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DEATH AND DYING

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Introduction

Over the course of millennia Judaism developed an extensive system of rituals designed to meet the needs of the dying and bereaved and their families. While some of these rituals have a textual basis in the Hebrew Bible, most Jewish death practices reached a classical form during the Middle Ages, and then developed further shaped by modernity.

Goses, Vidui and Traditional Deathbed Practices

The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us of the organicity of the human life cycle. Given that we are mortal human beings, “there is a time for being born and a time for dying” (Ecc. 3:2). Jewish tradition recognizes the immediacy of the dying experience and provides specific guidelines for companioning those leaving behind physical embodied life.

According to the Code of Jewish Law, *Shulchan Arukh*—the medieval legalistic guide for Jewish practice—one who is dying is referred to as a *goses*. A *goses* is a person in a state of “active dying”, that is, in a sacred nether realm, between life and death, between this world and the world beyond. Further, the *Shulchan Arukh* asserts “a dying person is to be considered as a living being in all matters” (*Yoreh Deah*, 339). The primary task for those present at the deathbed is to offer complete respect and dignity for one who is dying.

As one approaches death, ritual guidelines are never to leave them alone, even for a moment. Psychologically, one is to be present for a dying person providing compassionate companionship and helping calm fears. Spiritually, traditional understanding is that since the process of the soul separating from the body can be confusing, being present at the death moment helps assist the soul in its departure. To offer comfort as death approaches Judaism prescribes recitation of Psalms. In particular, Psalm 23 is perhaps best known of all the Psalms. Although usually associated with funerals, it is frequently chanted at the deathbed. Additionally Psalm 30, Psalm 121, and Psalm 150 are also appropriate choices, as is Psalm 119, which is an acrostic. It is traditional to choose verses whose opening letters spell out the individual’s Hebrew name.

Another practice at this time is recitation of the *vidui*, the deathbed confessional. There are two different types of *vidui* prayers. One version assumes the person approaching death is conscious enough to recite the prayer for themselves, peacefully preparing for death. The second



version is recited on behalf of one who is dying, within range of their hearing. It is said that for dying patients hearing is the last sense to go; even if in an unconscious coma, people can still hear words of those around them. Central to the *vidui*, is this understanding: “May my death be an atonement for my sins” (*Yoreh Deah* 338). In the contemporary world, this theology of death, that in dying one dies needing atonement from sin, is often problematic. In liberal Jewish communities, newer versions of the *vidui* assert a profoundly different theology: “For all those I may have hurt, I ask forgiveness. Upon all who have hurt me, I bestow forgiveness” (Shapiro 1993, 22).

With the rich resources of the internet, and contemporary liturgical improvisation, today there are numerous versions of these prayers available, spawning the re-emergence of the deathbed *vidui* in Jewish life.

Deathbed Visions

According to Rabbinic tradition, the moment of death itself is said to be a painless departure of the soul. It is described in the Talmud as being like “taking a hair out of milk” (Ber. 8a). Additionally, in mystical texts there are descriptions of deathbed visions that parallel contemporary near-death experiences. For example, the so-called life-review vision is described as follows: “when God desires to take back a person’s spirit, all the days they have lived in this world pass in review” (*Zohar* I, 221b). And further, replicating the stories told of dying individuals seeing deceased loved ones appear, we find in the *Zohar*:

At the hour of a person’s departure from the world, their father or mother and other relatives gather round, and they see them and recognize them, and likewise all with whom they had associated in this world, and they accompany their soul to the place where it is to abide.

Zohar I, 218a

These are but a few of the traditional teachings that demonstrate the inherent Jewish understanding that death is a transition from one realm of being to another, from embodied consciousness to what Nahmanides calls *olam haneshamot*, the world of souls.

Between Death and Burial: *Aninut*

At the moment of death, or when one first hears news of a death, it is traditional to recite the formula “*baruch dayan ha-emet*”, literally “blessed be the true judge”. The theological implication of this is recognition that human beings do not have control over the destiny of life and death; in the face of life’s finality, death is ultimately in the hands of God. Once death has occurred, Judaism sets in place an entirely different ritual framework. The immediate tasks now are to support the bereaved as they begin to cope with death and start preparation for the funeral.

Jewish tradition speaks of the mourner, at this point, as being in a state of *aninut*. Technically, *aninut* is the short period between death and burial. It is a time of raw, hyper-acute grief when mourners are confused, disoriented, in shock, especially when death has been sudden or violent. During *aninut*, mourners are exempt from all religious obligations, *mitzvot*, in order to focus exclusively on funeral preparations. (To clarify: one is exempt from *mitzvot t’aseh*, positive commandments, but *mitzvot lo t’aseh*, the negative commandments, ethical moral prohibitions, remain in place.)

Death is a normal life cycle event, and what transpires at this point for individuals and families occurs within the context of community—at least for those who affiliate with a community. Depending upon a family's communal involvement, a rabbi; Hevra Kaddisha, i.e. Jewish burial society; funeral director; as well as friends and family can all be involved in providing functional and emotional support for bereaved family members.

Preparation for Burial: Hevra Kaddisha

Hevra Kaddisha, literally “Fellowship of the Holy,” is the Jewish burial society, a communal organization within Jewish life responsible for the care, ritual preparation and burial of dead bodies. Depending upon the size and structure of a Jewish community, the Hevra Kaddisha may be affiliated with one individual synagogue; a trans-denominational organization serving the entire community; or employees of a funeral home, particularly in larger urban areas. Traditionally, male Hevra Kaddisha members care for the ritual preparation of men; female Hevra Kaddisha members care for women.

Common to all Hevra Kaddisha practice is a sacred process of guarding, washing, purifying and dressing the body of the deceased—referred to as the *met*—in preparation for burial. The sequence of rituals is carried out at a funeral home, although in pre-modern times, and in some older communities this would be done in a building on the cemetery grounds.

The Hevra Kaddisha ritual processes are as follows: *Shmira*, literally “guarding”, consists of watching over the body of the deceased and reciting Psalms. As a container of the soul, the body of a deceased person is sacred, and never to be left alone. It has to be protected from death until burial, safeguarded from animals, rodents and insects—certainly that was the case before modernity and the creation of refrigeration in funeral homes. A *shomer*, or guard, remains in close proximity to the body, reciting Psalms, preferably in Hebrew, though in the vernacular if necessary. This prayerful vigilance takes place, before, during and after the body is ritually cleansed. Even once the body is placed in a coffin, *shmira* continues until start of the funeral.

Next, is the process known as *rehitza*, washing the *met* to remove any dirt, foreign matter or extraneous substances, such as bandages, medical apparatus, etc. This is followed by a sacred process called *tahara*, literally “purification”, a water ritual consisting of cascading twenty-four quarts of water over the body, in a continuous flow. Together *rehitza*, washing, and *tahara*, purification, function as a way of cleansing the body of earthly defilements, washing away the suffering of a lifetime. These ritual practices are both functional and spiritual. On one hand they provide gentle, compassionate care tending to the lifeless body of a deceased person; on the other hand, they offer conscious comfort for the disembodied soul, as it transitions from this world to the world beyond.

Following this, the *met* is dried and clothed in burial shrouds, white linen garments known as *tachrichim*. Fashioned after the sacred garb worn by the High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple on Yom Kippur, the *tachrichim* are hand-sewn, with no knots—that could hinder the departure of the soul—and no pockets—because whether rich or poor, in death we take no possessions with us. Next a large white sheet is draped inside the casket, traditionally a plain pine box, unadorned and without nails, and the *met* is placed in the coffin and wrapped cocoon-like in the white sheet. A prayer shawl is placed around the *met*—for men in Orthodox communities, and for men and women (who would have worn a prayer shawl in her lifetime) in liberal communities. Next a sachet of earth from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is sprinkled within the casket, with some placed over the heart, eyes and genitals of the *met*. The Jerusalem earth is a

symbol of the ultimate resurrection of the dead which, according to Rabbinic tradition will begin on the Mount of Olives, a symbol of God's ultimate triumph over death.

As these ritual acts are being carried out, members of the Hevra Kaddisha recite ancient liturgies created specifically for preparing a body for burial. The first comprehensive Jewish burial manual was *Maavor Yabok*, by Rabbi Aaron Berechiah of Modena, published in Mantua, Italy in 1626. In the very last prayer of the *tahara* process, members of the Hevra Kaddisha surround the casket and speak directly to the *met*, assuring the soul that everything was performed according to custom, and asking for forgiveness for any indiscretion or errors. In essence these Hevra Kaddisha practices and liturgies are designed to prepare the soul of the deceased to be welcomed into the transcendent realms of the world beyond.

The Jewish Funeral

Jewish funeral rituals have existed as long as Jews have lived and died. In Genesis 23:17 we read how Abraham bought the Cave of Makhpelah in Hebron to bury his wife Sarah; subsequently, he and his descendants were buried there. This inaugural story of Sarah's burial is the archetypal paradigm of Jewish burial, demonstrating the responsibility one holds for respectful burial of the dead.

In traditional terms, this next stage of ritual practice is called *halvayat hamet*, "accompanying the deceased". For the deceased, the Jewish funeral respectfully disposes of the physical body in the earth; and honorably remembers their life and legacy. For surviving family members, the funeral provides opportunity to say goodbye to a loved one, express emotions of grief and loss, and experience compassionate support of family, friends and community.

Traditionally, the Jewish funeral is designed to be very simple. There is no fanfare, flowers, embalming, open casket, or glorification of a dead body. This simplicity, although often eroded in contemporary times, is the traditional way of Jewish burial. On first hearing news of a death, one would rip their clothing across the heart, a cathartic expression of grief. Today a ritual known as *kriah*—rending of the garments, takes place prior to the funeral service. Instead of tearing one's clothing, some mourners choose a variant on the traditional custom, and wear a symbolic black ribbon. As the ribbon is cut one recites "*baruch dayan ha-emet*", "blessed be the true judge". The psychological function of *kriah* is a catharsis of emotions: tearing one's garment expresses an angry outburst at human powerlessness in the encounter with death. In a symbolic sense, the torn ribbon is a visual representation of the torn heart one experiences at the death of a loved one.

Jewish funeral liturgy is intentionally simple. At the funeral home (or in some cases, the synagogue) the officiating clergy recites Psalm 23, and—although there are many variations based upon the denominational orientation—Psalm 16 and Psalm 90. This is followed by the *Adonai Mah Adam* prayer asserting the existential reality of life and death: "A human being is like a momentary passing breeze; a person's days are but a transient shadow; at dawn, life blossoms and renews itself; at dusk it withers and dries up." *El Maleh Rachamim* is then chanted in a dirgeful melody, petitioning God that the deceased "find rest under the wings of the Divine Presence (Shechinah) ... [and] in the heavenly Garden of Eden".

In addition a eulogy, or *hesped* is presented honoring the life of the deceased. Usually delivered by officiating clergy, today it is common for friends or family to also share stories and memories of the deceased. Overall, the eulogy, like the act of *kriah*, facilitates a process of emotional discharge for mourners. And finally the funeral service concludes with mourners saying the Mourners' Kaddish.

Burial Ritual

From the funeral home, mourners are transported to the cemetery. Walking toward the grave escorting the coffin, Psalm 91 is recited. It is traditional to stop seven times along the way, the folk level understanding of this is that it is designed to ward off evil spirits. Additional graveside liturgy includes the *Tz'adduk Ha-Din* prayer, which asserts that God is “The Sheltering Rock; His work is perfect for all His ways are justice.” In essence this prayer is an antidote to the sometimes seeming meaninglessness of death, affirming a divine source of justice in the world.

Next is the pinnacle moment of Jewish burial. After the casket is lowered into the earth, mourners and accompanying family and friends shovel earth into the grave. There is a stark realism as sounds of earth hitting the wooden box echo for all to hear, as the deceased is being returned to the earth—“from dust to dust”. There may be additional Psalms or prayers recited, followed by the Burial Kaddish which begins with the declaration “Magnified and sanctified be the great name of God” and upholds a belief in resurrection, referring to “that world which He is to create anew, and to revive the dead and to raise them to an everlasting life”. In the raw poignancy of death, Jewish burial liturgy affirms a vision of hope and aspiration for total redemption.

A *minyan*, a quorum of ten people, is required for recitation of Kaddish, reminding us that the Jewish funeral is a communal ritual, with friends and family present to support the bereaved and say goodbye to the deceased. Similarly, the collective nature of the burial is most apparent as the graveside service concludes. Walking away from the graveside, immediate family members pass through two parallel rows formed by those present who say: “May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem”. This ritual act indicates to the family: “We are with you in your time of loss, you are not alone in your suffering”.

Jewish funeral rituals serve a definite psychological function assisting the bereaved family in accepting the reality of death; providing a ritual context for beginning the process of mourning; and offering communal support for bereaved family members. Caring for the bereaved is a Jewish communal value. This is central to Jewish understanding, in both death and life.

Cremation: The Non-Traditional Alternative

According to traditional Jewish practice, cremation is prohibited. However, historically there is not a clear-cut prohibition against cremation in the Talmud. In ancient Palestine and Babylonia, the underlying assumption was that cremation was not practiced. Given the desert climate of the Middle East, in-ground and cave burial were the standard operating procedures. And in Mishnaic times, cremation was to be avoided simply because it was an idolatrous Roman practice. Both Talmud (Sanhedrin 46b) and Maimonides (*Sefer HaMitzvot* 231, 536) emphasize the practice of in-ground burial; and in *Shulchan Arukh*, and other classical codes there is no overt condemnation of cremation. The campaign against cremation started when the Reform movement began advocating for the permissibility of cremation in the closing decades of the 19th century. This in turn provoked a vociferous Orthodox backlash, and only then did cremation come to be seen as a denial of the resurrection (*Kol Bo Al Aveilut*, 54ff). This persists to this day.

The doctrine of resurrection of the dead, *tehiyat hametim*, is a central Rabbinic tenet: the belief is that at the end of time, God will intervene in the human realm, the socio-political order will be divinized, there will be a messianic transformation, and all the dead will be brought back to life. If one is cremated, so goes the traditional rationalization, one cannot

participate in the resurrection. Hence the prohibition. However, liberal Jewish practice holds a flexible attitude toward cremation. As early as 1892 the Central Conference of American Rabbis began to permit officiation following cremation. With urban mobility and spiraling costs of burial, today many Jews are choosing to be cremated. This trend will undoubtedly continue to grow in the future.

Shivah: Seven Days of Communal Mourning

Returning from the cemetery, mourners wash their hands outside of the home (usually of the deceased or immediate family member) and upon entering, the seven-day period of mourning—"sitting *shivah*"—begins. During this time, the bereaved suspend worldly activities and devote full attention to remembering and mourning their beloved one. Family members and friends visit the *shivah* house to offer condolences and support.

The institution of *shivah* is very old in Jewish tradition. Earliest mention of a seven-day period of mourning occurs in Genesis where it indicates Joseph observed seven days of mourning after the death of his father Jacob (Gen. 50:10). According to the Talmud, at the time of Noah and the Flood, God "mourned seven days for the destruction of the world" (San. 108b). *Shivah* commences on the day of burial and concludes on the morning of the seventh day. During the Sabbath, there is a temporary cessation in the observance of mourning.

According to Jewish law, *shivah* is observed for parents, a spouse, sibling or child. In the case of an infant of less than thirty days, there is no *shivah* observance, traditionally. However, in recent years there is an acknowledgment of the intensity of grief in the case of infant loss and miscarriage, and people are now creating observing mourning rituals in such cases. The *shivah* begins with a traditional meal for mourners called *seudat havra'ah*, "the meal of consolation". Provided by friends and family this meal traditionally consists of foods which are round, symbolic of the cyclical nature of life. Traditionally this has been lentils and hard-boiled eggs. Although the symbolism is sometimes lost, the purpose in eating these foods is to remind the mourner that life is cyclical and continues even in the face of death.

Throughout the *shivah*, mourners sit on low stools (hence the term "sitting *shivah*"), indicative of their bereaved state. They are also prohibited from wearing leather, bathing, engaging in marital relations and even studying Torah, regarded as a pleasurable activity to be avoided during mourning. In the *shivah* house, it is customary to cover all mirrors, so mourners will avoid looking at themselves, and instead reflect upon the meaning of life and death. Another reason for this practice, according to medieval Jewish understanding, was that the spirit of the departed could remain in the house as an image hidden in the mirror.

Each day during *shivah*, traditional morning, afternoon and evening prayers are recited. During these services mourners recite the Kaddish prayer. For the complete seven-day period a candle flame burns continuously in remembrance of the departed. According to Proverbs 20:27: "The candle of God, is the soul of the person." The glowing candle is seen, symbolically, as a divine guide for the soul, or a remembrance of the soul's divine nature.

Shivah concludes with mourners walking around the block. This serves the function of beginning re-entry into life, after the intensive week of mourning during *shivah*. Interestingly, according to the Zohar it is said that "for seven days the soul goes to and fro from one's house to one's grave, from one's grave to one's house, mourning for the body" (Zohar I, 218b). According to mystical understanding, this suggests that the soul of the deceased remains in proximity to the world of the living in the immediate days following death. Psychologically, walking around the block is a re-emergence into daily life; but spiritually, in a symbolic sense, this ritual act is seen as a way of escorting the soul on its journey.

Shivah is an ancient Jewish ritual designed to give mourners emotional support and time for emotional discharge during this acute phase of mourning. When practiced with dignity and respect as prescribed by Jewish tradition, this ritual has a powerful psychological efficacy in assisting the process of bereavement and healing.

***Shloshim*: Thirty Days of Transition**

Judaism, in its wisdom, prescribes an ongoing and graded process of mourning. The first thirty days after a death, referred to as *shloshim* (meaning thirty), is a transitional period designed to carry one from the initial impact of death and burial toward a gradual reestablishment of the daily rhythms of life.

As with *shivah*, traditionally there are a series of *halakhic* prohibitions, though less restrictive, including no haircutting, shaving, wearing new clothes, getting married, attending parties, listening to music, etc. Traditionally during this time, mourners say the Kaddish daily in synagogue. For those mourning a child, spouse or sibling, according to traditional Jewish practice, thirty days constitutes the full time of mourning. However, in the case of death of a parent, the formal process of mourning continues for one year.

Psychologically, the function of *shloshim* is to act as a transitional phase in which the mourner slowly integrates the reality of death and its impact. In the first days and weeks after a death, mourners can be disoriented, exhausted from the visceral impact of grief, feeling numb, disconnected. Over the course of *shloshim*, mourners slowly resume active life, moving from shock and disorientation toward gradual acceptance of death.

At the end of *shloshim*, it is traditional for mourners to gather friends and family and study in honor of the deceased. The merit of this study is said to have a beneficent effect on the state of the soul. At every juncture along the way, traditional Jewish practices provide moments for connection between the living and the dead.

Kaddish: Historical Background, Traditional and Psychological Perspectives

For those who have lost a parent, the mourning process continues for a full year. Traditionally, the ritual highlight of this period is the daily recitation of the Kaddish prayer. A mourner “says Kaddish” for eleven months as a way of remembering, honoring and memorializing the deceased. The word “kaddish” is derived from a Hebrew root, *l’kadesh*—“to make holy”. An ancient Aramaic prayer dating from Geonic times, c. 7th century C.E. Kaddish was recited at the conclusion of Talmudic study in ancient Babylonia. Later this prayer was integrated into synagogue liturgy. The earliest reference to Kaddish as a memorial prayer was made in 13th-century Rhineland by Rabbi Isaac ben Moses of Vienna (c. 1180–1250) in a book *Or Zarua* (Shabbat, 50) (Wieseltier 1988, 46ff.). Following the devastation of Jewish life after the First (1096–1099) and Second (1147–1149) Crusades, saying Kaddish emerged as way for bereaved orphans to honor their deceased parents.

By the late 16th century, we find in Rabbi Moses Isserles’ gloss to the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Yoreh Deah* 376:4) that recitation of Mourner’s Kaddish had become accepted practice in both Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities.

Recitation of Kaddish is a public act, said during morning and evening prayer services in the presence of a minyan, or quorum of ten worshippers. Originally, mourners recited Kaddish for an entire year. However, since the maximum length of time in Gehenna, the postmortem realm of purgation, is said to be twelve months, in the mid-16th century Rabbi Moshe Isserles limited recitation of Kaddish to eleven months (*Yoreh Deah*, 376.4 *Rema*). Out of filial respect,

one would not assume one's parent had merited maximum punishment in Gehenna. Although the process of mourning continues until the end of the first year, a mourner completes saying Kaddish thirty days before the first anniversary of the death.

Besides being a liturgical prayer, Kaddish is a process for healing grief. Publicly reciting Kaddish for eleven months is the method Judaism prescribes for recovery from loss and bereavement. And since the act of saying Kaddish is a communal one, it also forces mourners to interact with other people in the synagogue environment. This serves an important function, breaking the social isolation of mourning. Saying Kaddish also helps a mourner remember the deceased, appreciating the legacy that person left behind. Since many people are not necessarily involved in organized religious life, it is helpful to think of Kaddish as *both* a specific ritual act one performs in synagogue as well an internal process of working through the nature of one's relationship with the person who has died.

Yahrzeit: Traditional Perspectives

Yahrzeit is the traditional term for the anniversary of a person's death. Derived from a Yiddish word meaning "year's time", *Yahrzeit* is a time for commemorating the death of a family member; for remembering their life and legacy; and for honoring their memory through a number of specifically prescribed Jewish rituals. *Yahrzeit* is observed on the anniversary date of a person's death, according to the Hebrew calendar. If the exact date of death is unknown, a person may choose an approximate date and observe that annually as the time of *Yahrzeit*. In Sephardic tradition, observance of the anniversary of a death is called *Yom Hillula*.

The custom of observing the anniversary of a death is an ancient one. The first reference to a *Yahrzeit* is found in the Book of Judges: "And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Yiftach the Gileadite, four days in a year" (Judges 11:40). In Talmudic times, *Yahrzeit* was observed regularly; individuals would fast upon the anniversary of a parent's death.

Yahrzeit is observed through a very few simple customs. The most common observance associated with *Yahrzeit* is the lighting of a memorial candle, which burns for a twenty-four-hour period. Like the *shivah* candle, the *Yahrzeit* lamp is linked to the passage of Proverbs 20:27 "A person's spirit is the lamp of the Lord".

Traditionally, there is no formal prayer for kindling the *Yahrzeit* lamp. However, it is common to offer personal prayers on behalf of the departed, and to silently connect with one's own private thoughts and feelings about the person whose *Yahrzeit* is being commemorated. It is also traditional to attend synagogue services and recite a Kaddish in honor of one's *Yahrzeit*.

Another traditional custom some practice is fasting on the *Yahrzeit* for one's parents, although today this is not a widely followed custom. Instead, people contribute to charity, do charitable deeds, or sponsor a synagogue Kiddush in honor of the deceased. It is also a traditional practice to spend some time in study specifically to honor a departed one.

Psychologically, *Yahrzeit* provides a time for the living to remember the dead and the legacy they left behind. This is especially important as time passes on and the memory of a person fades. By observing *Yahrzeit* people are able to reconnect with feelings and memories about the deceased, and to note the passing of the cycles of time.

Yizkor: Traditional Perspectives

Yizkor is a Hebrew word which means "remembrance". It refers to memorial services held four times each year in honor of those who have died. Traditionally *Yizkor* prayers are offered during

morning synagogue services on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, and the last days of Passover and Shavuot.

The practice of remembering the dead was an entirely new liturgical innovation developed progressively in the Middle Ages. Given the cultural trauma of major anti-Jewish outbreaks—first during the Crusades and later at the time of the Black Death—a need arose to memorialize and honor deceased martyrs (I. Marcus 2002, 463). Over time the Yizkor prayer services evolved and emerged as a “communal family liturgical memorial”, in which all deceased family members were honored (Freehof 1965, 185). During the 16th–18th centuries, days for remembering the dead became established on the liturgical calendar: first Yom Kippur (*Tanhuma*, on Deut. 3:21) and then, additionally, only in the 1800s, at the time of the three pilgrimage festivals.

It is customary to recite *Yizkor* for a deceased parent, child, sibling or spouse. It has also become common practice to recite *Yizkor* prayers on behalf of the six million Jewish martyrs of the Holocaust. While the general practice is to recite *Yizkor* in a synagogue, it is not uncommon for a person to recite private *Yizkor* prayers in one’s home. In addition to reciting prayers on *Yizkor*, there are two other specific customs associated with *Yizkor*. As with *Yahrzeit*, it is common at the time of *Yizkor* to contribute to *tzedakah* in memory of the departed, and to kindle a memorial lamp on the sundown of the festival when *Yizkor* is recited.

Psychologically, *Yizkor* provides a special and sacred time to remember and honor those who have died. During the regular ongoing cycle of life, it is easy to be pre-occupied with the demands of daily living and often difficult to take the time to remember people who once were part of our life. *Yizkor* is a time for the remembrance of souls. It offers opportunity to connect with our memories about one who has died, and to reflect on their life and their legacy.

Through the saying of the *Yizkor*, the spiritual bond between the living and the soul of the departed is developed and strengthened. It is this spiritual bond which links the past to the present and allows us to prepare for the future with hope and with a sense of feeling connected to those whom we have known and loved.

From deathbed through to burial, from *shivah* through to the cyclical remembrance of loved ones at *Yizkor*, Judaism provides ritual forms that offer comfort and help us find meaning and communal connection in the face of the fragility of life. When practiced with an awareness of the inherent psychological and spiritual wisdom of Jewish death traditions, these practices help individuals and families navigate the vicissitudes and changes of the cycles of life and death.

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