

The New Shul Guide to DEATH AND MOURNING



Prepared by **The New Shul** Ritual Lab

Under the guidance of Rabbi Niles Elliot Goldstein

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Anita Kushner

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Contact Information for The New Shul

As of July 2010

The New Shul office

212-284-6773

Listen to the recording for numbers to call outside business hours.

Email

memberhelp@newshul.org

*We are always available to offer guidance and assistance to
members of The New Shul in their time of need. Please do not
hesitate to call or email*

Contents

Introduction	1
Four stages	3
Prior to death	4
Jewish laws and customs	4
Offering comfort.....	5
Psalms and prayers.....	7
Ethical will	9
Deathbed confession.....	11
Planning ahead.....	13
How The New Shul can help	14
The moment of death	15
Jewish laws and customs	15
Arranging for the funeral and burial.....	15
Caring for the body.....	18
How The New Shul can help	19
How friends and family can help	19
Funeral and burial	21
Jewish laws and customs	21
Funeral and burial.....	21
Psalms and prayers.....	23
How The New Shul can help	26
Mourning	27
Jewish laws and customs	27
Psalms and prayers.....	29
How The New Shul can help	30
How friends and family can help	31
Jewish views of death	32
The gift of your presence	34
Selected unanswered questions	36
Readings	40
Resources	54
Dedications	57
About The New Shul	58

Introduction

The *New Shul Guide to Death and Mourning* was created for those of you facing the loss of someone close to you—someone whose death promises to shake your world. It will introduce you to the Jewish practices designed to see you through this loss, from the moment you learn it is coming to the time when you mark the anniversary—and beyond, through the rest of your life.

There is also, we hope, something here for the individual who is facing death personally. Whether your time is imminent or mercifully distant, there are Jewish practices to help you pull together the loose strands of life.

Also included are guidelines for friends, family and members of The New Shul community. The role you have to play for the dying and the bereaved is more important than you can possibly imagine.

Some of the practices described in this booklet are considered “laws” or “commandments.” They are the ones that a traditionally observant Jew is obliged to follow. Others are customs that are considered voluntary from a religious point of view.

In fact, all of these practices are voluntary in the sense that it is up to you to decide whether or not to take them upon yourself. We can only recommend them for their surprising power to comfort, honor, support and console. As with all rituals, the more consciousness—or *kavanah*—you bring to them, the more meaningful they will be.

If you discover a certain practice puts you in a bind, you may need to interpret it in light of your situation. Interpretation, too, is part of the Jewish tradition. You will find in this booklet a beautiful story from one of our members on how and why she found it necessary to reinterpret a basic tenet of Jewish law that is traditionally interpreted to ban cremation.

Since death must be dealt with not just psychically but practically, there is information here about arrangements that must be made. As you may wonder what The New Shul can do to help, we have included information about that as well. But please do not bother checking the booklet in your time of need. Just call. The New Shul staff and community are here for you.

Lastly, we have included a variety of readings, from the religious to the secular, for different casts of mind. A poem, song or reflection that speaks to you can be a comforting friend in a dark time.

The New Shul Ritual Lab

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A Note on Language: While The New Shul community endeavors to use gender-neutral language in worship, the readings in this booklet reflect the translators' choices. We encourage you to choose language consistent with your preference and practice.

Four stages

From a Jewish perspective, there are four stages to loss: the time prior to death when your loved one is ill or dying; the moment of death; the funeral and burial; and mourning. We have followed these stages in this booklet. In the first three stages, the main task of the relative or friend is to comfort, care for and then honor the loved one. Only in the last stage is the mourner completely free to attend to his or her own needs. The different Jewish practices prescribed for each stage recognize this reality, and attempt to give it structure and meaning.

Prior to death

Jewish laws and customs

In the period leading up to death, or during any grave illness, Jewish law obliges us to observe the ancient principle of ***bikkur cholim***, that is, personally visiting and caring for the sick or infirm. A visit can take place at home, at a hospital, or at a hospice. The vital element is that you offer your physical presence, and comfort, to the person in need.



In situations where you may have to make critical medical decisions for the person who is dying, there is a fundamental Jewish principle that may be a guide. The law states that we must **never do anything to hinder or hasten the dying process**. In other words, let nature take its course. Unfortunately, given the complexity of today's medical realities, it may be unclear how this principle applies in specific situations. The Rabbi is always available to offer guidance in such cases.

Directly prior to the death of a loved one, it is customary to **offer prayers** for that person and, specifically, to read from the Book of Psalms.

For the person who is dying, there are two customs to help close out this phase of life. (Why is this considered a "phase of life" rather than the "end"? Because according to Jewish belief, life will continue in *ha'olam ha'ba*, the world to come. Read Rabbi Goldstein's explanation in "Jewish views of death" below.)

One custom is to prepare an **ethical will** (in addition to the traditional will that directs the allocation of material possessions). An ethical will expresses your wishes and dreams for those who live on. It can, of course, be written at any time of life, not just when facing death, and revised as your ideas change. We have included one written by the father of a member of The New Shul in the pages that follow.

Another custom is to recite the ***Vidui***, or "deathbed confession," just prior to death. This recitation enables you to "set things right" with

God. Two versions are provided for you in this booklet. You may also say whatever words flow from your heart.

Offering comfort

There are many ways to provide comfort to a loved one at the end of his or her life. You can provide some peace of mind to the patient by offering to take care of concerns beyond his or her physical condition. Such help might consist of:

- Organizing a visitors' schedule
- Making phone calls to inform others of the patient's condition
- Being present at meetings with doctors to ask questions and take notes on behalf of the patient
- Arranging for extra nursing care
- Arranging for care for other family members and pets, if necessary
- Helping to make funeral and burial arrangements, if preparations have not been made.

If you are the primary caregiver, these tasks can become a full-time job, and you will undoubtedly have your own life to manage as well. Make sure one of the first things you create is a support team, which may include the social worker at the hospital, other family members and friends. Remember that if you wear yourself out, you will deprive your loved one of the greatest gift of all—your loving presence.

To provide physical comfort, you may find the following suggestions from Marilee Tolen, a Holistic Nurse Practitioner, to be helpful:



Peaceful Passages

People who are sick or dying have simple yet special needs. All of their senses are extremely heightened so they are very sensitive to most things. You can offer modest measures that can be very effective.

1. **Clear and straighten the environment.** A cluttered environment creates obstacles for movement and can be an unknown source of stress. Have bedsides and surrounding area clear from unnecessary clutter.

2. **Control the room temperature.** Most people who are sick or dying have lowered body temperature. A warmer environment or an extra blanket can make a difference in comfort level.
3. **Adjust the lighting in the room.** Offer soft, diffuse, preferably natural light during the day and low lighting in the evening. Avoid a dark environment.
4. **Place meaningful mementos and photos of loved ones within view.** Memories of momentous occasions and loved ones are often the most important thing to people when they are sick or are dying. Objects and photos that evoke these people and events are therefore a great comfort.
5. **Lightly spray or diffuse essential oils in the environment.** Essential oils such as lavender and citrus can have a calming and peaceful effect. Mix a few drops with distilled water in a spray bottle to spray in the air, or diffuse with a cold air diffuser made specifically for aromatherapy use. Be certain not to use perfume or perfume grade oils; use only therapeutic grade essential oils. To create a more spiritual environment, use oils from ancient scripture such as Frankincense.
6. **Play soft music or nature sounds.** Pleasant natural sounds can offer comfort. Singing birds or running water can be a source of peaceful relaxation. Use music that is soft and unobtrusive.
7. **Use clean, soft, cotton bedding.** 100 percent cotton, preferably organic, sheets that have a high thread count are gentler on the body than sheets that have polyester. Cotton sheets breathe more than other materials and are more comfortable to the person who is sick and dying, especially if he/she is having fluctuations in body temperature.
8. **Wipe face and eyes with warm, moistened, soft washcloth.** This can feel so wonderful to the person who is bedridden. Offer it more than once or twice a day.
9. **Help them to look presentable, and let them know that they do.** No matter how sick people are, and even if they are dying, there is a certain part of them that is still in touch with how they look to others. See that their hair is combed and they are comfortably groomed for how they feel. Let them know that they look okay.
10. **Offer sips of water.** Adequate hydration is a comfort measure as well as a physical need. People who are sick or dying are often not aware of their needs for fluids, and their thirst signals may not be as active. A well-hydrated person, no matter what state of health they are in, is more comfortable.
11. **Offer and provide nourishment.** When people are sick and dying they may not be in touch with their desire to eat. Nutrition is important for bodily functions. A well-nourished person, at any state of health, is more comfortable.
12. **Hold your loved one's hand.** Holding a person's hand that is sick or dying is a very simple yet powerful gesture to let them know that you are present.

13. **Hold or rub your loved one's feet.** Feet provide access to the entire body through reflex points. You can offer a gentle foot massage or just hold the feet; both offer comfort.
14. **Gently brush the brow with a light touch.** Touching someone's forehead can offer great comfort. People often touch their own foreheads when they feel distressed or unwell. Using a gentle touch to the forehead of someone who is sick or dying is a natural thing to do. Placing your hand and keeping it there, or lightly brushing the brow can offer comfort.
15. **Listen.** Listen to the words of the person who is sick or dying, and listen to the silence as well. Avoid being overly talkative just to fill in the quiet gaps.
16. **Create and maintain a harmonious environment among all family and friends.** People who are sick or dying are very sensitive to the energy between people in their environment. Work to create and maintain harmony among family members and friends, especially those people in their immediate environment.

Reprinted with permission from Marilee Tolen RN, HNC, founder of Peaceful Passages™, www.peacefulpassages.org.

Psalms and prayers

It is Jewish custom to say psalms or prayers with, or for, a person who is gravely ill or dying. One psalm traditionally read is Psalm 13, the text of which is provided below. You will also find below a modern prayer that may be recited as death approaches and one that may be read when removing a person from life support. Other readings may be found at the end of this booklet and in the *Book of Psalms*.



Psalm 13 Adapted by Christine Robinson

How long, O God, how long?
 How long must I wait to see your face,
 to feel your presence?
 How long until I figure things out,
 heal from my wounds, feel whole again?
 How long must I live with these longings,
 with no more than hints and guesses to go on?
 Look on me and give me answers! Light up my eyes!

I put my trust in your love. I know
 that you hold me in the arms of life
 whether I feel it or not.

If trust and longing are all that I have,
then that is enough, and I will sing.

From *Psalms for a New World*, doubterpsalms.blogspot.com.



A Prayer on Seeing a Change for the Worse and Death Is Near **By Rabbi Vicki Hollander**

Go, for Adonai sends for you.
Go and Adonai will be with you.
(3 times)

Adonai blesses you and watches over you.
Adonai's Presence shines upon you and sheds grace all around you.
Adonai garbs you in light and bestows peace upon you.
May Your angels come to _____'s sides.
On her right, Michael, carry our prayers;
on her left, Gavriel, protect her;
before her, Uriel, light her way;
behind her, Raphael, heal all hurts;
and over her head and all around her,
Shekhina, may she rest within your wings.
Be strong and of good courage;
don't be afraid for Adonai is with you wherever you go.
As an eagle rises within her nest and hovers over her young,
as she spreads her wings, takes them, and bears them upon her wings,
awake, North wind and come, South,
blow upon my garden that the spices within may flow out.
Let my beloved come into her garden and eat its precious fruits.
Open the gates.
Adonai will keep you from all evil, will watch over your soul.
Adonai will guard your leaving and your coming in
from this time forth and forever.

(At the presence of the departure of the soul from the body: stand and look into
person's face)

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Ehad.



A Prayer of Trust

By Navah C. Harlow

To say on removing a parent from life support

Avinu she-ba-shamayim—Our Father in Heaven.

Today is the day that I have spoken for my beloved mother/father even as she/he spoke for me when I was a child without words, without understanding. He/She anticipated my needs and protected me from harm when I was yet unable to negotiate my life independently.

Today she/he is no longer capable of speech, of comprehension, of expressing his/her love for me as she/he has always done through words and through actions.

Today I have spoken as I promised I would. I have articulated his/her wishes as she/he has articulated them to me over these past few years. We both hoped that this day would never come. We both hoped that Your will would be done quietly, peacefully. But that was not meant to be. The inevitable outcome of his/her illness was postponed by hopes and dreams and medical technology. We know today that nothing can help. The life that was acceptable to her/him is no longer accessible. The process of dying is being prolonged.

Today I have spoken as I promised. I have fulfilled the mitzvah, the commandment, of honoring my father/mother.

He/She has lived with integrity, has acted righteously and has spoken truthfully. Take her/him then, unto Your sanctuary, let her/him repose upon Your holy mountain.

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Ethical will

In contrast to the conventional legal will in which material possessions are divided among inheritors (or charitable organizations), an ethical will articulates the wish that loved ones will maintain certain traditions and moral and ethical behavior after one's death. The desired practices may be secular as well as Jewish. While ethical wills are not commonplace among contemporary Jews, nor mandatory under Jewish law, the tradition of writing them goes back centuries.



PERSONAL DOCUMENT

An Ethical Will

My father, Sanford Gins, wrote this "Ethical Will" and presented it to us when I was 12, my sister was 14, and my brother 10. As he predicted, it would be many years before I was able to appreciate the wisdom of his words. I had my own child long after his death and I am grateful for the legacy of his words.

— Cathy Gins, 2009

TO MY CHILDREN

Surprising as it may seem to you now, being a “good” parent is the toughest (and most rewarding) challenge I have encountered in my life. This includes growing up, getting educated, fighting in a war and earning a living.

To me, one of the most important obligations as a parent is to give you a sense of values, a code for living, a standard of conduct upon which you can rely until such a time as you are mature enough to form your own. No school, teacher or friend can be a substitute. Your problems and need for decisions will arise and need to be coped with by you before you have been able to equip yourself with mature judgment.

In undertaking this responsibility, I fortunately do not have to rely solely upon my own thinking and limited individual capacity. I can benefit from all of the thinking and ability of the generations before me—from men far wiser than myself—from ideas and concepts that have withstood the tests of hundreds of generations. That is why we study history, literature, philosophy and religion.

Ethically, we all have only two basic problems—where do we want to go and how do we get there—or—what kind of a person do we want to be and how do we withstand the pressures of living to be that kind of person. Here, I believe is where religion enters the picture. It helps us to find these answers. The ritual and form of the religion is less important than its effectiveness in enabling us to be happier and better people and contribute to a happier and better world.

If you grew up with just the Golden Rule in mind and lived honestly and strictly in accordance with it—no one could complain. But the Golden Rule is just a goal or destination. You will need, as we all do, guideposts along the way every day of your life (and sometimes, as you grow older, many times in one day).

One of the guide books, part of the literature of Traditional Judaism, is called *Ethics of the Fathers*. This is a compilation of the wisdom of great rabbis and teachers over the past thousands of years. True wisdom, unlike knowledge which can become outdated as we acquire more and newer facts, does not change any more than man’s relationship to himself, to his fellow man and to his God changes.

When we were children, my father, as did his father and his father’s father, asked us to read and study a chapter of this book each week, so that after a while these teachings would become part of our own thinking and feelings. The original book in translation is stilted and somewhat difficult to read. Because I sincerely believe it will be as valuable to you as it is to me, I have tried to prepare a simplified version which follows. You should understand the word “Torah”, as it is used throughout, to mean more than the Bible, to include all of the teachings, wisdom and truths which are our heritage.

It is still “adult” reading and the significance of much of it you will not comprehend until you are called to use it or when you have children of your own.

Then, if not before, you may be appreciative, but in the meantime, study it as all of you so conscientiously save and bank your money—so it will be there when you want or need it.

Rosh Hashanah 1964

Deathbed confession

Many progressive Jews are surprised to learn that Jews have a tradition of saying confession as death approaches. In fact, the deathbed confession, known as the *Vidui*, is in keeping with other Jewish practices, such as the public chanting of confession on Yom Kippur. Though not mandated by Jewish law, the *Vidui* is a time-honored practice for making peace with God before dying.



A Traditional *Vidui*

By Dr. Ron Wolfson

I acknowledge to you, Adonai my God and God of my forefathers and foremothers, that both my cure and my death are in your hands. May it be your will to send me a perfect healing. Yet if my death be fully determined by you, I will in love accept it at your hand. O may my death be an atonement for all the sins, iniquities and transgressions of which I have been guilty against you. Bestow upon me the abounding happiness that is treasured up for the righteous. Make known to me the path of life: in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand, bliss for evermore.

You who are the parent of the parentless and judge of the widowed, protect my beloved family with whose soul my own is knit. Into your hand I commend my spirit; you have redeemed me, Adonai, God of truth. Amen, and Amen!

When the end is approaching:

Adonai reigns; Adonai has reigned; Adonai shall reign forever and ever. (3x)

Adonai is God. (7x.)

Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai alone.

Shma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad

Excerpt is from *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement & Comfort* by Dr. Ron Wolfson ©1993 The Federation of Jewish Men's Club. Permission granted by Jewish Lights Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091.
www.jewishlights.com.



An Alternative *Vidui*

By Rabbi Amy Eilberg

My God and God of my fathers and mothers

May my prayer come before You.

Do not ignore my plea.

Please, forgive me for all of the sins

That I sinned before You throughout my lifetime.
 I am ashamed of deeds that I have committed.
 I regret things that I have done.
 Now, O God, take my pain and suffering as atonement.
 Forgive my mistakes, for against You have I sinned.
 May it be Your will, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors
 That I sin no more.
 In Your great mercy, cleanse me of the sins I have committed
 But not through suffering and disease.
 Send me a complete healing along with all those who are ill.
 I acknowledge before You, Adonai my God and God of my ancestors,
 That my healing and my death are in Your hands.
 May it be Your will to grant me a complete healing.
 If it be Your will that I am to die of this illness,
 Let my death be atonement for all the wrongs that I have done in my life.
 Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings.
 Grant me a place in the world to come.
 Parent of orphans and Guardian of widows
 Protect my dear ones,
 With whose souls my soul is bound.
 Into your hand I place my soul.
 You have redeemed me, O God of truth.
 Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad.
 Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, The Lord is One.
 Adonai Hu Ha'Elohim. Adonai Hu Ha'Elohim.
 Adonai is God. Adonai is God.

From Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn a Jew, by
 Anita Diamant, Shoken Books, NY, NY.



PERSONAL STORY

The Courage of Surrender By Rabbi Niles Elliot Goldstein

I never knew my great-uncle David very well. He lived in Dallas and I grew up in Chicago, so our paths crossed only a few times at family gatherings while I was a child. But I'd heard he'd lived a rich life, filled with colorful experiences and challenges, that he'd been in combat as a tank commander during the D-Day invasion in France, and I always had an idealized, almost mythic image of him as a *fighter*.

When I was older, David and I finally had a chance for some real conversations, mainly about the War, but also about Judaism, ritual practice, and God—he and my great-aunt Charlotte had strong religious identities and were active in the Dallas

Jewish community. David was one of those archetypal figures who belonged to, and embodied, what Tom Brokaw calls “the Greatest Generation.”

David and I had our last conversation while I was in Dallas for a conference. By that point, David was an old man—he had a serious heart condition and was very ill. The condition had been with him a long time and my parents had said for years that he could succumb to it anytime—but, fighter that he was, he kept hanging on.

Some years passed; David’s health deteriorated. My parents gave me updates on his situation and I spoke with Charlotte over the phone. When I got a chance to travel again to Dallas, to tail and write a magazine piece on a professional storm chaser, I went first to visit my great-uncle at their home.

Charlotte led me into the bedroom. David was there along with a nurse. He was lying on a cot; there were tubes attached to his body. David didn’t seem to recognize me. He slipped in and out of consciousness. At times, David would curl up into a fetal position. When he moved he let out a moan that chilled me to the bone.

I sat with Charlotte in the kitchen. She told me that David’s death was no longer a matter of weeks or even days away, but of hours and minutes. “I’ve been getting myself ready for this for years,” she said in her southern drawl. “He’s in so much pain. I just want him to let go and let it end.”

I stood over David in the bedroom. This figure who’d seemed larger than life now looked tiny. His limbs were thin and frail. His right leg hung off the side of the cot and he appeared as if he *already* had one foot in the grave. David had always come across as rooted in the real world. Yet now his appearance was ethereal. The roots that had held him down in his life—through immigration to a new country, the Great Depression, and a World War far away from Texas—were now being extracted before my very eyes.

I put my hand on David’s leg. He gazed at me with a kind of vague recognition. I decided to recite the *Sh’ma* with him and for him, the declaration of a Jew’s commitment to monotheism that is traditionally said, not just upon going to bed and waking up, but also, if possible, on one’s deathbed: *Sh’ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad*—Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is one.

Less than an hour later, Charlotte called. She told me David had died. Charlotte said she was convinced that on some level David grasped the words I’d recited, that saying the *Sh’ma* had helped him to let go, to give up his long, defiant fight.

Yet to me, David was still a warrior. What I’d witnessed was a different kind of heroism: the heroism of surrender. David hadn’t given up. He had instead chosen to give *over*, to surrender his soul—in his own indefatigable way.

Planning ahead

Planning ahead for your loved one’s funeral and burial will save you from having to make important decisions when you are in a state of shock and grief. It may also give you the opportunity to

consult your loved one about his or her own wishes. If you do not feel up to the full task during this period, you might at least consider choosing a funeral home, as state laws mandate removal of the body to a funeral home within a few hours of death, leaving little time to choose then.

If your loved one made his or her own funeral and burial arrangements in advance, make sure you know what they are and who to call to set them in motion.

Note, in this regard, that you can make arrangements for your own funeral and burial in advance, saving family and friends the difficulty, while ensuring that everything goes exactly as you would like. Funeral chapels offer a substantial discount when you pre-pay.

Detailed information on funeral and burial arrangements is included in the next chapter.

How The New Shul can help

We are here for you. You are a part of the community and the Rabbi, Executive Director, and many of our members are available to offer insight, empathy, comfort and guidance. Please contact the Rabbi or the Executive Director by phone or email to let us know of your situation. (Contact information is provided at the front of the book opposite the table of contents.)

Depending on your wishes, the Rabbi can visit with your family at home or in the hospital; offer a *misheberach* (prayer for healing); pray with you; talk about questions that may be troubling you; and generally provide comfort. The Rabbi can also guide you if you are dealing with difficult decisions, such as those concerning life support, by sharing with you the wisdom of the Jewish tradition.

The Executive Director is available to help as well. She will check in regularly by phone and e-mail to see what you need. Depending on your wishes, she may send over a warm Shabbat dinner or take the youngest members of your family out for an evening to help answer their difficult questions and provide the adults with a respite. She can also help direct you to people, places or resources you may need.

The moment of death

Jewish laws and customs

In ancient times, it was typical to tear one's garments upon hearing of the news of the loss of a loved one, as a symbolic way of outwardly expressing one's inner grief. Today, this custom, called *k'riah*, is often expressed at the funeral by tearing a ribbon attached to one's clothing; the ribbon is generally provided by the funeral home. It is also customary at the moment of death for mourners to recite *Tziduk ha-Din* (see below), which is an affirmation of God's sovereignty.



Jewish law calls for a **speedy burial** of the deceased so as not to prolong the suffering of the mourners. In practice, "speedy" usually means within 48 to 72 hours of death, though more traditional Jews attempt burial even sooner if possible. The time may be longer if Shabbat or another holy day intervenes, as Jewish burials do not take place on these days. If funeral arrangements have not been made in advance, they will have to be made within this short period. Friends and relatives can be of help. Indeed, seeing a mourner through this process could be considered part of the fulfillment of the Jewish obligation of **consoling the mourner**.

There are various customs surrounding care of the body from the time of death to the time of burial. These include *taharah*, a ceremonial cleansing with water, and reciting Psalms next to the body. Today, many of these customs are handled through the funeral home.

Arranging for the funeral and burial

If you have already selected a funeral home, or if funeral arrangements have been made in advance, call the home to set things in motion. Otherwise, your first step will be to select the funeral home you wish to use. As explained above, secular law requires that the body be removed to one within a few hours of death, so this choice must be made very quickly.

Typically, you will visit the funeral home in person to make arrangements. It is often recommended that you ask a valued friend to accompany you on this visit, both to help you think through matters clearly and to reduce any sense of pressure you might experience. At the funeral home, you will be presented with a number of decisions, such as:

Selecting a Funeral Home

There are many well-regarded funeral homes in the metropolitan area, including the following two in the city. Family and friends may be able to advise you on the selection.

Plaza Jewish Community Chapel
630 Amsterdam Ave. at 91st St., NYC
212-769-4400
plazajewishcommunitychapel.org

Riverside Memorial Chapel
212-362-6600
180 W. 76th St., NYC
riversidememorialchapel.com

- How you want the body cared for prior to burial (see the following section for an explanation of Jewish ritual practices)
- What casket you want
- Whether you want a chapel and/or graveside service
- Who will deliver the eulogies
- Who the pallbearers will be
- Whether you want to recommend a charity for those wishing to make a donation
- Whether, where and when *shiva* will be held following the funeral (see the following chapter for an explanation of *shiva*)

If you do not already have a burial plot for the deceased, the funeral director will provide you with a list of cemeteries. Jewish burials customarily take place in consecrated Jewish cemeteries. While not all permit non-Jewish partners to be buried there, many do. Make sure to inquire if you have an interfaith family.

It is traditional to use a simple wooden casket and not to embalm the body. Indeed, in Israel, coffins are not even used—although this approach is illegal in the U.S.; instead, the shrouded body is put directly into the earth.

One reason often given for these practices is that they allow the body to decompose at a natural pace—in keeping with the Jewish prohibition against hindering or hastening death, as well as the body's return to earth. Another reason sometimes offered by those who believe in bodily resurrection when the Messiah comes is that an unaltered body is needed for resurrection.

These reasons also explain why cremation is not traditionally practiced among Jews.



PERSONAL STORY

My Father's Wishes

By Maia Wechsler

My father wrapped tefillin when he was young and recited his daily prayers. He was devoted to his rabbi—the engaged, passionate and socialist leader of Gary, Indiana's Jews, Rabbi August, who died before I was born. Somehow, by the time I came along, my father went to shul only on the High Holidays to make his mother happy. A law professor, he always brought a small case book of recent Supreme Court decisions which he held open and read like a prayer book. When I was old enough to understand, he told me he was an atheist. He also told me he was a Marxist and Marx had called religion the “opiate of the masses.” I believed him. But our Temple Israel was still the center of my life—and nothing seemed contradictory about that.

Many years later, my father died in a nursing home in Maryland after three years of serious illness. It was, to say the least, a terrible time for us all. We always knew he wished to be cremated—he considered burial a fetishism and waste of useful land. I suppose we were typical of many families, however, before he died. We couldn't bring ourselves to discuss the end and its aftermath in any kind of detail. No rabbi had been called to help us through this difficult time. What do we do? What do Jews do? Aside from the law of immediate burial and shiva for seven days, I knew virtually nothing. What about cremation?

There is a special place just outside Gary that I rarely visited in my youth but came to know better as an adult—the Temple Israel cemetery. It was a tree-shaded, lovely little corner of the world where my forebears and extended family—and all of Gary's Jews for that matter—were buried. I had recently attended the burials of my dear cousins' parents, accompanied by my children, who learned to lay stones on the graves to mark our presence and love. I had never known this ritual as a child—I had known few rituals in fact. But I was learning more and more as a member of The New Shul. What I was experiencing, much to my surprise and my mother's teasing chagrin, was a desire for more ritual, more Jewish structure, more Jewish continuity in my life.

We were with my father when he took his last breath. In the moments of our deepest grieving, my sister and I were clear about one thing—we would return to celebrate his life at Temple Israel with our family and friends. My mother acquiesced, though she clearly was too played out to take the initiative. And, like my father, her identity was not linked to a house of worship, or God for that matter.

My father had left no instructions for his ashes. We three women briefly discussed where he might have wanted them sprinkled. This is when my sister and I came to the realization that we wanted a place to mourn this wonderful man—and we wanted that place to be filled with the spirit and dust of those he loved and who

passed on before him. Could we bury his ashes in the Temple Israel cemetery next to his parents? Either this was sacrilege (Jewish law) or it was sentimental and bourgeois (my father). But this is what we wanted—and hadn't we fulfilled his wish to be cremated? So I called the Rabbi, who I did not know well, with some trepidation. I found a smart and caring man on the other end of the line. I discovered I was not the first to come to him with this request—and that there were other ashes buried in our half—the Reform half—of the cemetery. After a series of calls, it was clear that there was space between my grandparent's graves for the ashes of their son. My sister and I felt a sense of awe and thankfulness.

I can now think back on his wonderful memorial service at Temple Israel, the gathering of so many friends and family at the cemetery, the affecting prayers and comforting sound of the Kaddish rising in the air, the solemn faces and tears, our holding onto one another, the beautifully crafted box with his ashes. And my children once again laying stones on the graves.

When I consider all this today, I want to believe that my father would have been happy with this compromise between tradition and his own wishes. I do know, however, that he would have been deeply moved to know that his ashes lie between his beloved parents—and that my sister and I felt so strongly about this.

Caring for the body

According to Jewish tradition, the body of a deceased person is never left unattended. Today, upon your request, the volunteer members of a *hevra kadisha*, or Sacred Burial Society, will provide a *shomer* or *shomeret*—a person who will stay with the body from the moment the body is taken to the funeral home until the funeral. The *hevra kadisha* will also perform the traditional Jewish ritual of preparation of the body called *tahara*, or purification: While reciting prayers, members of the *hevra kadisha* wash the body, clothe it in *tachirim* or a shroud, and put it in a simple casket, all in accordance with Jewish law. The only things that are traditionally put into the casket with the body are a handful of dirt or a stone from Israel, a holy book, and a *tallit* (a prayer shawl) belonging to the deceased person with some corner fringes cut off. Another option is to keep the *tallit* as a family heirloom.

The members of a *hevra kadisha* consider their task a holy one and conduct it with ultimate respect for the body. Different Burial Societies may differ in their procedures. Some may agree to use the deceased person's clothing instead of a shroud. Most will give family members

the opportunity to have a last viewing of the deceased before closing the coffin.

Jewish funeral homes typically work in connection with one or several cemeteries and a *hevra kadisha*. Some less orthodox Jewish funeral homes will call a *hevra kadisha* only at the family's request. Otherwise, the staff of the funeral home will wash the body in a secular manner and dress the body in clothing provided by the family. At the request of the family, the staff may also use cosmetics, do the hair of the deceased person, and leave the coffin open for the funeral ceremony.

How The New Shul can help

At the time of your loved one's passing, please contact the Rabbi or the Executive Director to let them know right away. (Contact information is provided at the front of the book opposite the table of contents.)

When you call, please tell the Rabbi or Executive Director what you need and whether you would like a visit. Both can provide guidance on funeral and burial arrangements. In addition, the Rabbi can advise you on Jewish law and philosophy and address any ethical dilemmas that you may encounter. The Executive Director can help with logistics, assist with children, sit and listen or just keep you company.

Let the Rabbi know if you would like him to lead the funeral service at the funeral chapel and/or at the graveside. If the Rabbi is officiating, he will work closely with you to create a service that meets your needs. Please help arrange for his transportation to and from the funeral with a family member or friend or, if necessary, provide a car service for him.

With your permission, The New Shul will e-mail a condolence announcement to the community with information about the funeral and shiva, so members can come.

How friends and family can help

In addition to providing a loving presence for the bereaved, friends and family can be of service in practical ways. For instance, you can:

- Notify other friends and relatives of the death
- Arrange for a phone tree to communicate funeral arrangements
- Help with funeral arrangements and, if desired, a reception following the funeral
- Help to write and submit an obituary to newspapers
- Arrange for transportation and lodging for out-of-town guests who will be coming for the funeral.

Funeral and burial

Jewish laws and customs

Jewish law requires a speedy burial, as described in the previous chapter, and the recitation by “the mourners” of the ***Mourner’s Kaddish***. Though not mandatory according to Jewish law, a chapel and/or graveside service is customarily held, during which eulogies about the deceased are given. It is likewise a custom for the whole family, and sometimes all those present at the graveside, to participate in burying the deceased by placing dirt on the coffin.



Offering ***tzedakah***, or charity, is another custom followed at this time. For this reason, an announcement is often made at funerals about where to make donations in memory of the deceased. Usually one or more specific organizations that were important to the deceased are named. It is *not* customary in the Jewish tradition to send flowers to the chapel or funeral home.

Funeral and burial

In contrast with the practice in some other traditions, Jewish funeral services are short and simple. The casket is typically closed, and there is no music other than the chanting of prayers. Neither are there flowers or other ornaments.

While there are no Jewish laws governing the content of the service, it traditionally includes a few prayers, including the Mourner’s Kaddish, and a eulogy (*hesped*) by the Rabbi. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for the mourners and others selected by the mourners to give eulogies as well. In the Jewish tradition, these talks do not concern themselves solely with praising the good works of the deceased; they also attempt to give a realistic and vivid, but loving, portrait of the person in his or her life. (Despite their realism, criticism is

not considered appropriate. Eulogies are supposed to be positive, in keeping with the Jewish principle of not speaking ill of the dead.) You can expect the officiating rabbi to review the order of the service and the choices you may make beforehand. Be sure to ask if this does not seem to be happening.

Prior to the service, the Rabbi will offer a black ribbon to members of the immediate family. They then partially tear the ribbon and pin it to

Who are the mourners?

According to Jewish law, the following relations are considered “the mourners” and are obligated to follow certain practices, including recitation of the *Mourner’s Kaddish* during the burial:

- Parents
- Spouse (or partner)
- Siblings
- Children

their clothing on or near the chest.

Traditionally, parents of the deceased pin it on the left side over the heart, while other mourners pin it on the right. The tear symbolizes the rupture in life caused by the loved one’s death.

This practice is a modern version of the ancient ritual of *k’riah*, still practiced in Orthodox communities today, in which mourners tear the garment they

are wearing when they learn of the death, then continue to wear the garment throughout the seven-day *shiva* period. Similarly, some non-Orthodox Jews today wear the *k’riah* ribbon throughout *shiva*, or even through *sheloshim* (the 30 days after burial), as a way of identifying themselves as bereaved.

Although the service is traditionally closed-casket, members of the immediate family are usually given an opportunity to view the deceased person’s body beforehand. This experience can help to solidify the reality of corporeal death. If you feel it would be meaningful to you and the funeral director does not offer it, be sure to request it.

You may have the service at the funeral chapel and hold another small service directly afterwards at the gravesite, or you may choose to have one service at the gravesite alone. If you have two services and travel to the cemetery is required, you will probably find that only close family and friends will come for the burial.

It is customary for the immediate family to put at least one shovelful of dirt from a prepared pile onto the coffin after it has been lowered into the ground. Cemetery workers will do the rest of the work, or all the mourners present may take turns shoveling dirt to fill the grave. This compelling, though sometimes physically and emotionally challenging

ritual is often described as a near-perfect, altruistic mitzvah in that it is a gift that cannot be reciprocated by the receiver.

Finally, it is common to leave a stone rather than flowers on the gravesite. This practice is said to echo the actions of Abraham (*Avraham avoteinu*, our father), who erected a stone monument at his wife Sarah's grave (*Sarah imoteinu*, our mother). It speaks to the human impulse to give and to say, "I have been here" without masking the reality of death with living flowers.

After the burial service, mourners return to the home in which they will conduct *shiva* (discussed in the "Mourning" chapter).

Psalms and prayers

If a service is conducted in a chapel as well as at the grave, the Mourner's Kaddish is traditionally said in both places. *El Malei Rachamim* is said only at the chapel service, unless there is none, in which case it is said at the grave. Psalms are customarily recited in one or both services.



Mourner's Kaddish

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא, בְּעָלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא, כְּרַעוּתָהּ,
וְיִמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל-בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעִגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵינָא:

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְעָלְמָא
מִן כָּל-בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאִמְרִין
בְּעָלְמָא, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמֵינָא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל
כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba, b'alma di v'ra, kir'utei,
 v'yamlikh malkhutei b'hayeikhon u-v'yomeikhon
 u-v'hayei d'khol beit Yisra-el,
 ba'agala u-vi-z'man kariv v'imru amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varakh l'alam u-l'almei almayta.

Yitbarakh v'yishtabah v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasei,
 v'yit-hadar v'yit'aleh v'yit-halal sh'mei d'kudsha, b'rikh hu
 l'ela min kol birkhata v'shirata, tushb'hata v'nehamata
 da'amiran b'alma, v'imru amen.

Y'hei shlama raba min sh'maya
 v'hayim aleinu v'al kol Yisra-el, v'imru amen.

Oseh shalom bi-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom
 aleinu v'al kol Yisra-el, v'imru amen.

May Adonai's name be exalted and hallowed throughout the world that Adonai created, as is Adonai's wish. May Adonai's sovereignty soon be accepted, during our life and the life of all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

May Adonai's great name be praised throughout all time.

Glorified and celebrated, lauded and worshiped, exalted and honored, extolled and acclaimed may the Holy One be, praised beyond all song and psalm, beyond all tributes that mortals can utter. And let us say: Amen.

Let there be abundant peace from heaven, with life's goodness for us and for all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

May the One who brings peace to Adonai's universe bring peace to us and to all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

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El Malei Rachamim

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, שׁוֹכֵן בַּמְרוֹמִים, הַמְצִיא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה
 תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוּרִים, כְּדָהָר
 הַרְקִיעַ מְזֻהָרִים, לְנַשְׁמוֹת כָּל־אֵלֶּה שֶׁהוֹצַרְנוּ הַיּוֹם
 לְבִרְכָה, שֶׁהִלְכוּ לְעוֹלָמָם, בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תְּהִי מְנוּחָתָם. אָנָּה
 בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים הַסְתִּירָם בְּסֶתֶר כְּנָפֶיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים וָצֶרֶר
 בְּצֶרֶר הַחַיִּים אֶת־נַשְׁמוֹתֵיהֶם. יְהוּה הוּא נַחֲלָתָם. וְיִנְחוּ
 בְשָׁלוֹם עַל מְשֻׁבּוֹתֵיהֶם. וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן.

Translation from Siddur Sim Shalom

'Exalted, compassionate God, grant infinite rest in Your sheltering presence, among the holy and pure, to the souls of all our beloved who have gone to their eternal home. Merciful One, we ask that our loved ones find perfect peace in Your tender embrace, their memory enduring as inspiration for commitment to their ideals and integrity in our lives. May their souls thus be bound up in the bond of life. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

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Translation from *Kol Haneshama* (the Reconstructionist prayer book)

God filled with mercy,
 dwelling in the heavens' heights,
 bring proper rest
 beneath the wings of your Shehinah,
 amid the ranks of the holy and the pure,
 illuminating like the brilliance of the skies
 the souls of our beloved and our blameless
 who went to their eternal place of rest.
 May you who are the source of mercy
 shelter them beneath your wings eternally,
 and bind their souls among the living,
 that they may rest in peace.
 And let us say: Amen

Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim, The Reconstructionist Press, 101 Greenwood Ave., Suite 430, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Fax 215-885-5603, press@jrf.org, pg. 1026. Translated by Joel Rosenberg



Psalm 121

A Song of Ascents.

I lift my eyes to the mountains—from where will my help come?
 My help will come from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.
 He will not let your foot falter; your guardian does not slumber.
 Indeed, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.
 Adonai is your guardian; Adonai is your protective shade at your right hand.
 The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
 Adonai will guard you from all evil; Adonai will guard your soul.
 Adonai will guard your going and your coming from now and for all time.

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Psalm 23

Adonai is my shepherd, I shall not want.
 God gives me repose in green meadows,
 and guides me over calm waters.
 God will revive my spirit and direct me on the right path—for that is God's way.
 Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no harm, for You are at my side.
 Your staff and Your rod comfort me.
 You prepare a banquet for me in the presence of my foes;
 You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.
 Surely goodness and kindness shall be my portion all the days of my life,
 and I shall dwell in the house of Adonai forever.

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How The New Shul can help

The Rabbi will officiate at the funeral if you wish and will work closely with you to plan the service to meet your needs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Rabbi will need your help in arranging for transportation to and from the funeral with friends or family, or through a car service.

Mourning

Jewish laws and customs

The period of *shiva* (literally *seven*) is the first week of mourning and begins immediately following burial. Traditional Jewish law mandates that we refrain from work, sex and other ordinary activities during this time. The ***Mourner's Kaddish*** is recited daily during *shiva*, as well as every day of the first year after a loved one's death. *Shiva* is not observed on Shabbat or other holidays.



Many liberal Jews choose to shorten the *shiva* period to three days. However long you choose to observe it, *shiva* is a time that is rich with feelings and offers you a precious opportunity to reflect. It can be therapeutic to give yourself the space to grieve as well as to receive comfort from friends, family and community members without the interruption of daily demands.

There are a number of *shiva* rituals which may help you navigate through this intensely difficult time. Upon returning from the cemetery to the house where *shiva* is being held, it is customary to wash your hands ceremonially with a pitcher of water placed outside the door. Many mourners then light a seven-day *shiva* candle, which is generally supplied by the funeral home. Another custom is for friends or relatives to prepare a "first meal" for mourners to eat after the burial. Round foods symbolizing the cycle of life, such as hard-boiled eggs, are often included in this meal; guests visiting after the funeral will typically share in this meal.

Mourners often keep their mirrors covered and sit on low stools or pillows during *shiva*; stools are also provided by most funeral homes. The traditional mourner will not leave the house, except on Shabbat to go to services. On other days, a ***minyan*** (or group of ten adult Jews) can come to the mourner's house so the *Mourner's Kaddish* can be said.

When paying a *shiva* call, it is customary to bring food so that the mourners do not have to worry about entertaining the many guests. It

is also customary for visitors to refrain from speaking with mourners until the mourners first speak to them. Sitting silently during the visit is a perfectly appropriate way of offering comfort if mourners seem reluctant to talk. Traditionally the discussion is centered around the deceased, remembering who s/he was and what s/he valued. See “The Gift of Your Presence” chapter for more guidance on comforting the bereaved.

Shiva is a component of the 30-day period following burial called **sheloshim** (literally *thirty*), during which mourners customarily do not participate in festive events, and men often do not shave. However, mourners do resume work and other regular activities after the first seven days.

Toward the end of the first year, a gravestone marking the place of burial is usually unveiled.

Lifelong mourning customs include reciting *kaddish* on the **yarzheit** (anniversary of death), as well as during the four **Yizkor** services that occur during the Jewish calendar year (Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot); giving *tzedakah*, particularly on the *yarzheit*; and visiting the grave of the departed before or during the Days of Awe, from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur.

Throughout this entire ritual cycle of grief, it is the duty of every Jew to **comfort the bereaved**.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

SITTING SHIVA

By Natalie Cohen

As a child, I would often accompany my parents to "make a shiva call" (to pay a condolence visit to someone's home during the first week after a death). It was strange to see the adults talking in hushed voices with the mourners in the living room; there was always a table nearby filled with food and desserts that were brought by visitors and we would just help ourselves. The mirrors were covered with black cloths. At some point, a group of the male visitors would gather to say the evening service (the Jewish community of my childhood did not count women in the **minyán**). At other times, we would attend an "unveiling." One year after someone's death we would go to the cemetery, the family would "unveil" a tombstone and friends and family would all gather afterwards for a meal – sometimes at a home, other times in a restaurant. I never gave too much thought to these occasional events.

After my mother died, the stages of Jewish mourning made sense to me for the first time. When she died, I felt as if a dark veil had fallen over me. She was a very

giving woman, a traditional “balabosta”, a Jewish mama of the “I’m cold, put on a sweater” variety. An immigrant to the U.S. from Romania before World War II, she kept kosher and maintained Jewish traditions but was modern at the same time. When my dad died fifteen years earlier, she and I formed a new closeness. She was recently widowed and I was a single woman in New York City. We shared a bond of two single women against the world together. One of my sweetest memories was going to the Thanksgiving Day parade with her like little kids, and then, too early to have dinner, we caught the first movie at a nearby theater at noon. Later she ate fish while I had the “Thanksgiving special” at a local restaurant.

She died suddenly so it was a great shock. There one day and gone the next. Every sound I heard and every visual image came to me through a shadowy filter. I performed the rituals of everyday life through this dark veil. Sitting shiva in my brother’s house in Philadelphia was a great psychological comfort. I was grateful not to have to go to work for a week; I didn’t have to grocery shop or do errands. I could just grieve while friends and family came to my brother’s house and offered food and comfort to us. I was amazed and deeply grateful when a group of friends drove down from New York City to visit. There was also an odd sense of intimacy among friends and family while being so unkempt. I felt protected from the harshness of the world by these rituals.

My mother knew that my husband and I were trying to have a baby. She came to visit in the hospital when I had surgery and knew of my pain not being able to carry a child. After her death we adopted our first son. As the anniversary of her death approached, I was responsible for arranging the unveiling. I was still on maternity leave and I remember bringing my baby boy to the cemetery in New Jersey to make arrangements and then taking him to the county park to go on the swings. Since we were living in Brooklyn it was inconvenient for everyone to come back to our apartment or to go to my brother’s in Philadelphia, so I arranged a meal at a nearby restaurant after the unveiling. It was the first time many of my relatives had seen our son. Our meal together as a family was filled with the sweetness of the new baby and sadness of my mother’s death at the same time. In a sense, this ritual “unveiling” felt like an appropriate way to mark my re-entry back into everyday life.

Psalms and prayers

During mourning, you may find it helpful to read passages from *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes), which are included in the *Readings* section at the end of this booklet, along with a variety of poems, both religious and secular. No prayers are prescribed other than the *Mourner’s Kaddish*. However, you may find that you wish to say a prayer upon lighting the *shiva* and *yarzeit* candles; an example follows.



Prayer for Lighting the Shiva Candle

By Rabbi Arnold Stiebel

The shiva candle is lit by the family on returning home from the funeral. There is no blessing traditionally associated with the lighting, but you may say one if you like. One contemporary suggestion follows; you may also say a personal prayer of your own devising.

Almighty God, Master of Mercy, the One who heals broken hearts, I cry out to You. My heart aches with the pain of my loss. I light this candle to bring light and Your presence back into my home, a home that seems so devoid of light.

Master of Mercy, I know that the soul is eternal and can never be extinguished. The soul of my _____ survives because it is stronger than death. The goodness, the righteous deeds, the wisdom that my _____ gave to me will always remain within me. It will have a permanent imprint upon my soul that can never be erased. And it will continue to guide me wherever I go.

There are people who think that heaven is a place far-off, but perhaps heaven is much closer than I once thought; heaven is in my heart and my memory of _____. I pray that _____ is silently watching over me and sheltering me and will guide my steps in this world. I believe that, just as You are surrounding me, so You are surrounded by all my loved ones who have preceded _____ into the Olum Haba, the World which follows this earthly life.

O, Compassionate One, bless me and my family and inspire us with Your goodness and righteousness in the days to come. Shatter not my faith in You and never allow me to forget the memories of my dear _____. Grant me the courage to endure what cannot be escaped and help me to go on without bitterness and despair. May _____ live forever in my heart. And shelter my beloved under the wings of Your divine presence, for now into eternity. AMEN.

Ba-rukH Ata Ado-nai, A-sheR B'ya-do Ne-fesh Kol-Khai, v'Ru-akh Kol B'sar Ish.

Holy One of Blessing, in Your hands are all souls and the spirits of all flesh.
AMEN.

Reprinted with the kind permission of Rabbi Arnold Stiebel, Woodland Hills, California.

How The New Shul can help

With the family's permission, the Shul will send out a condolence announcement to the community detailing the time and place where *shiva* will be observed. We will also enter the name of your loved one into our permanent database. From that point forward, his or her name will be read annually during the Jewish month of the *yarzheit* as well as during the *yizkor* service on

Yom Kippur. You will receive notification from the office every year as the *yarzheit* approaches.

Rishonim and B'nai Mitzvah Academy teachers will be available to help your child(ren) go through the mourning process. Watching a parent cry may be hard on your child(ren). Our teachers create a safe place for them to come, share, and question.

If you wish to memorialize your loved one within the Shul, we offer bookplates that go inside the covers of our prayer books. These may include a message of your choice.

How friends and family can help

Your first responsibility as a friend, relative or member of the community is simply to visit the mourners and keep them company. As time passes and the attention dies down, your continued presence and support may be even more important, as this is often when the bereaved find themselves confronting the full impact of their loss.

There are also many ways to provide practical assistance. During *Shiva*, it is customary to bring food so the family does not have to worry about preparing meals. You may also offer to handle condolence mail and acknowledgement cards, tackle paperwork and bills, and, if qualified, help with insurance and estate issues. If you are not qualified for this, you can help by finding professionals who are.

Jewish views of death

By Rabbi Niles Elliot Goldstein

Despite widespread misconceptions (and deliberate disinformation by zealous proselytizers), Judaism has a rich, powerful, and ancient belief in *Olam ha-Ba*, “The World to Come.” Though the Torah does not describe an afterlife as such, rabbinic theology and legend are filled with ideas and stories that affirm the reality that there is a world beyond this material world, and that our souls will outlive our bodies.

The concept of *Olam ha-Ba* that resonates the most with me is that when our lives come to an end, our souls reunite with their Creator in a kind of spiritual “homecoming.” That return involves a state of eternal life with God, a rapturous, divine communion.

Rabbinic legend contains various other depictions of what becomes of us after we take our last breath. According to one rather colorful story, we will all sit together at a great table under the protective shelter of the skin of Leviathan, the mythical sea monster (who represents the forces of chaos), feast on the flesh of Behemoth, the mythical land beast (who represents the forces of violence), and study holy texts in perpetuity. For the rabbinic sages, “heaven” was conceived of as a banquet for the mind and soul, a sanctuary of uninterrupted fellowship, learning, and peace.

In traditional Judaism, the concept of bodily resurrection is very real, and many Orthodox Jews believe that our souls will return from *Olam ha-Ba* during the Messianic Age and reunite with our physical bodies. Some Kabbalists, moreover, hold a belief in reincarnation. While neither concept resonates with my own views, they do reflect the ongoing influence that other traditions have had on Judaism over the centuries.

While the idea of “heaven” has many variations in Jewish thought, the concept of “hell” is even less clear, and it is rarely the subject of rabbinic discussion. There are references in Jewish literature to *Gehinom*, the closest image of a place that might be considered the Jewish version of hell. It is a mainstream, traditional Jewish belief that the souls of the righteous are rewarded after death with their place in the World to Come, and that the souls of the wicked will be punished. The precise form that punishment will be expressed is less clear. Many simply argue that “hell” is being denied a place in the World to Come, not condemnation to *Gehinom* or some other netherworld.

There is no single, dogmatic conception of what happens to us after we die. Yet the fact that there are so many different ideas about the question makes it is crystal clear that Judaism holds fast, and faithfully, to the belief in a world beyond this one.

And it is a world not to fear. It is a place of peace.

The gift of your presence

Comforting the dying and those left behind

We often feel inadequate in comforting the dying and the bereaved. We think there is a “right thing” to say or do, but there is not. At times our presence alone can provide comfort. It begins with being the peaceful clearing or space that allows them to doze off when we are visiting without feeling they have to entertain us, and to share with us without being judged. Do not underestimate the power of listening.

The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.

-- Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

“Just Listen,” from [Kitchen Table Wisdom](#) by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. Used by permission of Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

What can family and friends do to help? Everyone and every situation is different. It is important not to assume that you know what mourners need or want. Ask what they want or make a suggestion, and be prepared to accept the concerns they share. Maybe their concerns are focused on mundane tasks: the cat is overdue for her shots; the plants need watering, bills need paying; a birthday card should be sent to a second cousin. They may be concerned about keeping family and friends informed about scheduling visits so they are not overwhelmed with company. You can offer to take responsibility for these kinds of things that will afford them some peace of mind. Particularly if the illness or death has been sudden or tragic and people are dealing with the shock, they may not even know what they need or want from you. Friends and family need to step in and take over the day-to-day and help with the many decisions that must be made.

What if their concerns are of an emotional or spiritual nature? You can begin by asking “Would you like to pray together?” If they would like to pray but don’t know what to say, you can ask them what their concerns are and say this simple prayer for them. Again, do not

assume you know what their concerns are. Be open and respectful of what you hear.

Dear God,

I am here with _____. S/he is _____(scared, sad, confused, grateful, etc.). Please help her/him to know that you are available to be with her/him, she/he doesn't have to be afraid. Please reach out to her/him. Help her/him to remember (remind her/him) all the blessings of her/his life, and that she/he is loved.

You can also read them a book, article or inspirational poem.

How can you be a calm and peaceful presence when you are scared, sad and worried about the person you want to support?

Get your own concerns out of the way and go with open ears and an open heart. Imagine one or both of the following:

- Imagine the pull of your own reactions (fear, sorrow, concerns, memories) put aside.
- Imagine your heart opening wide (expanding). See yourself as a vessel welcoming in (filling with) light and love (God). This light shines inside you and through you (radiates from you), and you carry that light with you to share with them. You are a vessel of light and love.

When you are the one who is dying or bereaved, how can you benefit from others who want to support you? Allow yourself to ask and to receive. Perhaps it is not your nature to make requests. You may consider it an imposition on others. But know that for those who love you, the opportunity to make a difference in your life is a gift you offer them. It is not your job to entertain, but to be fed and nurtured by others.

Selected unanswered questions

Prior to death

What do Jews believe about removing life support? A cornerstone of traditional Jewish thinking is that one should not “hasten nor hinder” the natural processes of mortality, once death becomes inevitable. With advances in modern science and medicine, however, there are many new and complex decisions to make. Contemporary Jewish ethicists do believe in life support in the general sense, yet every case has its own particular circumstances and must be considered individually. When a person is nearing death, there ought to be serious discussion among the physicians, family, friends and Rabbi about what course of action to take.

Is organ donation an acceptable practice in Judaism? There is a widespread view among contemporary Jewish thinkers and ethicists that organ donation is an accepted and even meritorious practice. This follows the ancient Jewish principle of *pikuach nefesh*, or “guarding of life”. In modern understanding, a Jew is mandated to do anything possible to perpetuate and/or enhance the life of another human being. For example, donating one’s heart can save a life, while donating one’s eyes can enhance the quality of life; both are included in the principle of *pikuach nefesh*.

At the moment of death

Is cremation permitted? Traditional Judaism does not endorse cremation as it is considered a “hastening” of the natural, organic process of returning the body to the earth. Another reason sometimes offered by those who believe in bodily resurrection when the Messiah comes is that an unaltered body is needed for resurrection. However, many rabbis feel that cremation is an acceptable practice. If you need personal guidance on this question, please consult the Rabbi.

What should I do first? You should contact the synagogue office and the Rabbi, as well as the funeral home and cemetery you wish to use. Together, they will guide you through the funeral process and help you to plan for shiva and beyond.

Is a funeral service required? It has now become a widespread custom to hold a funeral service at a chapel and/or a graveside burial service. According to traditional Jewish law, however, only the actual burial is required.

What about a memorial service? While Jewish law does not require a memorial service, it is an accepted custom to hold such a service up to one year after death. This is not a funeral service, but rather an opportunity to remember and celebrate a person's life.

Are eulogies part of the Jewish tradition? Eulogies, while not obligatory according to Jewish law, are a widely accepted custom. They can be delivered by family, friends, and/or the Rabbi.

Is a rabbi required at the funeral? Having a rabbi at the funeral is a modern custom, but it is not an obligation.

Do you pay the Rabbi to officiate? No. The Rabbi will officiate for any members or relatives of members (parents, spouses/partners, siblings, children) for whom it is traditional to say *Kaddish*. However, it is customary to make a donation in appreciation of this service to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund or to The New Shul.

Should children come to the funeral? Whether children attend a funeral is a personal judgment for parents to make. In Jewish law, a child is not obligated to attend until the age of 13, when the child becomes a fully responsible member of the community. Feel free to consult Amy Eichenwald Golding for guidance regarding your own children.

Must a Jew be buried in a Jewish cemetery? It is a very strong tradition to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. However, there may be a

cemetery that has a section for Jews as well as sections for people of other faiths. In some cases where a Jewish cemetery is not available, one can have a Jewish funeral and Jewish burial but not be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Can my non-Jewish partner be buried next to me? In light of the tremendous changes in the Jewish community and the fact that there are many interfaith couples, it is common today for a non-Jewish spouse to be buried next to the Jewish spouse. Many Jewish cemeteries are very accommodating about this need. You should contact the cemetery directly to confirm; this question is really one of cemetery policy rather than rabbinic interpretation.

If I am Jewish but my deceased relative was not, can I still follow the Jewish mourning rituals? If the person who died is not Jewish, the Jewish partner may still follow the standard Jewish burial laws and customs. These traditions were developed for the mourner, not the deceased, so the Jewish mourner generally observes the same laws and customs as if his or her family member was Jewish.

What about a “green” burial? Jewish burial rituals are quite green as they are. Jews are traditionally buried in a plain wooden casket, so as not to disturb the natural process of decomposition of the body. For the same reason, the act of embalming is not part of the Jewish tradition.

Are flowers appropriate for the funeral or shiva? Flowers are not typically given to the mourners or sent to the funeral home in the Jewish tradition. Jews are not supposed to do anything that masks the stark reality of death. Instead, it is customary to make a contribution to a favorite charity or to the synagogue in the deceased person's memory.

What do Jews believe about the afterlife? Judaism has a very strong concept of the afterlife, known in Hebrew as *Olam ha-Ba*. See "Jewish views of death" above for Rabbi Goldstein's essay on this subject.

Should a wedding or other celebration be postponed when a family member dies? It is appropriate to postpone a wedding until

after the shiva period, out of respect for the mourners and the deceased. The tradition is more flexible during the first thirty days. However, if an event has been planned for a long time—and especially if the deceased has expressed wishes in this regard—you may wish to go ahead with it. Each circumstance is different and thus requires your personal judgment. The Rabbi is available to help you with this difficult decision.

Mourning

Where can I get shiva candles and yartzheit candles? The funeral home will typically provide the shiva candle. You can find yartzheit candles at most supermarkets and some large drugstores.

Do I sit shiva on Shabbat? No, mourning rituals are traditionally suspended during Shabbat and resumed immediately afterwards at sundown. When certain holidays fall within the shiva period, shiva is terminated for good. Please consult the Rabbi about specific holidays.

Readings



For inspiration, consolation and reflection



Excerpts from Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)

Chapter 7

13. Consider the work of God; for who can make straight, which God has made crooked?

14. On a day of good, be among the good, and on a day of adversity, ponder; God has made one corresponding to the other, to the end that man will find no fault with God.

15. All things have I seen in the days of my vanity; there is a righteous man that perishes in spite of his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongs his life in his evil-doing.

16. Do not be too righteous and do not be too wise; why should you destroy yourself?

17. Do not be too wicked and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?

18. It is good that you should take hold of the one without withdrawing the other from your hand; for one who fears God will fulfill them all.

Chapter 9

1. For all this I laid to my heart, even to make clear all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it be love or hatred, man knows none of these in advance.

2. All things come alike to all; there is one fate to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to one that sacrifices and to one that does not sacrifice; as is the good, so is the sinner, and one that swears, as one who fears taking an oath.

3. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate in store for us all - and the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness in their minds while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

4. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5. For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

6. Their love, their hatred and their envy is long ago perished; and they have no more share forever in any thing that is done under the sun.

7. Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.

8. Let your garments be always white; and let your head lack no oil.

9. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the fleeting days of your life that have been given to you under the sun, all the days of your vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in your labor under the sun.

10. Everything that your hand can do by its strength, do; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you are going.

11. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong, neither is bread won by the wise, nor riches by the intelligent, nor favor by the knowledgeable; but time and chance happens to them all.

12. For a man cannot know his time; as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.

Chapter 11

1. Cast your bread upon the waters, for you shall find it after many days.

2. Divide a portion into seven, or even into eight; for you know not what evil shall be upon the earth.

3. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls in the south, or in the north, in the place where the tree falls, there shall it be.

4. One who observes the wind, will never sow; and one who observes the clouds shall never reap.

5. As you know not what is the way of the wind, nor how the life breath passes into the womb of a pregnant woman; so too you know not the work of God who does all things.

6. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you know not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be equally good.

7. And the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

8. For if a man lives for many years, let him rejoice in them all, and remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.

Your Steps on the Stairs By Yehuda Amichai

Your steps on the stairs
have always stayed in me,
never coming nearer and never going away,
like heartbeats.

From *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, translated and edited by Chana Bloch and Stephan Mitchell © 1996 Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press.

Each of Us Has a Name After a poem by Zelda, adapted by Marjorie Falk, from *The Book of Blessings*

Each of us has a name
Given by the source of life
And given by our parents

Each of us has a name
Given by our stature and our smile
And given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
Given by the mountains
And given by our walls

Each of us has a name
Given by our sins
And given by our longing

Each of us has a name
Given by our enemies
And given by our love

Each of us has a name
Given by our celebrations
And given by our work

Each of us has a name
Given by the seasons
And given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
Given by the sea
And given by our death.

The passages by Marcia Falk are excerpted from *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival* (Harper, 1996; Beacon, 1999). Copyright © 1996 by Marcia Lee Falk.

My Mother's Mother Died in the Spring **By Lea Goldberg**

My mother's mother died in the spring
Of her days. And her daughter did not
Remember her face. Her image,
Engraved upon my grandfather's heart,
Was erased from the world of figures
After his death.

Only her mirror remained in the house,
Grown deeper with age within its silver
Frame. And I, her pale granddaughter,
Who do not resemble her, look into it
Today as if into a lake that hides its treasures beneath the water.

Deep down, behind my face, I see a
Young woman, pink-cheeked, smiling.

She is wearing a wig. Now she is
 Hanging a long earring from her ear
 Lobe, threading it through the tiny
 Opening in the dainty flesh of her ear.

Deep down, behind my face, glows the
 Clear golden speck of her eyes. And the
 Mirror carries on the family tradition:
 That she was very beautiful.

*From The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, edited by T.Carmi (Allen Lane, 1981).
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The Lake Isle of Innisfree **By W. B. Yeats**

I will arise and go now,
 And go to Innisfree,
 And a small cabin build there,
 Of clay and wattles made;
 Nine bean rows will I have there,
 A hive for the honey bee,
 And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there,
 For peace comes dropping slow,
 Dropping from the veils of the morning
 To where the cricket sings;
 There midnight's all a glimmer,
 And noon a purple glow,
 And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now,
 For always night and day
 I hear lake water lapping
 With low sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway
 Or on the pavements gray,
 I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Surrender

By Karen D. Kedar

Surrender to the mystery of life
And in doing so
Open your heart to Divine Wisdom.

Surrender to that simple place of knowing
Where in the softness and calm
God speaks to you.

Surrender to your desire
To believe in goodness and beauty and love
For in all these are godly waves of truth.

To surrender is not to relinquish responsibility.
Tend to what is yours, release what is God's
Learn to live with ambiguity.

There is a force stronger than your will and ego.
Have faith.
Surrender.

Excerpt is from *God Whispers: Stories of the Soul, Lessons of the Heart*. ©1999 by Karyn D.Kedar. Permission granted by Jewish Lights Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091. www.jewishlights.com.

Poppies

By Mary Oliver

The poppies send up their
orange flares; swaying
in the wind, their congregations
are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin
and lacy leaves.
There isn't a place
in this world that doesn't

sooner or later drown
in the indigos of darkness,
but now, for a while,
the roughage

shines like a miracle
 as it floats above everything
 with its yellow hair.
 Of course nothing stops the cold,

black, curved blade
 from hooking forward—
 of course
 loss is the great lesson.

But I also say this: that light
 is an invitation
 to happiness,
 and that happiness,

when it's done right,
 is a kind of holiness,
 palpable and redemptive.
 Inside the bright fields,

touched by their rough and spongy gold,
 I am washed and washed
 in the river
 of earthly delight—

and what are you going to do—
 what can you do
 about it—
 deep, blue night?

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Evening **By Gail Majur**

Sometimes she's Confucian--
resolute in privation. . . .

Each day, more immobile,
 hip not mending, legs swollen;

still she carries her grief
 with a hard steadiness.

Twelve years unaccompanied,
 there's no point longing for

what can't return. This morning,
she tells me, she found a robin

hunched in the damp dirt
by the blossoming white azalea.

Still there at noon--
she went out in the yard

with her 4-pronged metal cane--
it appeared to be dying.

Tonight, when she looked again,
the bird had disappeared and

in its place, under the bush,
was a tiny egg--

"Beautiful robin's-egg blue"--
she carried carefully indoors.
"Are you keeping it warm?"
I ask--what am I thinking?--

And she: "Gail, I don't want
a *bird*, I want a blue egg."

From *Zeppo's First Wife: New and Selected Poems* by Gail Mazur (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Affirmation **By Donald Hall**

To grow old is to lose everything.
Aging, everybody knows it.
Even when we are young,
we glimpse it sometimes, and nod our heads
when a grandfather dies.
Then we row for years on the midsummer
pond, ignorant and content. But a marriage,
that began without harm, scatters
into debris on the shore,
and a friend from school drops
cold on a rocky strand.

If a new love carries us
 past middle age, our wife will die
 at her strongest and most beautiful.
 New women come and go. All go.
 The pretty lover who announces
 that she is temporary
 is temporary. The bold woman,
 middle-aged against our old age,
 sinks under an anxiety she cannot withstand.
 Another friend of decades estranges himself
 in words that pollute thirty years.
 Let us stifle under mud at the pond's edge
 and affirm that it is fitting
 and delicious to lose everything.

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Consolation
By Robert Louis Stevenson

Though he, that ever kind and true,
 Kept stoutly step by step with you,
 Your whole long, gusty lifetime through,
 Be gone a while before,
 Be now a moment gone before,
 Yet, doubt not, soon the seasons shall restore
 Your friend to you.

He has but turned the corner — still
 He pushes on with right good will,
 Through mire and marsh, by heugh and hill,
 That self-same arduous way —
 That self-same upland, hopeful way,
 That you and he through many a doubtful day
 Attempted still.

He is not dead, this friend — not dead,
 But in the path we mortals tread
 Got some few, trifling steps ahead
 And nearer to the end;
 So that you too, once past the bend,
 Shall meet again, as face to face, this friend
 You fancy dead.

Push gaily on, strong heart! The while
 You travel forward mile by mile,
 He loiters with a backward smile
 Till you can overtake,
 And strains his eyes to search his wake,
 Or whistling, as he sees you through the brake,
 Waits on a stile.

Farewell to Yang, Who's Leaving for Kuo-chou
By Wang Wei, Translated by David Hinton

Those canyons are too narrow to travel.
 How will you make your way there, when

it's a mere bird-path—a thousand miles
 and gibbons howling all day and night?

We offer travel-spirits wine, then you're
 gone: Nü-lang Shrine, mountain forests

and beyond. But we still share a radiant
 moon. And do you hear a nightjar there?

Translated by David Hinton, from *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei*. Copyright ©2006 by
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And Death Shall Have No Dominion
By Dylan Thomas

And death shall have no dominion.
 Dead men naked they shall be one
 With the man in the wind and the west moon;
 When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
 They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
 Though they go mad they shall be sane,
 Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
 Though lovers be lost love shall not;
 And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
 Under the windings of the sea
 They lying long shall not die windily;
 Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
 Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;

Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
 And the unicorn evils run them through;
 Split all ends up they shan't crack;
 And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
 No more may gulls cry at their ears
 Or waves break loud on the seashores;
 Where blew a flower may a flower no more
 Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
 Though they be mad and dead as nails,
 Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
 Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
 And death shall have no dominion.

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Dirge Without Music
By Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
 So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
 Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
 With lilies and with laurel they go but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
 Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
 A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
 A formula, a phrase remains, but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love,
 They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
 Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
 More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
 Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
 Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
 I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

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Meditation for Healing from Grieving

By Ariel Neshama Lee

This meditation was written for a friend grieving the loss of her husband. The parasha for the week when he died was Lech L'cha and the meditation was written with that in mind. While it was written for a spouse, the theme of journeying and moving forward makes it applicable for use for anyone who is grieving. I acknowledge those who teach me and inspire my writing and my spirituality with their gifts of wisdom and light: Rabbi Alan and Rebbetzin Chaya Green, Rabbi Neal and Rebbetzin Carol Rose, Rabbi Lawrence Pinsker, and Ineke Shorten.

Envision yourself walking in the desert. It is quiet and still and beautiful. You feel the wind blow around you. It is soft, gentle, refreshing. You look ahead into the distance. You hear a voice speak to you. It is the voice of HaShem. It says Lech l'cha [feminine: Lechi lach]. It tells you to journey forward into your future. It tells you not to be afraid as you leave that which is familiar, that which is comfortable, that which is limiting. You take a step forward, then another, then another. You hear the voice again. It whispers softly "Lech l'cha/Lechi lach, go forward. Do not be afraid. Go forward to the land I have prepared for you. It is a land of abundance. It is a land that is more than physical. It is land of many dimensions—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual." It is an inner landscape as well as an outer landscape. It is where you connect with and become one with HaShem. It is where you can connect with the world that HaShem gifted to you and (name of deceased person). Your love birthed countless worlds in this landscape. These worlds will never die. They sparkle like the innumerable stars in the heavens. They are everywhere, all around you, within you. This is a love for all time. This love was created by HaShem at the moment of Creation. It always was and always will be. It is a love that cannot die. Do not be afraid to journey forward. You will not lose your love. Listen to the voice. Lech l'cha/Lechi lach. Go forward into your future. Go forward to where HaShem will take you. He gave you (name of deceased person) to take you to the stars. The journey has not ended. It is in another dimension. Journey into the desert. It is not a wasteland but a living, breathing entity, just as your love was a creation in and of itself—a living, breathing entity—that never dies. Lech l'cha/Lechi lach. Journey forward to the stars that HaShem created for you. Lech l'cha/Lechi lach. Journey forward to the place of light and holiness that is yours. Lech l'cha/Lechi lach. Journey forward to the place of beautiful, endless love that is yours.

Originally published at ritualwell.org.

Psalm 20

For the Choirmaster; a Psalm by David.

May the Lord answer you on the day of distress; may the Name of the G-d of Jacob fortify you.

May He send your help from the Sanctuary, and support you from Zion.

May He remember all your offerings, and always accept favorably your sacrifices.
 May He grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill your every counsel.
 We will rejoice in your deliverance, and raise our banners in the name of our G-d;
 may the Lord fulfill all your wishes.
 Now I know that the Lord has delivered His anointed one, answering him from His
 holy heavens with the mighty saving power of His right hand.
 Some (rely) upon chariots and some upon horses, but we [rely upon and] invoke the
 Name of the Lord our G-d.
 They bend and fall, but we rise and stand firm.
 Lord, deliver us; may the King answer us on the day we call.

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Any Time (I Am There) **By William Finn**

ELEGIES: A Song Cycle

Anytime you laugh,
 Anytime you cry,
 Anytime you hear a sound.
 When you're on the grass, lying on the ground.
 Anytime you wash your hands,
 I'll be around.

I'll be there on the baseball field, though I'm well-concealed, I'll be out there cheering.
 I'll be there in the books you read. It is guaranteed, I'm not disappearing fast.
 Anytime.
 No, not anytime.

And I am there each morning.
 I am there each fall.
 I am present without warning.
 And I'm watching it all.
 Yes, I'm watching it all.

Oh, and I am there in music.
 I am there in the sky.
 I don't know why this thing did happen but this much is clear,
 Anytime or anywhere,
 I am there.

Anytime you pray.

Anytime you fight.
Anytime you've gained a pound.
Anytime it's day.
Anytime it's night.
Anytime the Earth moves, I'll be around.

I'll be there in the maple trees, I'm a summer breeze on a perfect evening.
I'll be there when you celebrate when the world seems great, I'll be waiting by your side.
Anytime. Yes! Anytime.

And I am there each morning.
I am there each fall.
I am present without warning.
And I'm watching it all.
Yes, I'm watching it all.

Oh, and I am there in flowers.
I am there in snow.
I don't know why this thing happened but this much is clear,
Anytime you cry, anytime you sing for anything.
I am there each morning.
I am there each fall.

I don't know why this thing happened but this much is clear,
Be aware,
I am there. I am there.

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Sheet music available from *ELEGIES: A Song Cycle*

Resources

Suggested readings

GENERAL

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning

Maurice Lamm

A classic and comprehensive work presenting all of the fundamental laws and traditions pertaining to Jewish death and mourning rituals, offering the traditional point of view in contemporary terms.

Consolation: The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief

Maurice Lamm

A comprehensive and practical book on the subject of grief for mourners and those who seek to bring comfort to the bereaved.

Grief in Our Seasons: A Mourner's Kaddish Companion

Kerry M. Olitzky

Focuses on the first year of mourning, and the Jewish tradition of using study to honor the memory of those we love who are no longer with us.

Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning

Jack Riemer, Editor

A collection of writings exploring how Jewish insights on death and mourning rituals can teach the living and comfort the bereaved.

The Jewish Mourner's Book of Why

Alfred J. Kolatch

Comprehensive volume on Jewish death and mourning. Question-and-answer format explores the laws, observances and customs that relate to Jewish mourning. Includes a section of readings for the bereaved.

Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing

Anne Brener

While it follows the Jewish mourning process and tradition, this book is not just for Jews, but for anyone who could gain strength from the Bible and teachings of Jewish tradition.

Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew

Anita Diamant

Explores how to make Judaism's time-honored rituals into personal, meaningful sources of comfort. By the author of *The Red Tent*.

A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort (Art of Jewish Living Series)

Ron Wolfson

A guide to meeting the needs of those who mourn and those who seek to provide comfort. Includes the specifics for funeral preparations, shiva and other rituals.

FOR CHILDREN

A Candle for Grandpa: A Guide to the Jewish Funeral for Children and Parents

David Teichner

A young boy describes the events surrounding the death of his grandfather including his feelings of grief and his participation in the funeral. Also includes answers to frequently asked questions regarding death and funerals.

Help Me Say Goodbye

Janis Silverman

An art therapy and activity book for children coping with loss. Sensitive exercises address questions children may have and encourages children to express in pictures what they may not be capable of expressing in words.

LOSS OF A CHILD

Confronting the Loss of a Baby

Yamin Levy

Rabbi Levy, the father of a stillborn baby, offers guidance on healing following the loss of a baby.

Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope

Nina Beth Cardin

Addresses the needs of those who have lost a pregnancy, suffered from infertility, or experienced a stillbirth.

When a Baby Dies

Nancy Kohner, Alix Henley

Uses letters from and interviews with bereaved parents to address the loss of a baby.

PERSONAL MEMOIRS AND LITERARY WORKS

Kaddish

Leon Wieseltier

A narrative of Wieseltier's grief and mourning during the year following his father's death, and his exploration of the history and spiritual significance of the Kaddish and other Jewish death and mourning rituals.

Living A Year of Kaddish

Ari L. Goldman

The best-selling author of *The Search for God at Harvard* continues his spiritual quest in this account of the year he spent saying Kaddish for his father.

The Blessing of a Broken Heart**Sherri Mandell**

Koby Mandell was thirteen-years-old on May 8, 2001 when he and his friend Yosef cut school to go hiking. Their bodies were found the next day. The boys had been brutally stoned to death in a cave in the heart of the Judean desert. How does a family cope with the loss of a child through such horror?

Paula**Isabel Allende**

A magical realist memoir written by the Chilean writer for her daughter as she lay in an irreversible coma and then died from a rare blood disease.

The Year of Magical Thinking**Joan Didion**

Chronicles the year following the death of Didion's husband, fellow writer John Gregory Dunne, from a massive heart attack while the couple's only daughter, Quintana, lay unconscious in a nearby hospital suffering from pneumonia and septic shock.

Suggested websites**ethicalwill.com**

Provides information on, and examples of, ethical wills.

interfaithfamily.com

Answers questions about burial and mourning practices for non-Jewish relatives.

myjewishlearning.com

Offers essays on Jewish death and mourning practices.

npr.org

Publishes an interesting essay on Jewish prayers and blessings associated with death and mourning. Current location is:

<http://npr.org/programs/death/readings/spiritual/hammer.html>

ritualwell.org

Presents traditional and contemporary rituals and readings for death and mourning.

Dedications

With gratitude to beloved teachers and my grandparents.

Sean Baldwin

In loving memory of my grandparents who helped shape who I am today and continue to inspire me: Blanka and Walter Knie and Hedwig and Erich Eichenwald.

Amy Eichenwald Golding

For my beloved father, Jack Eisenberg, still the great companion of my mind.

Sheryl Eisenberg

In loving memory of my father, Herbert Friedman.

Marty Friedman

In loving memory of my father Sanford Leroy Gins, who in addition to his love and support, provided the foundation of wisdom on which my family and I continue to build our lives.

Cathy Gins

In loving memory and enduring respect for my grandparents and their influence over my life as a Jew: Leo and Bertha Rakita, and Sidney and Ethel Goldstein.

Niles Goldstein

Irwin E. and Zelda C. Klass, my father and mother, who loved and taught me.

Tobey Klass

To my parents... long gone, long remembered and long missed.

Anita Kushner

With love and gratitude, to my mother's sister, Svetlana Rozet, and my mother's mother, Ella Romm.

Sasha Malamud

In loving memory of my aunt Hilda Marton who kept Judaism alive for me.

Tonda Marton

In loving memory of my father, Abraham Mereson.

Amy Mereson

In memory of my dear friend and colleague Rabbi Diane Leibowitz, who taught me that I didn't have to say goodbye.

In memory of my beautiful sister-in-law, Sally Reinitz, whose courage continues to inspire me.

Joyce Reinitz

In loving memory of the man I miss so dearly, my father Burton Wechsler, and of the grandparents I hold in my heart, Rebecca and Joseph Winters and Loretta and Cyrus Wechsler.

Maia Wechsler

ABOUT THE NEW SHUL

Founded in 1999, The New Shul is a progressive, inclusive, independent, and egalitarian congregation that is life-affirming and spirit moving, that respects tradition while remaining open to experimentation and innovation in Jewish life and ritual. Located in Greenwich Village in Downtown Manhattan, we have a vibrant and creative religious school, a place where families learn together and parents are partners with teachers in passing Judaism to their children. The New Shul offers adults a path home to their Jewish heritage, where questioning is not only tolerated but encouraged, where men and women can open new doors to their spirituality through learning that excites the mind and ignites the soul. Ours is a community where heart and hand are united, where people rise together to face the challenges of trying to heal a broken world.