



MAY THE ANGELS CARRY YOU:
Jewish Prayers and Meditations for the Deathbed
by Simcha Paull Raphael,
Albion-Andalus Publishers, Boulder, CO 2016,
and

MAY THE ANGELS CARRY YOU:
*Jewish Songs of Comfort for
Death, Burial and Mourning*
by
Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael, Shechinah.com, 2016.

Reviewed by Rabbi Jack Riemer

Dr. Heschel used to lament that Judaism was the world's least known religion---especially among Jews. And Marvin Fox once told a story that demonstrated this sad truth. When he was a professor at Ohio State, the members of a Jewish sorority came to him for advice. One of their members was gravely ill, and they simply had no idea what prayers or practices they should recite at her bedside. They told him that the only prayers that they could think of came from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* which is a manual created by the Buddhist monks, and they somehow felt that these prayers were not the most appropriate for the sickbed of a Jewish person.

Simcha Paull Raphael's new book and Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael's new album of music will help to fill this spiritual vacuum. And therefore, they are the kind of book and the kind of music that all of us ought to keep handy for the day when we may someday need it.

For instance, it contains a prayer that the family can recite when life support is being removed. This is a moment whose spiritual power for good and for bad should not be underestimated. The decision takes a moment but the scars can remain for a lifetime, if the family is unable to agree on when or whether to pull the cord. Who loved Mama more---the one who insists that it is right to insist on heroic measures or the one who insists that there is a time to let go? And how shall this moment be marked? The prayer that Simcha Raphael provides is moving, clear and gentle. It thanks God for the medicine and for the machinery that has allowed their parent to remain in this world until now. And it asks God to be with the one who is dying and to watch over her soul, and to be with the mourners who need strength and comfort in this difficult hour.

We spend months teaching our children how to become bar or bat mitzvah, but there is no place in the curricula of most of our schools for teaching them how to

prepare for the end of life—as if they will never need to know what resources and what guidance our tradition provides for this sacred moment. This book, for example, provides a text of the traditional *Vidui*—the Last Confessional—which is meant to be said by or for the person who is letting go of life. The prayer is noble in its simplicity and its dignity, and it ought to be available to all those who are mortal—in other words to all of us—and not just hidden away in the Rabbi's Manual. In addition to the traditional text, Simcha Paull Raphael offers us some guidance on how to compose a *Vidui* of our own. He suggests that it should be a moment in which we express gratitude for all that has been good in our lives, that it should be a moment in which we express regret for all the mistakes and the sins that we have committed in our lives, and it should be a moment in which we express our love and our wishes for those whom we will leave behind.

Music can reach levels beyond where words can go, and so Dr. Raphael is fortunate in having a wife who is a gifted composer and singer. Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael has taken the words of the classical prayers for the end of life and set them to music, in melodies that are simple, but powerful and profound.

This book—with its prayers in Hebrew and in English and with the wise and helpful commentary that it contains—and this album which lifts the soul and calms the spirit of the listener—together form a valuable resource that should help those who must walk in the shadow of deep darkness emerge with healing in their hearts.

Rabbi Jack Riemer is the editor of *Jewish Reflections on Death* and the co-editor of *So That Your Values Live On: a Treasury of Ethical Wills*. His essays and reviews appear in many journals of Jewish thought in America and abroad.

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