**Jewish Mourner's Handbook**

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**Preface**

Death is not fair; the survivors of someone who dies experience intense pain and a feeling of loneliness that border on being unbearable. Their sorrow is deep and seemingly endless. There is nothing we can do about death, but solace and a bit of comfort can be found, both from our interactions with one another and from Judaism.

Too often, we don't know what to do when someone dies because we have never paid much attention to the mourning customs. We are unprepared to face the crisis. We don't know where to turn, or from whom to seek advice and support.

Over the centuries, Judaism has developed specific rites and rituals which respect the dead and express compassionate concern for the living. The Jewish laws of mourning are built into a community structure which is designed to provide a firm footing in the face of loss.

This handbook is intended to answer some of the questions you may be asking at this very moment. It is not a thick compendium of laws and customs, but it will help you with your immediate concerns, and it includes prayers, readings, and meditations which can help ease the pain during the period of mourning and at yahrzeit in coming years. For more authoritative guidance on relevant aspects of Jewish law, seek the advice of your rabbi, who will give you the answers you seek.

A Note About Autonomy and Personal Choice in Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism affords the adult free choice within the framework of Judaism and personal autonomy to follow that choice when it is made from a base of Jewish knowledge. Thus, the prescribed rituals for mourning and bereavement, as contained in this handbook, may be freely interpreted within the context of Reform Jewish decisionmaking.

Introduction

King David, seeing his son near death, changed from his opulent robes to sackcloth and from his diet of rich and plentiful food to fasting, hoping his personal sacrifices would save his beloved son. Seven days later the young boy died. David again put on his luxurious clothes and sat down to a royal feast. When friends asked him how he could eat when his child had just died, he replied that he had done all that was humanly possible to save his son, and now that he was gone, it was time to pick up the pieces of his life and go on living. David had discovered a profound truth that you too will find. The living must go on with life. This handbook will help you find that insight through Judaism.

This manual has been written for the bereaved; it is not about the grief, anguish, and sadness of losing a loved one. It concerns the Jewish way of life and death, and its related rituals and practices. These simple acts can help to give meaningful expression to your grief and sorrow.

There is no simple and easy way to endure the suffering and pain that accompany death. You will certainly need the help of your friends, clergy, and loved ones to help you work through your grief, one step at a time. We all do.

The Jewish way of life, through specific rites and rituals, helps to order and structure our response to the experience of death. Instead of letting grief drain the vital spirit out of you, Judaism transforms it into a vehicle for strengthening family ties and promoting the sanctity of life. Nobody can answer the question "why" which you are mulling over in your minds. Comforting words cannot banish tears. But Judaism can offer you some consolation, through its customs and traditions, which work to reaffirm life.

The Dubner Maggid, a famous Lithuanian preacher in the eighteenth century, once told the story of king who owned a large, beautiful, and pure diamond. The king was justifiably proud of the gem, for it had no equal anywhere. One day, it accidentally sustained a deep scratch. The king called in the best diamond cutters and offered them a great reward to remove the imperfection. But no one could repair the blemish, and the king was extremely distressed.

After some time, a gifted craftsman came to the king and promised to make the rare diamond even more beautiful than it had been before the mishap. The king was impressed and entrusted the precious stone to his care.

The man kept his word. With superb artistry he engraved a lovely rosebud around the imperfection, using the scratch to make the stem.

Deep inside of you is the potential to emulate the craftsman. Although life has bruised and wounded you, you can use its scratches to etch a portrait of beauty through memory. By allowing the Jewish way of mourning to guide you, you can begin to take your first steps toward the road of light and life.

May God comfort you in your sorrow among the mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.

What Does Jewish Tradition Say About Life And Death?

The dust returns to the earth as it was, but the spirit returns to God who gave it.

--Ecclesiastes 3:2

A story in the Talmud tells about an old man who was planting a tree. "Why are you planting a tree?" asked a bystander. "Do you expect to live long enough to see it full-grown?" "No," responded the old man, "but the trees I have enjoyed in my lifetime were planted by those before me, so I am planting for those after me."

It is difficult for us to think about the end of life. We long for a life beyond because death is a mystery. As there is a Jewish way of life, so too there is a Jewish way of death. Over the centuries the rabbis have evolved a pattern of practices and rituals which are concerned with every aspect of death. These include the utmost regard for the dying and deep concern for the spiritual support of the mourner. Thus, Jewish rituals of mourning are sensitive to the specific needs of the bereaved.

Our tradition understands the shock you feel, the despair, the anger, and even perhaps a little guilt. Our rituals and customs have been shaped to help to channel emotions into a productive expression of grief. In essence, our attitude toward death is shaped by our love of life. Judaism is more than a creed. It is a way of life, and its rituals and customs are given practical expression in our daily actions. The rites of mourning are more for us the living than for the dead.

In America today, the dying are often isolated in hospitals and treated as collections of organs and illnesses rather than as whole human beings. Our society tends to deny death; the dying may be treated as incomplete persons, and many people avoid those for whom death is imminent.

The Jewish way of death is different, just as the Jewish way of life is different. Judaism approaches all of life honestly and realistically. It knows that death is a part of every life and therefore that we have no choice but to face it openly. Three thousand years ago, King David honestly faced his own death: "Behold, 1 am now about to go in the way of all the earth," he said to his son, Solomon. it as simple and undeniable as that.

There are several underlying principles that sum up the Jewish way of death. Among these are:

**Reality**

Judaism bids us to face death realistically. Death is a part of every life, and it is important to face it with honesty. This realistic view of death and preparation for it during one’s life is a well-known motif that pervades the entire Jewish tradition. The kittel, the plain white linen garment that tradition bids us to wear on the Day of Atonement and at Passover. is both the garment of freedom and purity and also the traditional burial shroud. Judaism’s insistence upon confronting death directly is also reflected in the requirement that the tearing of a mourner’s garment (nowadays often a symbolic ribbon) as a sign of the tear in our hearts must be done while the mourner is standing.

**Simplicity**

The simplicity of the Jewish burial is designed to avert another psychological pitfall. The religious prescription of a wooden coffin is meant to avoid ostentation at the funeral and to remind us that death is the great equalizer. In the democracy of death all are equal, no matter what their social or economic status.

**Community**

Especially at a time when we mourn the death of a loved one, we need the comforting help that other people can give us. It is customary for the Jewish community to reach out to mourners in their time of grief and let them know that they are not alone. As an act of kindness, the mourner's first food after the burial is prepared by others, for otherwise he or she might not remember to eat. The congregation moves to the mourner's home and services are held there during the initial days of mourning.

The Jewish way of life finds order and meaning through structure. Instead of letting death consume mourners, Judaism transforms bereavement into a vehicle with the potential to strengthen familial ties, revitalize communal solidarity, and promote the sanctity of life itself. Realizing that reason cannot answer the "why," and that comforting words cannot banish heart-rending tears, Judaism offers consolation in the face of death by reaffirming life, moving mourners slowly back to the normal routine of life.

As a mourner you need help and comfort. Others are willing to provide this. Let them help you and comfort you, for in Judaism comforting the mourner is a mitzvah, a religious obligation. It is a creative spiritual act, requiring deep sensitivity.

Moreover, God is with you as a Protector and Partner, the Source of life and the place of death. God is the mystery that wraps us up in life and shelters us in death.

Your faith in God and your belief in life will comfort and console you. May the comfort they give you be as soothing as that felt and so exquisitely expressed by the psalmist: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff help to comfort me" (Psalm 23).

It is in this spirit, the spirit of support and understanding, that we will together walk gently through some of the rituals of mourning.

Before Death

These are the deeds which yield fruit and continue to yield fruit in the tine to come… visiting the sick.

--Talmud, Shabbat 127a

**Bikkur Cholim**

All of life is sacred; its beginning and its end are mysteries. Both birth and death touch the fringe of the Divine and have been invested with meaningful religious rites. There are several observances that Judaism requires for the living and the dying before death occurs. One of them is bikkur cholim, the mitzvah of visiting the sick, one of the supreme acts of holiness.

The rabbis designated visiting the sick as both a loving act of kindness and a basic Jewish communal obligation. This mitzvah is deemed so important that it is numbered among those things for which a person enjoys the fruits in this world, while the principal reward is held for him in the world-to-come.

When you visit a sick person, you bring both physical and psychological relief, calming and lifting the spirit and engendering a feeling of care, warmth and love.

The Talmud tells how Rabbi Akiba once visited a disciple who had become ill. No one else had bothered to visit the disciple, and as a result his house was a mess. Akiba did all that was needed; he "even swept the man's floors." When the disciple recovered, he attributed his restored health to Akiba's visit. By preparing his home for a return to life's daily routine, he said, Akiba had strengthened his will to get well.

Jewish tradition also teaches that it is important to allow others to help us when we are sick. For example, Rabbi Jochanan once visited Rabbi Hanina when he was ill. When Hanina complained about his suffering, Rabbi Jochanan suggested that he repeat to himself the same encouraging words he had spoken to such good effect when Rabbi Jochanan was ill. Hanina replied: "When I was free of suffering, I could help others; but now that I myself suffer, I must ask others to help me." This story is a reminder that you should know when to give and when and how to receive, and that in receiving, you are also often giving.

There are a series of rabbinical guidelines for the practice of bikkur cholim. For example, it is important that your visits be made at appropriate times and not last too long, so that you don't make the patient uncomfortable.

Always remember that the primary purpose of your visit is to help the patient with a spirit of good cheer and optimism about the prospect for recovery.

Centuries ago bikkur cholim societies were prevalent in many European Jewish communities. Societies for visiting the sick were founded by Jewish immigrants in America and continue to exist in some communities. If you do not have such a society in your community and want to get one started, you may wish to speak to your rabbi or Jewish Family Service about starting one.

Performing the mitzvah of bikkur cholim will help to enrich your life. The benefit flows not only to the patient but to you, the visitor.

**Vidui**

Rabbi Eliezer once said: "Repent one day before your death." His students asked him, "How are we supposed to know when we will die?" "All the more reason to repent today," he replied, "lest you die tomorrow; and if you repent each day, your whole life will be spent in repentance" (Talmud, Shabbat 153a).

Judaism believes in the importance of putting one's house in order, especially when death is imminent. In such cases, patients ought to be encouraged to say the [Viddui] the confessional prayer. Of course care should be taken to ensure that this does not distress the patient. It should be explained that reciting the Vidui does not mean that death is imminent but is an opportunity to pray to God and ask for healing.

The following is a suggested version of the Vidui which you may wish to use as a guide. Tradition allows you to add your own thoughts and feelings.

I acknowledge before you, Adonai, my God, and God of our ancestors, that both my cure and my death are in Your hands. May it be Your will to send me perfect healing. Yet if this is not your determination, I will accept it. In your presence I atone for all of my sins and transgressions. O God, bestow upon me the abounding happiness that is treasured up for righteous people. Make known to me the path of life. In Your Presence is fullness of joy. At Your right hand is eternal bliss. Protect my family with whose soul my own is knit. Into Your hand I offer my spirit. You have redeemed me, O God of truth. Amen.

**Ethical Wills**

When Jacob, the biblical patriarch, felt that he was close to death, he asked for divine mercy, saying: "May it please You to grant that a person should fall ill for two or three days and then be gathered into our people, in order that he may have time to put his house in order and repent of his sins." The Holy One replied: "It shall be so; and you shall be the first to profit by this opportunity."

Jacob's blessing to his children (Genesis 49) and the famous farewell address of Moses (Deuteronomy 33) established a beautiful custom that attained great popularity during the Middle Ages. Parents and grandparents, before their deaths, often wrote letters to their children in which they expressed their hopes and desires for the future, articulating the values they cherished, hoping these principles would live on through their children. These letters and writings to the children are called ethical wills.

An ethical will is neither a will nor an ethical document but a lengthy personal letter. Writing an ethical will is not easy. Preparing one requires you to do some serious thinking, probing deeply for the essence of your life which you will want to transmit to your family. In writing an ethical will, you provide your family with a spiritual legacy for which they will be forever grateful. In an ethical will you might express thanks to your spouse, children, or other relatives for their contributions to your life, or you might list values which are part of our precious heritage and urge that they be carried out. (Space has been provided in the appendix for you to jot down your thoughts in preparation for the writing of an ethical will.)

From Death To Bereavement

**Aninut**

Death is seldom expected or anticipated. Even when you know that a loved one has been stricken with a terminal illness, the moment of death still takes you by surprise. Shocked by the news of death, you are thrown into a state of confusion.

In Jewish practice, the first phase of the mourning process is called aninut. It begins when you learn of the death of an immediate relative and ends when the interment or burial takes place.

A person who has lost a relative and is going through aninut is called an onen. During this period many decisions may be required, but you may not be ready to make them. The laws which govern your actions and behavior as an onen are sensitive to this inner struggle and reflect a common sense understanding of a mourner's current state of mind. You are not expected to be concerned about social amenities and certain types of mitzvot that require you to do something are not required at this time.

There are several stages of mourning in Judaism, each with its own inner logic and sensitivity. Aninut is the first step. Like the others that follow, it is designed to help you acknowledge and accept your pain and loss.

**When Death Occurs**

Preserving the sacred dignity of life and the reverence for the human body sets the tone for all we Jews do when responding to death. When we hear of a death, the traditional response is Baruch Dayan Ha'ernet -- "Praised be the Righteous Judge."

As soon as you learn that one of your dear ones has died, call your rabbi, who in turn will notify the chevra kaddisha burial society if there is one in your community. Next, call the funeral home to make arrangements for the transfer of the deceased, the funeral, and the interment. This includes setting the date and time of funeral.

In very traditional situations a person called a shomer, (lit. "watchman") will stay with the deceased from the time of death until burial. The rabbi or funeral director will help you find a shomer if you want one. Traditionally, a candle is placed near the deceased, and psalms, particularly Psalms 23 and 91, are recited. When a death occurs in a hospital, some of these rituals are delayed until the deceased is removed to the funeral home.

**The Chevra Kaddisha**

The Chevra Kaddisha (lit. "holy society") is an organization of people who are familiar with Jewish funerary practices and are willing to help the mourner as well as to prepare the deceased For burial. In some modem synagogues, the chevra kaddisha is called the caring committee. Whatever its name, the chevra kaddisha will perform a tahara (ritual cleansing of the body) and recite the required prayers. The funeral director or rabbi will help you locate the chevra kaddisha if its members are unknown to you.

**The Rabbi**

The officiating rabbi will try to ease the pain of your grief, and will also want to know certain things about the deceased, especially if the rabbi and the deceased were not acquainted. The information you provide will help the rabbi to prepare for the funeral service. Obviously the rabbi needs to know the deceased' s Hebrew name. In addition, be prepared to honestly and openly speak about the deceased and your relationship, as difficult as doing so may be at the time. Remember good times and bad times; all is part of any human life. Others in the family should also be given an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, especially children, for it is all part of the grieving process. Let the rabbi know whether there is something that should not be said at the funeral. Family members should be encouraged to share their thoughts during the funeral itself, if they are emotionally able to do so.

**The Funeral and the Eulogy**

In general, funerals should be short and simple. Some families have the funeral service in the chapel and then go to the place of interment; others have the entire service at graveside. This is usually determined by the number of people expected to attend and other considerations. If you do not choose to have a funeral at the graveside, then graveside prayers at the interment should be kept to a minimum. Some people feel the need to lengthen and complicate them, but it is best to keep them simple.

Some of the mourners may want to publicly say something about the deceased and their relationship. While the officiating rabbi is often called upon to be the spokesperson for the entire family, the funeral is a family ceremony and participation should be welcome. However, you may want to limit the number of people participating in the funeral and the length of time each person is given to speak.

**When Can the Funeral Take Place?**

Consult with the officiating rabbi and the funeral home before determining the time of the funeral. Traditionally, the funeral takes place within twenty-four hours of death, hence the traditional proscription about embalming. While this is most desirable, it is not always possible when some close mourners live great distances away. There are, however, exceptions to the general prohibition of embalming. They are when a lengthy delay in the funeral service seems mandatory, and when burial takes place overseas. Postponement is required when "within twenty-four hours" would mean Shabbat or a holiday on which funerals are not permitted (the High Holidays, Sukkot, Passover, Shavuot). There are also certain other times when delays may be permitted, such as when immediate family members are out of town or when the death occurs away from home. Convenience, however, is not sufficient reason to delay. When a funeral takes place just prior to a festival, if the family returns home and sits shiva for a brief period before that holiday, the shiva is canceled. If, however, the funeral occurs during the intermediate days of Passover or Sukkot, shiva does not begin until the holiday is over. Consult your rabbi for an exact interpretation of these laws.

The Casket

Some mourners are tempted to purchase a casket that "will last forever," but in Jewish tradition we follow the lead in the text "For you are dust, and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). In other words, whatever prevents the process of returning to dust is considered inconsistent with traditional Jewish practice. Thus, the coffin should be made entirely of wood.

While the cost of the casket should be determined by your financial ability, the casket should not be ostentatious. The rationale is that we came into the world as equals in the sight of God, and we should leave the world in the same way.

**The Shroud**

Shrouds (tachrichim) are simple white garments; generally made of linen (or sometimes muslin or cotton). They are all alike in order to ensure that everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, is equal at death. Instead of frantically searching for the deceased' s finest clothes, with everyone having an opinion or a favorite outfit, these simple garments are preferable, once again, in order to ensure the democratic principle and avoid potential problems. A deceased male (and any female whose family elects to do so) is also wrapped in a talis (prayer shawl), with one tzitzit (ritual fringe) cut.

**Where May the Funeral Take Place?**

Historically, Jewish funerals took place at the home of the deceased or at the cemetery. Synagogues were used very rarely, and only for people of extraordinary distinction and stature in the community.

Today, some communities permit funeral services to be held in the synagogue. Where this is the case, you might want to consider it as an option. In this way, the entire celebration and sanctification of life throughout the life cycle is associated with the synagogue. Death is not segregated in an institution of its own but becomes a part of daily living.

On the other hand, funeral homes are designed to accommodate large numbers of people and make sure everything runs smoothly. If a Jewish funeral home is not available and you must use a Gentile funeral home, then all Christian religious symbols, such as crosses, should be removed.

**Children at the Funeral**

Children should be provided with the opportunity to grieve in their own way. Do not assume that because they do not fully comprehend "what's going on," they do not understand at all. In the face of death, we all need to be reminded of the promise of life which is present in front of us in the faces of children. As they grow older, they may be thankful for the opportunity you provided, since their memories of the deceased may fade over time.

Take your cue from the child. A child who wants to attend should be permitted to do so. If a child is frightened, it would be best to arrange appropriate child care. In any case, the rabbi should sit down with children prior to the funeral and explain what will take place during the funeral. The child also needs a chance to say goodbye.

**Flowers**

Sephardic custom allows for flowers, and there is no real proscription against them in Ashkenazic practice, but well-wishers should be encouraged to give tzedakah (charitable giving) as a more lasting memorial. If flowers are received, they should be displayed, because of the risk of offending the sender, but never in an ostentatious manner. If people ask about sending flowers beforehand, urge them to give tzedakah instead by making a contribution to a medical research association for the disease which afflicted the deceased. Announcements in newspapers should indicate the wish of the family to have donations made to a specific charity(ies) in lieu of flowers or gifts.

**Who Is a Mourner?**

According to Jewish tradition, one is required to observe the laws of mourning for seven relatives: father, mother, spouse, son, daughter, sister, and brother. Anyone can say Kaddish as well (especially if the deceased's mother and father are not living). Occasionally someone will say Kaddish for a relative who has no one else to say Kaddish or whose children will not follow the custom of saying it.

**What to Tell the (Grand)Children**

All of us have the tendency to talk around death rather than about it, using complex scientific and medical terminology to explain things away. We think that if we know all the details and can describe them to others, somehow we will understand more and be comforted. This is generally not true, and detailed explanations should be avoided, particularly in the case of children. Be direct and truthful, guided by the age of the children. Answer the questions asked, as they are asked. Don't assume that a child needs to know everything an adult feels inclined to know. Encourage questions and discussion, but don't provide answers to questions that are not asked; be supportive and understanding, but try to avoid myths that will later have to be rejected, such as that grandpa is sleeping or that grandma went away on a long trip. Speak from your heart and from the foundations of your own belief.

The Funeral And Burial

When a person dies, all that accompanies that person are Torah and good deeds.

--Avot 6:9

Cutting Keriah

One of the most striking Tewish expressions of grief is cutting keriah, the rending of the garments by the mourner prior to the funeral service. The rending is an opportunity for psychological relief, allowing the mourner to express anguish and anger by means of an act of destruction made sacred by Jewish tradition.

The keriah is the tear made on the mourner's clothing (or on a ribbon attached to the clothing) as an outward sign of grief and mourning and an acceptance of death. The custom originated with our biblical ancestors. Jacob, David and Job all cut their clothing after experiencing the death of a loved one.

Keriah, the rending of garments, is usually done immediately before the funeral service. During keriah, the mourners stand signifying that they are confronting death head-on.

For a deceased parent, keriah is customarily on the left side, closest to the heart. For all others, keriah is on the right side. Immediately prior to keriah the following benediction is recited by the mourner: [Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam dayan ha-emet] ("Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, the true Judge.") Much like the Mourner’s Kaddish, this benediction is a reaffirmation of our faith in God and in the worthwhileness of life, even during a time of great sorrow. This custom also recognizes God as the final judge of all humankind.

The Funeral

The Hebrew word for "funeral," levayah, literally means "to accompany." This teaches us that a Jewish funeral requires community involvement. It is a mitzvah and an act of respect to attend the funeral service and to accompany the deceased to the cemetery, walking alongside or behind the casket. In some communities, pallbearers actually carry the casket to the hearse and then to the grave.

The funeral itself ought to be brief and simple, for its purpose is to honor the deceased and to allow friends and relatives a chance to support the mourner through their presence. Contrary to popular belief, there is no standard or fixed funeral service. Generally speaking the officiating rabbi will read a selection from the Book of Psalms, deliver a eulogy, and chant the [El Malei Rachamim] memorial prayer at the conclusion of the service.

It is considered an honor and an important obligation of mourners and family members to provide the substance for the eulogy, if at all possible. Abraham, our first patriarch, eulogized his wife Sarah; this custom of family involvement is well worth perpetuating.

The recessional, performed by wheeling the casket from the funeral chapel or synagogue to the hearse, is often attended to by honorary pallbearers chosen by the family. The rabbi often leads the recessional while reciting psalms.

The Cemetery

On arriving at the cemetery, pallbearers from among the family or friends should, if possible, carry the casket to the grave. This custom dates back to biblical times, when Jacob's children carried him to his grave. Seven stops are customarily made by the pallbearers on their way to the grave, symbolizing the seven times the word "vanity" occurs in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Between the stops, Psalm 91 is recited because of its words of comfort.

A prayer called Tzidduk Hadin, which is an acceptance of God's judgment, is usually recited at the graveside, its words begin: "The Rock, God's work is perfect, for all God's ways are judgment. A God of faithfulness and without sin, just and right is God." (There are times during the year when Tzidduk Hadin is not said. Your rabbi will know which days these are.)

The rabbi may then say a few closing words, followed by the lowering of the casket into the grave. This is followed by the reciting of El Malei Rachamim, a prayer for the peace of the departed soul. The reciting of the Mourner's Kaddish closes the service.

It is a mitzvah for relatives and friends to symbolically help shovel the earth back into the grave in order to cover the casket. As difficult as this may seem, it is literally the last physical act that we can perform for our loved one, and helps start the mourner on the way to acceptance and reconciliation. Since it is Jewish custom not to leave a body unattended, people will often not leave the burial site until the coffin is covered with earth.

With the burying of our loved one, the theme now changes from honoring the deceased to comforting the mourners. To act out this transition, all of those present are asked to form two parallel lines, facing each other. As the mourners pass through the two lines, those present recite these traditional words of comfort: [Hamakon yenachem etchem betoch she'ar avelei tziyon verushalayim] --" May God comfort you among the mourners for Zion and Jerusalem."

Mourning Observances

We need not erect monuments to the righteous; their deeds are their monuments.

--Genesis Rabbah 32:10

What is Shiva?

Shiva, taken from the Hebrew word for "seven," refers to the first seven days of mourning. This moves you from aninut, the initial stage following the knowledge of death, to avelut, or the actual period of mourning. Since tradition reckons parts of a day to be considered as a whole day, the day of the interment is considered the first day of mourning regardless of whether it included a full twenty-four hours or not.

Shiva does not begin until the deceased has been interred, and then usually lasts for seven days. In Judaism, there is always a creative tension between personal or community joy and sorrow. This pull is felt at various times and seasons during the year when a death occurs. Thus, when a death occurs on the first day of a major festival (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot), the beginning of shiva is delayed until the end of the festival. Moreover, onset of a major festival brings the shiva period to an end regardless of how many days have elapsed. A wedding celebration may also change the laws for mourning.

Actually, shiva is divided into two parts. The first three days following interment are a period of intense grief, (Hence, some Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis have abbreviated shiva to this period only.) During this period, in recognition of the overwhelming nature of your loss, Jewish tradition encourages you to stay at home. Friends are encouraged to visit you after you have had a chance to deal privately with your grief in your own way.

Following this beginning, you enter the next and final stage in the remainder of shiva. While feelings cannot be regulated by time and different people respond to love and loss differently, shiva will provide you with the support you need to lean on. You may now be ready to receive friends--who want to help you, trying to do the best they can within the limits of being human. They share your pain and want to comfort you, trying to provide for your daily needs. Little more than this can really be done. We are all limited in our ability to respond to death and cope with the demands it places on the living.

Superficially viewed, the various customs of mourning (which may differ slightly from community to community) may seem to have little independent purpose, but together they form a structure of support and identification for you and those who love you and want to help you.

What Should I Do During Shiva?

Because the deceased's possessions are a moving reminder of his or her life, shiva should preferably be held in the home of the deceased. This also allows the family to be together. It is customary to refrain from work and commerce during shiva, unless there is a clearly articulated public need or the mourners are very poor. Among more traditional Jews, shaving (or haircutting of any sort) is avoided, as is personal grooming (but not hygienic practices). New clothes are not to be worn and you should refrain from conjugal marital relations. The formal study of Torah is prohibited as well, but mourners are encouraged to reflect on books of the Bible such as Psalms and Job.

Certain shiva practices are things to be done immediately upon returning from the cemetery. First, traditionally one washes the hands. It is an ancient custom to cleanse when leaving the presence of death and to rid oneself of impurities associated with it. Second, the mourners eat a meal of condolence, prepared by friends for them, as an affirmation of life. This custom ensures that they will not deprive themselves of nourishment because of their grief. The original meanings of these customs are not always known, and various authorities and concerned relatives will suggest a variety of reasons for many of them (or will even suggest that you forgo their observance).

During shiva friends and members of the community will visit to formally express their condolences. Some of them will be uncomfortable and not exactly sure what to say; searching for words to give you comfort, they may be inclined not to speak until spoken to (and this, in fact, is what tradition instructs). They are there to support you, even in silence.

During shiva mourners sit lower than others, usually on low stools and traditionally do not wear leather shoes; both practices are signs of mourning, indicating a significant change from the typical patterns of normative daily life and physically reflect the emotional state of bereavement. Very often a minyan will assemble in the house of shiva in order for you to say Kaddish at home each morning and evening.

The Shiva Candle

A candle (which lasts throughout the seven-day period) should be kindled upon entering the house of shiva after the funeral service. It is usually provided by the funeral director. Light, a symbol of the divine in us all, as well as of the soul of the deceased, is associated with the celebration and sanctification of life and time throughout-the year. There are differences of opinion regarding where the candle should be placed, but it should be in the home of the deceased if that is where shiva is being observed, and if not, wherever shiva is being observed.

One candle is sufficient for the entire household. If, for some reason, shiva is being observed by different members of the family in different places, individual candles should be lit in each place. A suggested reading for the lighting of the shiva candle will be found in the appendix of this book.

The Meal of Consolation

The meal of consolation or condolence, prepared by friends, is provided for you so that you can eat when you get home from the cemetery. This is not a reception, and you should not feel inclined to "entertain your guests." Typically, the meal is made up of hard-boiled eggs (traditionally a symbol of eternal renewal and life), cooked vegetables (lentils), and a beverage -- all symbols of the cyclical nature of life. There are times when the meal of consolation is not offered, such as when shiva has been postponed or suspended. When shiva begins in the late afternoon preceding the Sabbath or a major festival, no meal is offered.

Mirrors

While the covering (or clouding over) of mirrors in the house of mourning has been customary for a long time, it is unclear how this custom developed. As a result, there are various reasons for wanting to do so, including:

1.Human beings are made in the image of God. Since that image is diminished in the face of death, human image reflected in the mirror should be symbolically diminished (through the covering of the mirror). 2.Mourners should focus on their relationship with the deceased and not on personal vanity. 3.The great appeal of mirrors, especially of those which are ornate or unusually decorated, should not draw anyone's attention away from the responsibility of mourning or of comforting the mourner. 4.Finally, the mirror reflects the image of individuals. Mirrors are not permitted in the deceased's home because it becomes a house of worship during shiva.

The Conclusion of Shiva

When mourners get up from shiva, they walk a short distance, usually around the block, to symbolize their return to society and the real world, from which death forced them to withdraw. The mourners now enter the second phase of mourning, called sheloshim. As its Hebrew name indicates, this is a period of thirty days, reckoned from interment to include the seven days of shiva. Just as we counted the beginning of shiva as a full day, immediately following interment, we do the same at the conclusion of shiva and to institute the counting of days for sheloshim.

Generally, sheloshim begins on the morning of the seventh day (following the morning service). One returns to a normal daily routine during sheloshim, but a number of mourning customs initiated during shiva are to be continued during sheloshim. Specifically, one may return to marital relations, but is to avoid forms of entertainment. The mourner returns to work, but continues to say Kaddish in the context of the daily minyan. Technically, sheloshim ends the full mourning period for all relatives except for those grieving for their parent (whose length of mourning is a full twelve months). In most communities, Kaddish for parents is said only eleven months minus one day.

Festivals affect sheloshim. Consult your rabbi for further details.

Post-Mourning Practices

Those who live no more echo still within our thoughts and words, and what they did is part of what we have become.

--Gates of Prayer

How Long Do We Mourn After Shiva Is Completed?

As was just indicated, mourning lasts a full year when one of your parents has died, reckoned as twelve full months (rather than parts of months as was the case with shiva and sheloshirn) from the day of death (not from the day of the interment). (In a Hebrew leap year of thirteen months, mourning is required only for twelve months.)

Due to the principle of social visibility, the most stringent mourning restrictions, such as those in the area of personal grooming, are relaxed because of the mourner's need, during the year, to interact with others, especially in the workplace. Torah study is encouraged as a tribute to the deceased, and so are acts of tzedakah (charity). Throughout this period you should continue to avoid parties and social occasions. Some authorities on Jewish law hold that this prohibition refers to purely social occasions and does not include religious celebrations and the like.

The Kaddish

The expression "You are my kaddishel" among Ashkenazi Jews means, "You are the one who will say Kaddish for me after I am gone." As this parental expression indicates, the obligation to say Kaddish is a significant one. The Kaddish is a strong statement of faith; it is moving and emotionally powerful. It is a poetic declaration of belief which echoes from the soul of the Jewish people and therefore has the potential to reflect your deep pain as a mourner.

There are two forms of Kaddish with which the bereaved should be concerned. First, there is a burial Kaddish which includes a paragraph about the (eventual) resurrection of the dead, during the messianic era. This Kaddish is said only at graveside; and there is a Mourner's Kaddish which is said all year and whenever the mourner is in the synagogue. Many rabbis use the regular Mourner’s Kaddish at graveside also. The rabbi who leads the service will tell you which Kaddish will be used at graveside.

The Kaddish helps to move you from the intensity of grief at interment to the less intense emotional mood of the various periods of mourning. Its constant repetition, at the appointed times, provides an anchor of relief at a time nothing else in life seems stable. It is to be said in a public quorum, traditionally a minyan of ten persons (Reform Judaism permits it with fewer persons), to help you through these times of distress, and allows you to become one with all the mourners of the Jewish people throughout history. Its repetition throughout the year is an exclamation of respect for parents.

Traditionally, the son is required to say Kaddish for deceased parents. We have come to understand this obligation as binding on the daughter as well. These responsibilities cannot be transferred to another person. However, one may want to say Kaddish for someone other than a parent. In the past, families often paid individuals to say Kaddish for their deceased. This practice should be discouraged. It does not release the primary individual from obligation.

The Tombstone and Marker

Like many of our customs, the custom of erecting a monument over a grave goes back to biblical times. We are told in the Book of Genesis (35:20) that Jacob set a pillar upon his wife Rachel's grave. He undoubtedly did this in order to keep his wife's memory alive as well as to be able to identify the grave.

While there is really no regulation concerning the time when the tombstone should be erected, it has become customary to do so at the end of the year of mourning. We consecrate the monument at a ceremony called an unveiling, which is described below.

There are a number of customs with which you may wish to familiarize yourself regarding the inscriptions on the tombstone. The name of the deceased in English, and often in Hebrew, appears on the tombstone, along with the date of death according to both the secular and the Hebrew calendar. Sometimes above this inscription, among Ashkenazim, one finds two Hebrew letters, [nun] [pei], which are the initials for (poh nach)-"Here Rests. " The Sephardim often use the Hebrew letters [kaf] [mem], standing for (matzevet kevurah), meaning "monument of the Grave of." Underneath the inscription one usually finds the Hebrew letters [taf] [nun] [tzadek] [vei] [hei], standing for (Tehi nishmato tzerurah bitzeror hachayyim) -- "May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life."

A Levite's tombstone often has a ewer carved out over the inscriptions as a symbol of his office, because in the ancient Temple the Levites washed the priest's hands before they gave the Priestly Benediction.

The tombstones of kohanim, these descendants of the ancient priests, are often marked by a carving of the hands raised in the Priestly Benediction.

Occasionally there will be a verse from the Bible or rabbinic literature (or from any Jewish text, for that matter) on the tombstone. The verse usually is chosen because it has some application to the life of the deceased and the family decides that it will serve as an appropriate memorial.

The Unveiling

In Western countries and in America it has become customary to consecrate the tombstone or marker with a service. Since in America the tombstone is covered with a cloth which is taken off by the family during the service, the ritual is called the unveiling.

The unveiling generally takes place within a year after the death. It can take place anytime after thirty days, and for various reasons we need not always wait a year. The ceremony offers yet another opportunity for the family to pay tribute to the deceased and to meditate with each other about the meaning of life and death. Caution should be exercised; the unveiling should not become a social event, nor another funeral.

It is appropriate for the immediate family and close relatives and friends to be invited to the unveiling. Although there is generally a rabbi present to officiate, the ceremony is relatively brief and simple, and a member of the family can conduct it if desired. Most unveilings consist of the reading of some psalms, a few brief remarks about the deceased, the removal of the cloth covering the tombstone and the reading of the inscription, the chanting of Eil Malei Rachamim and the reciting of the Mourner's Kaddish if a minyan of ten persons is present. (Reform Judaism allows this even if a minyan is not present.) When the ceremony concludes it is customary for each person present to place a small stone on the tombstone. Laying stones on monuments is a sign that someone has visited the cemetery and thus an acknowledgment that the deceased is still loved and remembered.

When scheduling the unveiling, remember that it is advisable to call your rabbi several weeks or even months in advance, and to set the date after consulting with the rabbi. Unveilings may take place whenever grave visitations in general are permissible. (See below for appropriate times to schedule unveilings and visit the cemetery.)

Visits to the Grave

Judaism has always tried to discourage excessive grave visitation. However, there are suggested times to visit graves (and these are the times that are appropriate for an unveiling). The most appropriate days for grave visitation are the day that concludes the sheloshirn, the day of the yahrzeit, traditional fastdays such as Tisha B'Av, and anytime during the month of Elul, especially the day before Rosh Hashanah. Visitation ought not to be made on the Sabbath or on Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot, including their intermediate days.

When you visit the cemetery you are free to recite whatever prayers or psalms you wish. One popular custom is to use Psalm 119, whose verses are grouped in alphabetical order. You may wish to read-those verses which begin with the letters of the name of the deceased. Eil Malei Rachamim may also be recited (either in Hebrew or in English), and of course the Mourner's Kaddish if a minyan is present (Reform Judaism allows it without a minyan). You may wish to also use the graveside meditations in the appendix of this handbook.

Yahrzeit

Jewish tradition has added an additional ritual to help us meet the crisis of bereavement. This is the annual commemoration of the anniversary of death known as yahrzeit in Yiddish ("year time") and as anos among Sephardim. Every year, on the anniversary of the death, we consecrate a special day of remembrance for our loved one. This is usually on the anniversary according to the Hebrew calendar, but some people use secular dates to mark yahrzeit. (If you are not certain of the day when a relative died, you should select an appropriate date on which to observe yahrzeit each year.)

The yahrzeit officially begins with the lighting of a twenty four hour candle on the night of the anniversary. (You may choose to read one of the yahrzeit meditations in the appendix of this handbook when lighting the candle.) Many reasons for this custom have been suggested. One states that light symbolizes a person's soul, suggesting immortality. "The soul of a person," says the Book of Proverbs (20:27), "is the lamp of God."

On the day of the yahrzeit, it is customary to attend services and to recite the Mourners Kaddish. Eil Malei Rachamim is also chanted in memory of the deceased. It is also entirely proper for the mourner, if comfortable doing so, to act as the leader of the service. On the Sabbath preceding the yahrzeit, it is also customary to call the mourner to the Torah for an aliyah.

Appropriate too is the fulfillment of some mitzvah in honor of the deceased on the day of the yahrzeit. This could consist of Torah study, contributing to some worthy cause, or some act of generosity. It is also appropriate for family and friends to gather on the yahrzeit for the purpose of recalling various aspects of the life of the deceased, perpetuating his or her memory in a warm and loving family atmosphere.

Yizkor

The association of memorial services with joyous festivals is very characteristic of Judaism. On Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, and Passover and Shavuot, a remembrance service called Yizkor takes place. Participating in this service allows us to remember our loved ones and the values they cherished and transmitted while alive. In this way we are encouraged to continue to lead the good lives that our loved ones bequeathed to us.

Yizkor may be said for all Jewish dead: parents, grandparents, husbands and wives, children, family, and friends. Some people do not say Yizkor for friends or grandparents if their parents are living. Consult your rabbi if you want to say Yizkor for these people while your parents are still alive.

Despite the common practice, which suggests against it, Yizkor may be recited on the very first holiday after death.

The Yizkor service consists of several biblical passages related to the meaning of life and death, passages specifically directed at remembering our loved ones (including Jewish martyrs and those killed in the Holocaust), Eil Malei Rachamim, in which we ask cod to shelter the souls of our beloved in eternal peace, and the Mourner's Kaddish. Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my Shepherd") is also often recited in many synagogues today.

As with yahrzeit, it is also customary to kindle a twenty-four hour candle on the evening preceding Yizkor. Mourners also customarily pledge charity and perform other loving deeds of kindness to honor the memory of their beloved departed.

Special Questions And Concerns

This chapter attempts to answer some very difficult questions in a frank and sensitive manner-and with the realization that the intricacies of Jewish law often require a profound and thorough investigation. Read our answers; follow your heart; and seek the advice of a rabbinic authority.

Suicide

While Jewish tradition teaches that God alone has the right to make decisions about life and death, and therefore suicide is morally wrong, the Jewish people have always been sensitive to the state of mind which would lead an individual to commit suicide. Thus, only rarely are self-inflicted deaths labeled as suicides within the context of Jewish law.

As far as Judaism is concerned, whether a death is a suicide is not determined by police records or court decisions, but by a rabbi after careful consideration of all the variables, which include the influences of drugs and alcohol, mental health, motivation, and planning. Many rabbis feel that the laws regarding suicide are insensitive to the mental anguish suffered by the person who commits suicide, as well as by the survivors. In addition, even traditional Judaism holds that the customary mourning practices should be observed in every detail, even in a case of suicide, if not doing so would lead to the family's honor being questioned.

In any case, you, the mourner, are entitled to the fullest sympathy that your neighbors and our people have to offer. Questions and personal doubts about the cause of death may plague you for years to come, but you cannot be held responsible for what happened, nor should you feel responsible. We all feel your burden, but only God can fully understand the mysteries of the human mind; we can only fumble in the darkness and provide one another with comfort. No matter what happened, you must not torture yourself with questions and doubts.

Since suicide is traditionally considered an act of blasphemy and a transgression of Jewish law, the bereaved are generally required to follow a different pattern of mourning. According to this perspective, only those aspects of the mourning ritual that affirm life are to be observed. In addition, the location of the grave may be affected. Some cemeteries include a special separate section for suicides. Keriah would be cut in a case of suicide but a eulogy is not always offered. The Burial Kaddish would not be said, but the Mourner's Kaddish is to be recited daily for the full twelve-month period; yahrzeit and Yizkor are to be fully followed.

Mausoleurns

Since the requirement to inter the deceased refers specifically to burial in the earth, a mausoleum built over a burial plot is permissible. Mausoleums in which the casket is kept above the earth are contrary to the biblical directive which emphasizes earthly burial, but liberal Jews permit them. However, vaults are permitted in those areas where they are required by civil law, usually due to the water table of the land. Even where permitted, vaults should not be used for the sole purpose of preserving the remains of the deceased. This is contrary to the spirit of Jewish burial practice, which hastens to rejoin the body with the earth from which it came.

Cremation

While liberal ]Judaism often allows for cremation, it is traditionally prohibited because it does not allow for the body to naturally return to the earth. According to this perspective, if a cremation does take place, the ashes would not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Some cemeteries will allow burial of ashes, however, and in this way we preserve some attachment to the Jewish community by allowing for burial in Jewishly consecrated soil.

Jewish mourning practices serve both to honor the deceased and to comfort the bereaved. Generally, cremation provides for neither. If you choose this option, you should be fully cognizant of these factors because such decisions cannot be altered. Many liberal Jews observe full mourning rites even when cremation occurs.

Euthanasia

From the Greek for "beautiful death," and sometimes referred to as mercy killing, euthanasia is strictly forbidden by traditional Jewish law. While liberal authorities deem it permissible, Jewish law condemns any active intervention that could shorten a person's life. The issue is clouded, however, because postponing death unnecessarily is also prohibited and even traditional authorities do not agree over what constitutes active cessation of life. Orthodox opinion seems to suggest that we are not required to attach any life-prolonging devices to a terminally ill patient but may not remove them once attached. Some Conservative authorities seem to suggest that we may remove such devices and allow nature to take its course. Reform Judaism clearly holds that we are forbidden to prolong a life that has been reduced to the status of a "vegetable."

Amputated Limbs

If an individual dies with severed limbs, then those limbs are to be buried with the deceased. Previously amputated limbs should have been buried in the eventual grave of the individual or in a family plot nearby. While there are no special practices, amputated limbs should be buried even if a person does not have a burial plot when the amputation takes place. We are to be buried as completely as possible, just as we were born.

Organ Donations

The deceased's will should be closely followed unless it clearly transgresses Jewish law. In that case, a rabbinic authority should be consulted. While the donation of limbs seems to be contrary to traditional Jewish law (and subject to a more liberal interpretation by liberal authorities), the donation of organs remains under constant rabbinic debate. Such donations should be discussed in depth with a rabbinic authority. However, organ donation is generally encouraged by all branches of Judaism as a means of pikuach nefesh (saving [and extending] life).

Autopsies

Orthodox authorities generally argue that autopsies should only be permitted if they will directly affect a person suffering from the same disease. Conservative and Reform authorities hold that autopsies may be performed if it can be clearly demonstrated that they will expand our general medical knowledge.

A World Beyond The Grave

In death two worlds meet with a kiss: this world going out and the future world coming in.

Life After Death

Jews and Judaism have generally been more concerned with this world than the next and have concentrated their religious efforts toward building an ideal world for the living. Belief in any type of afterlife was little pronounced in the early biblical period. During the rabbinic period, however, it began to assume a more prominent place in Jewish faith. A doctrine of the immortality of the soul developed which suggested that the body returns to earth, dust to dust, but the soul which is immortal returns to God who gave it. In addition, rabbinic Judaism also affirmed the eventual resurrection of the body with its soul which will occur with the coming of the Messiah. (Reform Judaism rejects the idea of resurrection. Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism understand the Messianic idea in more abstract terms.) This remains an area in which each of us must confront the wonder of existence on our own, and make peace on our own terms with the mystery of death. There are a plethora of ideas about the precise meaning of immortality and what form it can take. This small handbook is not intended to provide you with a full treatment of the subject and its history. However, the following describes several of the forms in which our people conceive of immortality today:

1. Influence through family. We live on through the life of our family and their descendants. This is another way of saying that we live in and through our children. This naturalistic view says that eternal life occurs biologically through the children that we bring into this world. 2. Immortality through influence. When we have influenced others to the point that they fashion themselves after us and continue to use us as a role model, this kind of eternal significance is itself a form of immortality. 3. Influence through deeds and creative works. Our work can outlast our life, however modest. We will continue to live on through our work. This notion of immortality is expressed in the Midrash: "We need not erect monuments to the righteous; their deeds are their monuments" (Genesis Rabbah 32:10). 4. Influence through memory. People live on in the memory of those who knew them and loved them. Simply remembering people that we admired and loved gives them eternity. 5. Reincarnation. The kabbalists, the medieval Jewish mystics, proposed still another option. They taught that a person's soul returns again and again in different bodies, and the way in which it conducts itself in each reincarnation determines its ascent or descent in its next visit. 6. Resurrection. Many Jews in the past believed that the physical body would be resurrected during the messianic era. Some still hold this view today. 7. Eternal life. The deceased live with God and will be restored to their bodies when the Messiah appears. 8. Rationalist view. Maimonides, the twelfth-century philosopher, proposed, in contrast to the mystics, that in as much as God is pure intelligence, one's godlike qualities reside in our intellects. Therefore, to the extent that we develop our intelligence and reach the knowledge of eternal truth, to that extent we achieve immortality.

Clearly Judaism has many different concepts of immortality. But all of these options, however varied, are based upon one fundamental conception: in Judaism, God is just and we are all responsible for our actions in this life. Even if a person led an uncaring life, God may still find some small kind deed or some small act of repentance that will suffice for admittance to the future world.

So no matter which understanding best resembles your own, the basic question always remains the same: How did you live your life? Did you leave the world a better place for others? This thought is beautifully summed up in the Midrash on the Book of Psalms 118:17, commenting on the phrase "Open the Gates of Righteousness for me."

At the time of judgment in the Future World everyone will be asked, "What was your occupation?" If the person answers, " I used to feed the hungry," they will say to him, "This is God's gate; you who fed the hungry may enter." "I used to give water to those who were thirsty''--they will say to him, "This is God's gate. You who gave water to those who were thirsty may enter." "I used to clothe the naked"--they will say to him, "This is God's gate; you who clothed the naked may enter." ...and similarly with those who raised orphans, and who performed the mitzvah of tzedakah, and who performed acts of caring, loving-kindness.

Appendix

Lighting A Shiva Candle

The following selections are some suggestions which might direct your thoughts as you light the shiva candle. Feel free to adapt these texts.

O God, grant us strength as we mourn the loss of him/her. We will always have cherished memories of him/her. Bless our family with light and peace. May his/her memory continue to serve as a blessing and an inspiration to all who knew and loved him/her.

A PRAYER OF MOSES (Psalm 90)

Adonai, You have been our refuge in all generations. Before the mountains were born or the earth was formed From everlasting to everlasting You are God. You turn a person to dust You say: "Return, O mortals." A thousand years are in Your sight As a passing day, an hour of night. You carry us away and we sleep We flourish in the morning like grass. In the morning it grows anew In the evening it is cut down and withers. We are consumed by Your anger We are overcome by Your wrath. You set out our sins before You Our secrets before Your presence. Your anger darkens our days Our lives expire like a sigh. The days of our years are three-score and ten Or even by reason of strength four-score years. Laden with trouble and travail, Life is quickly gone, and we fly away. Who can know the power of Your wrath? Who can measure the reverence due You? Teach us to number our days That we may get us a heart of wisdom. Relent, Adonai! How long must we suffer? Have compassion upon your servants. Match days of sadness with days of joy Equal to the years we have suffered. Let your work appear to Your servants And Your glory upon Your children. May Adonai our God show us graciousness And may Adonai prosper the work of our hands.

Concluding Shiva

At the conclusion of shiva, one customarily takes a short walk around the block. These meditations may help shape your thoughts before taking your walk.

O God, Healer of shattered hearts, let neither death nor sorrow have dominion over us. May we always remember and cherish all of those good and kind deeds in the life of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. May his/her memory inspire us to deeds of loving kindness.

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O God who heals the broken-hearted, we thank You for Your gift of comfort that You have brought us during these past days -of sorrow. We are also thankful for family and friends who have shared our grief and brought us comfort.

As we again go forward to resume our life's tasks, We pray that You will help us face our grief without bitterness. Teach us to honor our dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by continuing to serve our people through deeds of charity and lovingkindness. And may You, O God, always be our support when our strength fails us.

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We rise up now to face life's tasks once more. There will always be moments of loneliness, for a loved one has passed from our midst. Teach us to always be thankful for the life of our dear companion and for the opportunity of sharing so many joyous moments with him/her. May we always honor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by rising above despair and finding consolation in serving our people. Amen.

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God of spirit and flesh, we have turned to You for comfort in these days of grief. When the cup of sorrow passed into our hands, Your presence consoled us. Now we rise up to face the tasks of life once more. There will be moments of woe and hours of loneliness, for a loved one has gassed from our sight. In our times of weakness may her (his) memory strengthen our spirit. Teach us to give thanks for all that was deathless in the life of our dear companion and friend, and which now is revealed to us in all its beauty. Be our support when our own strength fails us.

For the love that death cannot sever; for the friendship we shared along life's path; for those gifts of heart and mind which have now become a precious heritage; for all these and more, we are grateful. Now help us, God, not to dwell on sorrow and pain, but to honor our beloved by the quality of our lives. Amen.

Adapted from Gates of the House (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

Readings for Consecrating (Unveiling) a Monument

On behalf of the family of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and in the presence of his (her) relatives and friends, we consecrate this memorial as a sign of love undying.

May his (her) soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

Rabbi's Manual (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

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For an adult

God of infinite love, in whose hands are the souls of all the living and the spirits of all flesh, standing at the grave of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ we gratefully recall the goodness in her (him) and we give thanks for the consolation of memory.

Strengthen us who mourn, that, walking through the valley of the shadow of death, we may be guided by Your light. May our actions and aspiration honor our loved one as surely as does this monument, which will stand as a symbol of our abiding devotion. So will she (he) live on for blessing among us.

Gates of Prayer (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

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For a child

To You, O Source of peace, we turn in our time of need. Give us strength and patience to bear our burden of sorrow. And help us to overcome our grief, that we may return to life and its tasks. Deepen our love for one another; teach us to open our hearts to all who need us; move us to reach out to them with our hands; and guide us on our path, until we find the abiding love that survives all loss and sustains us through every trial.

Grant consolation, Adonai, to sorrowing parents and to all who mourn. Heal our hurt, renew our hope and our faith. May the memory of this beloved child make all children more precious to us, and inspire us to labor for a world in which every life shall find its fulfillment.

As we dedicate this memorial to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ we hallow and bless Your name.

Adapted from Rabbis Manual (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

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Conclude with the Eil Malei Rachamim Memorial Prayer and the Mourner's Kaddish.

When Visiting the Cemetery

The following psalms may be recited when you visit the cemetery. You are not required to recite anything. Feel free to speak from your heart or meditate in silence. The Eil Malei Rachamim Memorial Prayer is customarily recited before leaving the grave site.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in straight paths for His name's sake. Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, i fear no evil, for You are with me. Your staff and Your rod comfort me. You prepare a banquet for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of your life. And I shall dwell in the house of God forever. Psalm 23.

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In Memory of a Loved One I lovingly recall \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; may he/she rest in peace. I thank God for the gift of his/her life, for the pleasant memories which are left behind. May the goodness and love with which he/she touched my life continue to influence my life as I share these qualities of kindness with others. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life and endure as a source of blessing to all who knew and loved him/her. Amen.

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To this sacred place I come, drawn by the eternal ties that bind my soul to the soul of my beloved. Death has separated us. You are no longer at my side to share the beauty of the passing moment. I cannot look to you to lighten my burdens, to lend me your strength, your wisdom, your faith. And yet what you mean to me does not wither or fade. For a time we touched hands and hearts; still your voice abides with me, still your tender glance remains a joy to me. For you are part of me for ever; something of you has become a deathless song upon my lips. And so beyond the ache that tells how much I miss you, a deeper thought compels: we were together. I hold you still in mind, and give thanks for life and love. The happiness that was, the memories that do not fade, are a gift that can not be lost. You continue to bless my days and years. I will always give thanks for you.

Gates of Prayer (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

Eil Malei Rachamim

For male

Eil malei rachamim sho-khein bam'romim, hamm-tzei m'nukhah n'khonah tahat kanfei ha-sh'khinah, b'ma-alot k'doshim u-t'horim k'zohar ha-rakiya maz-hirim et nishmat \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ ben\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ she-halakh l’olamo, b'gan eiden t'hei m'nuhato. Ana, ba-al ha-rahamim, hassti-rei-hu b'seiter k'nafekha l’olamim, u-tzror bi-tzror ha-hayim et nishmato, Adonai hu nahalato, v’yanu-ah b'shalom al mishkavo v'nomar amen.

God of compassion, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence, among the holy and the pure who shine in the brightness of the firmament, to the soul of our dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who-has gone to his eternal rest. God of compassion, remember all his worthy deeds in the land of the living. May his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life. May God be his inheritance. May he rest in peace. And let us answer: Amen.

For female

Eil malei rachamim sho-khein bam'romim, hamm-tzei m'nukhah n'khonah tahat kanfei ha-sh'khinah, b'ma-alot k'doshim u't'horim k'zohar ha’rakiya maz-hirim et nishmat \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ bat\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ sheh-halkhah l'olamah, b'gan eiden t'hei m'nuhatah. Ana, ba-al ha-rahamim, hassti-reha b'seiter k'nafekha l’olamim, u-tzror bi-tzror ha-hayim et nishmatah, Adonai hu nahalatah, v'tanu-ah b'shalom al mishkavah, v'nomar amen.

God of compassion, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence, among the holy and the pure who shine in the brightness of the firmament, to the soul of our dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who has gone to her eternal rest. God of compassion, remember all her worthy deeds in the land of the living. May her soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life. May God be her inheritance. May she rest in peace. And let us answer: Amen.

Mourner's Kaddish

Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei-ra-ba be-al-ma di-ve-ra chi-re-u-tei,

ve-yam-lich mal-chu-tei be-cha-yei-chon u-ve-yo-mei-chon u-ve-cha-yei de-chol beit Yis-ra-eil, ba-a-ga-la u-vi-ze-man ka-riv, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

Ye-hei she-mei ra-ba me-va-rach le-a-lam u-le-mei al-ma-ya.

Yit-ba-rach ve-yish-ta-bach, ve-yit-pa-ar ve-yit-ro-mam ve-yit-na-sei, ve-yit-ha-dar ve-yit-a-leh ve-yit-ha-lal she-mei de-ku-de-sha, be-rich hu, le-ei-la min kol bi-re-cha-ta ve-shi-ra-ta, tush-be-cha-ta ve-ne-che-ma-ta, da-a mi-ran be-al-ma, ve-i-me-ru; a-mein. Ye-hei she-la-ma ra-ba min she-me-ya ve-cha-yirn a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

O-seh sha-lom bi-me-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu ve-al kol

Yis-ra-eil, vei-me-ru: a-mein.

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Let the glory of God be extolled, let God's great name be hallowed, in the world whose creation God willed. May God's sovereignty soon prevail, in our own day, Our own lives, and the life of all Israel, and let us say Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Let the name of God be glorified, exalted, and honored, though God is beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter, and let us say Amen. For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say Amen.

May God who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, let peace descend on us, on all Israel and all the world, and let us say: Amen.

Adapted From Gates of Prayer (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

Kindling The Yahrzeit Candle

Remember that the yahrzeit candle is traditionally burned from sunset to sunset on the anniversary of the day of death, according to the Hebrew calendar, starting on the evening preceding the day. There is no special prayer to be recited. Choose a quotation, a psalm, or a poem, one of the selections below or any other passage which you are moved to read.

I now remember my dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who has gone to his/her eternal resting place. May his/her soul be given life everlasting, and may his/her memory be a source of blessing to those who knew and loved him/her. Amen.

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I light this yahrzeit candle in loving memory of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ recalling the words from the Book of Proverbs: "The soul of a person is the light of Adonai.

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O God, I remember tonight the life of my dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. As I light this candle to his/her memory, I put my trust in You and pray that his/her memory will serve as a blessing and source of inspiration to all people who knew and loved him/her.

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May God remember the soul of my dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who has passed to eternal rest. I pledge: charity and deeds of lovingkindness- in his/her behalf and pray that his/her soul will be kept among the immortal souls of our righteous ancestors.

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O God, I pray that you will keep the soul of my dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ united with us in-the bond of life. In his/her memory, guide me so that I will live righteously, fulfilling Your will and serving our people. May his/her soul rest in peace and be remembered as a blessing.

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O God, as I observe \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_'s yahrzeit, I pray that I may emulate all that was good and righteous in his/her life. May his/her soul be given eternal life and his/her memory always remain a comfort and source of inspiration.

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At this moment, which bears the memory of our beloved \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ let us join hands in love and remembrance. A link has been broken in the chain which has bound us together, yet strong bonds of home and love hold us each to the other.

We give thanks for the blessing of life, of companionship and of memory. We are grateful for the strength and faith that sustained us in the hour of our bereavement. Though sorrow lingers, we have learned that love is stronger than death. Though our loved one is beyond our sight, we do not despair, for we sense our beloved in our hearts as a living presence.

Sustained by words of faith, comforted by precious memories, we kindle the yahrzeit light in remembrance. "The human spirit is the light of Adonai" (Proverbs 20:27). As this light is pure and clear, so may the blessed memory of the goodness and nobility of character of our dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ illumine our souls.

The light is kindled

Zich-ro-no (Zich-ro-na) li-ve-ra-cha. His (her) memory is a blessing.

Adapted from Gates of the House (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

Sample Ethical Will I

And When There Are No More Tomorrows

Jane Meinrath Bloch

Jane M. Bloch of Cincinnati Writes to Her Son Peter

May 4, 1963

Jane Meinrath Bloch was born on February 28, 1 926, and died on September 7, 1967. A native of Kansas City, Missouri, she attended Westport High School in that city and graduated from Vassar College in 1945. She mooed to Cincinnati, Ohio, with her mother in the early 1940s.

The following excerpts are from Jane Bloch's typescript account of her experiences while living in an iron lung. "She was placed on this life-support machine in 1949, when she contracted polio, and she remained on it for nearly eighteen years. In simple but poignant prose, she tells her son—and now the world--how she was able to cope with the knowledge that she would never again be able to live outside of the iron lung. In spite of this, Jane Bloch never despaired. During 'those eighteen years she learned to read Russian, studied Plato, and constructed a philosophy of life that is both instructional and ennobling. This remarkable document, written in 1963, is the testimony of a remarkable woman.

May 4, 1963

My dear Peter: I have wanted to write you a special letter for a very long time. I have wanted to tell you about all the things that have happened these past fourteen years -- starting from the hot August days in 1949 when the hospital ward was filled - sometimes with death or physical destruction, or sometimes miraculously with returned health. These were the days of the polio epidemic. I want to take you with me through those dim summer days and then through the many that followed in increasingly shining succession.... We have not spoken together, you and I, much about God. Because I have felt so deeply, I have remained silent – too silent. And if you have felt, because my life has had little formal religion, that I have removed myself from deep belief, you would have been given reason to have concluded this. I can only tell you that I have felt very close to God. In the very early days of my sickness, half-destroyed and understanding little, I began a prayer, and each night the same simple words returned again and again to me: "Grant me the strength, the courage, and the wisdom." There was no ending to the prayer, just those words, and the feeling that some spirit far greater than mine would hear me and help me. And in my room over the years, this belief has grown stronger. Although I know that there are disbelievers, I doubt that there are many men among us who in time of darkening trouble do not feel the need to turn to an unknown, but omniscient presence. And in my room, thinking and believing, I have been restored. I share with you deep feeling, and in a larger sense, like that calendar of time which I once feared, I am no longer torn when I acknowledge the force of my feelings. I have learned what I might not have learned had the hand of destiny not guided me into this very different life. Or was it perhaps, the hand of God? And so, Peter, dear, the chapters come to an end, but the story continues. There are lust a few things left to be said. When the time comes, as it inevitably must, that you and I will again be separated, I shall meet this with the greatest possible freedom of spirit, because I know, despite our closeness and great affection, you will be equally prepared for any separation. You are young, and independent, and strong, and you will find temporary sadness breached for you by your own freedom of spirit. You will always go ahead, even while welcoming the memories of what I hope is perhaps a uniquely experienced and enriched past. I know now the hurdles of the years that you have passed, and so I know too the hurdles you will pass in the future, and by this knowledge I am freed. And so, we will continue to enjoy our tomorrows, you, and your father and I, each of us prepared in our own way for the future, and each of us supported by the bonds of our united pasts. I have chosen to end my writing on an especially sun-warmed, summer day. The leaves are moving slowly in the beautiful tree outside my window, and the golden morning light throws shifting patterns into my silent room. There will be many happy, sundrenched days ahead, and I will see you tomorrow and each sun-filled tomorrow thereafter. And when there are no more tomorrows we will have shared a splendid bond. And so as I began, with love, I end for now.

From: Jacob Rader Marcus This I Believe © 1991

Sample Ethical Will II

"Remembered with Laughter"

excerpts from The Will and Testament of Sho- lom Aleichern, in a new English translation for Keeping Posted By Maurice Sarnuel

September 19, 1915. New York

... Wherever I should happen to die, let me not be laid to rest among the high and mighty or people of wealth, but let it be among simple Jewish workers, the true people, so that the tombstone which they will erect over my grave may adorn the simple graves about me, and the simple graves shall be an ornament for mine.... ... Let there be no high-flown inscription on the tombstone, only the name Sholom Aleichem on one side and the Jewish inscription on the other. ... Let there be no debates and discussions among my colleagues about perpetuating my name, and let there be no talk about putting up a monument for me in New York, and the like. I shall not be able to lie peacefully in my grave if my colleagues will behave foolishly. The best monument for me would be if my works will be read.... ... At my graveside and thereafter yearly on my yahrzeit, let my only surviving son and my sons-in-law, if they should so will it, say Kaddish after me. And, if such should not be their desire, or it would be against their religious convictions, they can fulfill their memorial obligations simply by coming together with my daughters and my grandchildren and good friends at large and reading out this testament; and they may also choose one of my little stories from among the gayest and read it out in whatever language they best understand, and let my name be remembered by them with laughter rather than not be remembered at all....

Readings and Reflections

The True Friend

A person had three friends. One friend was loved most dearly. The second was also loved. But the third was regarded with the least affection. One day the elders commanded this person to appear before them immediately. The person was greatly alarmed. Had someone falsely accused him? In fear and trembling, the person called upon each of the friends. First, the person turned to the dearest of friends, and was greatly disappointed when this friend found it impossible to go to the elders of the community. Next, the person turned to his second friend: "Will you go with me?" But the latter answered: "I will go with you only as far as the city gates, but I cannot enter with you into the city." In desperation, the person finally appealed to the third friend, the one to whom there was the least amount of devotion. Without hesitation, this neglected friend said: "Certainly I will accompany you, but first I'll go immediately to the city and plead for you with the elders. The first friend is one's wealth which one must leave behind when departing from this world, as it is written: "Riches profit not in the day of reckoning." The second friend is one's relatives, who can only follow a person to the graveside, as it is written: "No person can by any means redeem his fellow person from death." The third, least-considered friend, is the good deeds of a person's life. These can never go away and can even precede you to plead your cause before God, as it is written: "And your righteousness shall go before you."

Adapted from Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer

Our exit from the world, as compared to and contrasted with one's entry into it, is portrayed by Rabbi Levi thus: Of two vessels sailing on the high seas, the ship which has come into port is in the eyes of the wise much more an object of joy than the ship about to leave the harbor. Even thus should we contemplate our departure from this world without sorrow or fear, seeing that at death we have already entered the harbor — the haven or rest in the World-to-Come.

Shemot Rabbah, 48:1

When Rabbi Jochanan finished reading the book of Job he would say: The end of a person's death and the end of a beast is slaughter. Every creature born must die. Blessed is the one who was reared in Torah and who labored in Torah, who pleased one's Creator, who lived with a good name and who departed this world with a good name. Of such a person, Solomon said: "A good name is better than precious oil, and the day of death is better than the day of birth. (Ecclesiastes 8:1)

Talmud, Berachot 17a

In recording King David's death, the Bible states, "And David slept with his father" (I King 2:10). Why does it not state, "And David died"? The Sages answered their own question: "David was survived by a son who followed the good ways of his father' s life, continuing his father's noble deeds. Therefore, it could not be said that David was really dead, for David lived on through the good deeds of his son."

Talmud, Baba Batra 116a

These are the things the fruits of which the individual enjoys in this world, while the stock remains for the World-to-Come: honoring father and mother, the practice of deeds of kindness, timely attendance at the house of study morning and evening, hospitality to travelers, visiting the sick, helping the needy bride, attending the dead to the grave, devotion in prayer, and making peace between neighbors; but the study of Torah is equal to all of them.

Mishnah, Peah 1:1

The future is not like this world. In the future world there is no eating or drinking, no propagation or business or jealousy or hatred or competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence.

Talmud, Berachot 17a

For the love that death cannot sever; for the friendship we shared along life's path; for those gifts of heart and mind which have now become a precious heritage; for all these and more, we are grateful. Now help us, God, not to dwell on sorrow and pain, but to honor our beloved by the quality of our lives. Amen.

--adapted from Gates of the House (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything A time for all things under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die, A time to plant and a time to uproot, A time to kill and a time to heal, A time to break down and a time to build up, A time to cry and a time to laugh, A time to mourn and a time to dance, A time to scatter and a time to gather, A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embraces, A time to seek and a time to lose, A time to keep and a time to cast away, A time to rend and a time to sew, A time to keep silent and a time to speak, A time to love and a time to hate, A time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

The Blessing of Memory

It is hard to sing of oneness when our world is not complete, when those who once brought wholeness to our life have gone, and naught but memory can fill the emptiness their passing leaves behind.

But memory can tell us only what we were, in company with those we loved; it cannot help us find what each of us, alone, must now become. Yet no one is really alone; those who live no more, echo still within our thoughts and words, and what they did is part of what we have become.

We do best homage to our dead when we live our lives most fully, even in the shadow of our loss. For each of our lives is worth the life of the whole world; in each one is the breath of the Ultimate One. In affirming the One, we affirm the worth of each one whose life, now ended, brought us closer to the Source of life, in whose unity no one is alone and every life finds purpose.

Gates of Prayer (Central Conference of American Rabbis)

Our Rabbis taught: Formerly they were wont to convey (victuals) to the house of mourning, the rich in silver and gold baskets and the poor in osier baskets of peeled willow twigs, and the poor felt shamed; they therefore instituted that all should convey(victuals) in osier baskets of peeled willow twigs out of deference to the poor.

Our Rabbis taught: Formerly they were wont to serve drinks in a house of mourning, the rich in white glass vessels and the poor in colored glass, and the poor felt shamed; they instituted therefore that all should serve drinks in colored glass, out of deference to the poor.

Formerly they were wont to uncover the face of the rich and cover the face of the poor, because their faces turned livid in years of drought, and the poor felt shamed; they therefore instituted that everybody's face should be covered out of deference to the poor.

Formerly they were wont to bring out the rich (for burial) on an ornamented bed, and the poor on a plain bier, and the poor felt shamed; they instituted therefore that all should be brought out on a plain bier out of deference to the poor....

Formerly the expense of taking the dead out to one's burial fell harder on one's near of kin than ones death so that dead person's near-of-kin abandoned and fled, until at last Rabban Gamliel came forward and, disregarding his own dignity, came out to his burial in flaxen vestments. Said Rav Papa, And nowadays all the world follow the practice of coming out even in a paltry shroud that costs but a zuz.

Talmud, Moed Katan 27a-b

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains. What is the source of my help? The source of my help is Adonai, Creator of Heaven and earth. Adonai will not let you falter; your Guardian will not slumber. Surely the Guardian of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Adonai is your protector, Adonai is your shelter at your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. Adonai will guard you from all harm; God will preserve your soul. Adonai will guard your going and your coming, now and forevermore.

Psalm 121

1. Hallelujah. Happy are the people that fear Adonai That delight greatly in God's commandments.

2. Their seed shall be mighty upon earth; The generation of the upright shall be blessed.

3. Wealth and riches are in their house; And their merit endures forever.

4. They shine as a light in the darkness for the upright, Gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

5. Well is it with the people that deal graciously and lend, That order their affairs rightfully,

6. For they shall never be moved; The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.

7. They shall not be afraid of evil tidings; Their heart is stedfast, trusting in God.

8. Their hearts are established, they shall not be afraid, Until they gaze upon their adversaries.

9. They have scattered abroad, given to the needy; Their righteousness endures forever. Their horn shall be exalted in honor.

10. The wicked shall see, and be vexed; They shall gnash with their teeth, and melt away; The desire of the wicked shall perish.

Psalm 112

Eshet Chayil -- A Woman of Valor

Proverbs 31

a new version by Susan Grossman © 1984

A good wife / who can find her she is worth far more than rubies she brings good and not harm all the days of her life she girds herself with strength and finds her trades profitable wise counsel is on her tongue and her home never suffers for warmth she stretches her hands to the poor reaches her arms to the needy all her friends praise her her family blesses her she is known at the gates as she sits with the elders dignity, honor are her garb she smiles at the future.

A good man who can find him he is worth far more than rubies all who trust in him never lack for gain he shares the household duties and sets a goodly example he seeks a satisfying job and braces his arms for work he opens his mouth with wisdom he speaks with love and kindness his justice brings him praises he raises the poor, lowers the haughty. These two indeed do worthily true leaders in zion give them their due credit let their works praise them at the gates.

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There are stars whose light reaches the earth only after they themselves have disintegrated and are no more. And there are people whose scintillating memory lights the world after they have passed from it. These lights which shine in the darkest night are those which illumine for us the path...

Hannah Senesh

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A rabbi was passing through a field when he noticed an old man who was planting an acorn.

"Why are you planting that acorn?" he asked "You surely do not expect to live long enough to see it grown into an oak tree."

The man replied, "My grandparents planted seeds so that I might enjoy the shade and the fruit trees. Now I do likewise for my grandchildren and' all those who come after me."

Talmud, Taanit 23a

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