and with us, and sustain us. Help us to gather strength from within ourselves, from each other, and from our wider community. Blessed are You, Divine Presence, who shares sorrow with Your creation.

**Affirming One's Self (After option A or B continue here)**

**"Focus" woman says:** Elohai, neshamah shenatatta bi tehorah hi. Attah veratah, attah yetzartah, atah nefahtah bi, ve'attah meshammerah bekirbi<sup>o</sup>

My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me.

I know that I am created b'tzelem elohim, that a divine spark resides within me. I know that I am free to make choices – about my body and my future. I have made my choices, painful as they may be, in harmony with the divinity that dwells within me. I affirm my freedom, I affirm my self, and I honor my choices in the face of enormous complexity and still-lingering questions.

Barukh attah adonai, she'asani ishah. Barukh attah adonai, she'asani bat-horin.

I bless You, Holy One, who has made me a woman. I bless You, Holy One, who has made me free.

**Surviving and Being Thankful**

**"Focus" woman says:** The Holy One "heals the broken in heart and binds their wounds" (Ps.147:3) I have survived a sad journey – with peril to both body and soul. I thank You for sustaining me and bringing me through the peril in wholeness.

**"Focus" woman reads or sings (Hebrew or English, as is comfortable for her) Birkat Hagomel (dedicated to Ira Silverman, of blessed memory) Hebrew and English are both to be sung to the melody of the traditional American folk song, "The Creole Girl"**

Avarekh et ein hahayyim yotzerert tov vara. Akaddesh et hei ha'olam yotzer afelah ve'orah. Avarti begei tzalmavet ve'attah immadi. Modah ani lakh shehehezartini beshalom.

I shall bless the Source of Life who fashions good and evil. I shall bless the Holy One who brings dark and light to all people. For I have walked in the valley of the shadow of death. And You, and You were with me then, with every painful breath.

### Seeking Healing

**“Focus” woman moves from her place in center of circle. All women greet and embrace her. They respond to her Birkat Hagomel by repeatedly chanting in Hebrew Moses’ prayer for Miriam’s healing, as long as the power of the chant moves them:**

El na refa na lah°El na refah na lah°

Please God, heal her please°Please God, heal her please° "Please God, heal her please

Please God, heal her please (Numbers 12:13)

**Chanting subsides and women flow right into singing Debbie Friedman’s adaptation of a traditional prayer for healing:**

### Mi Shebeirach

"Mi shebeirach imoteinu

M’kor habracha l’avoteinu

May the source of strength

Who blessed the ones before us,

Help us find the courage

To make our lives a blessing,

And let us say, Amen.

"Mi shebeirach avoteinu

M’kor habrachah l’imoteinu,

Bless those in need of healing

With r’fua shleimah

The renewal of body,

The renewal of spirit,

And let us say, Amen.

**After a moment of silence, one woman says:** “Thank you all for sharing your love and support with \_\_\_\_\_ at this difficult time.”

*Rabbi Leila Gal Berner. In Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones, Vol. I, ed. Rabbi Debra Orenstein, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1998, pp. 127-132 Reprinted here with permission of the author. It may be freely reproduced for the purpose of pastoral counseling only.*

*For rituals on miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, and infertility from the Conservative Movement of Judaism, see the Rabbinical Assembly’s Rabbi’s Manual, Moreh Derekh, Vol II, I-3 to I-42, and for adoption, F-12 and A-11.*