

chase daffodil bulbs at a local nursery. Weak as he was, George planted them himself. The daffodils would bloom the coming spring. "I told myself: Maybe I'll get to see them flower, but likely I won't. Then they will be for my grave."

George's face was calm and expectant. I got the message—to speak with equal candor. "Did you know that I and virtually the entire medical staff disagreed with the treatment?" I asked.

"I did." George paused gravely. "I knew all the arguments made in cases like mine. Treatment would cause unnecessary suffering for me and for my family. Add in that it throws away society's money on a doomed person." His eyes narrowed. "I find these arguments patronizing. I did even before I was ill. It was my *right* to choose what I did.

"Even if I didn't prevail—and I didn't expect to—it was my only chance. I deeply wanted to live, so I had to fight. Then I could tell myself that I had tried, that I had done everything possible. There would be no regrets."

George placed the individual squarely as the ultimate arbiter of his fate. It rep-

resented a certain form of hope—the hope to be strong enough not to yield, to fight despite knowing there was little chance of survival. The mustering of the will to engage the foe and the strength to sustain the battle, in themselves, became a form of victory. Surrender would be on George's terms, at a time and place of his choosing. I realized how clueless I had been.

"Once I decided to go for it," George continued, "I thought of my forebears. They were pioneers who embarked on a perilous and uncertain journey west. Most knew they would perish on the way. But they persisted."

"And your faith?" I asked. "How did that influence you?"

"I recited the Twenty-Third Psalm—before, during, and after each treatment. It spoke so beautifully, so directly, to my plight."



*The Lord is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.*

*He maketh me to lie down  
in green pastures: he leadeth me*

*beside the still waters.*

*He restoreth my soul:*

*he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

*I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presense of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

What accounts for the power of this psalm for non-Jews and Jews alike? As Rabbi William Hamilton has explained to me, the psalm suggests two very different scenes. The first is idyllic: green pastures and still waters. The second is harrowing: the valley of the shadow of death. In the idyllic setting, God is somewhat distant, and is spoken of in the third person: *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.* But then there is an abrupt shift in scene and of God's person: When the Psalmist walks through the valley of the shadow of death, God is addressed as *thou*. In this change to the familiar we feel God moving near to us, becoming a close companion, allaying our fear, supporting us with rod and staff, nourishing us in the presence of our enemies. Faith is most powerful when we sense God as proximal and personal.



For many years after his cure, George visited cancer patients in the hospital who were losing hope. He was an inspiration. His survival showed them that there is inherent uncertainty in the behavior of even the worst diseases. He tried, too, to spark hopes beyond this clinical truth: to assist people in making choices that addressed their own particular needs, desires, and beliefs. Reaching back to the touchstones of one's heritage and faith, one could seek out freedom—both a freedom of the body shackled by disease and a freedom of the spirit to assert its dignity. □



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