

Text Immersion Project

Bavli Moed Katan Chapter 3, Gittin Chapter 5, Brachot Chapter 9

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Teaching Moed Katan Chapter 3

All of us at some point in our lives experience the death of a loved one and the process of mourning. In the third chapter of Moed Katan, the rabbis of the Talmud discuss many of the Jewish mourning and burial practices and their origins. As part of the text immersion project, I have created five lesson plans to teach a selection of these texts. The lessons are designed for an adult audience.

It is expected that in the actual discussions, learners will mention their prior experiences with death and mourning. They may not have observed all of the practices included in these lesson plans or consciously chose not to practice them. Although this class is designed to expose the learners to these practices, the teacher will need to be sensitive to the prior experiences of the learners and not expect that all liberal Jews follow the burial and mourning practices outlined in Moed Katan. I have included sample answers for most of the discussion questions, which are based on the texts included in these lessons. It is expected that learners will approach these texts from their own life experience and understanding of Judaism, which sometimes may differ from the perspectives of the rabbis of the Talmud.

Session #1

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the learners to Rabbinic Literature and to the laws of mourning.

Objectives (At the end of this lesson, students will be able to):

- Explain the relationship between the Torah and Rabbinic Literature.
- Analyze the similarities and differences between different rabbis' opinions about whom one is obligated to mourn for.
- Identify the members of one's family that one is obligated to mourn for.

Learning Experiences:

Introductions

- Ask each student to share their name and something interesting about themselves and why they chose to come to this class.
- Ask students to share what they already know about Jewish burial and mourning practices and what questions they have and what are they hoping to get out of the class.
- Introduce topics that are to be discussed during the 5 sessions: the relatives one is obligated to mourn for, the time periods for mourning (*shiva*, *shloshim*, *shana*), mourning restrictions (shaving, bathing, work...), mourning rituals (*kriah*) what to do in a *shiva* home/greeting a mourner, is there a limit to mourning?

Introduction to Talmud

- Explain that many of the texts we will be studying come from the Babylonian Talmud. Explain the relationship between the Bible, the Mishna and Gemara. Show a page of each and explain each section. Show a page from Vilna, Steinsaltz and Artscroll.
- Explain that often the rabbis are very concerned with details and categories. We will see this throughout the texts we will study.

- Introduce the tractate *Moed Katan* and explain the relationship between the name of the tractate and the laws of mourning.

Text Study

- We will begin learning about mourning practices by looking at whom we are obligated to mourn for. First we will look at a Biblical passage and then see what the rabbis do with this passage. A little background information for the text we are about to read: During Temple times, one needed to be ritually pure before entering the Temple. One of the ways people became impure was through coming into contact with a dead body. A non-priest came into contact with a dead body when walking by a grave or attending a funeral. Then they would have to go through a ritual to purify themselves. Since priests were responsible for working in the Temple, usually they were not permitted to bring impurity upon themselves by being in contact with a dead body.
- Direct students to open their Plaut Torah Commentary to page 819 and ask someone to read Leviticus 21:1-4.
 - Whom must a priest bury? *Father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister*
 - Why might the text be distinguishing between a married and an un-married sister? *Once a sister is married, she is no longer considered a close relative. She is now under the auspices of her husband.*
 - Who seems to be missing from this list? *Wife*
 - Why do you think the Bible doesn't include this relative?
 - Since priests were allowed to participate in the burial for these relatives, even though would become ritually impure, what does this say about the obligation to bury a relative?
- Direct students to look at the Talmud text sheet. Explain that we will now explore how the rabbis interpreted the Leviticus text. Ask a volunteer to read the first paragraph.
 - How is this text different than what we read in Leviticus? *Leviticus text referred only to priests, the rabbis extrapolate the obligation for mourning for non-priests*
 - How is the rabbis' list different from the list in Leviticus? *It includes the wife. It distinguishes between paternal and maternal siblings. It is interesting to note that the rabbis assume that Leviticus distinguishes between paternal and*

maternal relatives of the priests (the 1st statement of the rabbis). However, they expand the list and broaden the rules for non-priests (the 2nd statement of the rabbis).

- Why do you think the rabbis' adapted the list from Leviticus? *The rabbis are more concerned about familial relationships. The rabbis understand that Leviticus is very concerned with maintain priests' purity so that they can serve in the Temple but the rabbis are writing in a time when the Temple does not exist and there is no way to maintain ritual purity because the red heifer does not exist.*
- Who might you add to this list?
- Direct students to read the 2nd paragraph. Read the 1st sentence.
 - What are the rabbis doing? *Expanding the list for whom one is to mourn.*
 - Who might be considered a secondary relative? *Rashi: Grandfather, grandson, nephew from brother or sister.*
 - Read next sentence. Explain that Rabbi Shimon son of Elezar limits to grandfather and grandson.
 - Read 3rd sentence. Who might these relatives be? *In-laws*
 - Ask students to share if they ever mourned for their secondary relatives.
- Direct students to read the 3rd paragraph
 - What seems to be the difference between the rabbis quoted above? *Between whether the non-mourner is with the mourner in their home or is not.*
 - What might be a reason Rav and Rav Huna obligate a person to mourn while they are in the presence of a relative that is mourning?
 - Ask students to describe times they were with a mourner in their home. How did it feel to be with the mourner even though you were not mourning? Did you take on any mourning practices? If so, what led you to do this?
 - Ask students to describe times they were not in the presence of a relative who was mourning. How did they feel not being with the relative? Did you take on any mourning practices? If so, what led you to do this?
- Direct students to read the 4th paragraph.

- What seems to be bothering Rav Huna? *That the son of Mar Ukva was going to mourn for his brother-in-law and Rav Huna does not include "brother-in-law" in the category for whom one is obligated to mourn.*
- How does Rav Huna's opinion in this paragraph compare to the opinions of the sages quoted above? (make a chart on the board of all the opinions)
 - Rabbis 1, which is their interpretation of the Leviticus text – spouse, parents, paternal brother, paternal sister, son, daughter
 - Rabbis 2 – plus maternal brother, maternal sister (whether married or not)
 - Rabbi Akiva – plus one's secondary relatives
 - Rabbi Shimon son of Elazar – limits secondary relatives to son's son and father's father
 - Sages – limits secondary relatives to mourning along with anyone one is obligated to mourn for.
 - Rav and Rav Huna – only mourn for secondary relatives when in the presence of their immediate relatives
 - Rav Huna – limits mourning for wife's relatives to mother-in-law and father-in-law
 - Ask students for possible rationales for the various opinions.
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of each opinion?
 - Which opinion would you follow?

Activity

- Distribute paper and writing utensils. Ask students to map out their primary and secondary relatives. Students should identify which relatives they would be obligated to mourn for according to all of the opinions. Naturally, the students will have relatives on the map who are deceased. They may indicate on the map if/how they mourned for that individual. When they are finished, students will share who they included on their maps and how their map is similar or different from the opinions of the rabbis studied in the texts.

Moed Katan 20b

The Rabbis taught: All those relatives about whom it is stated in the passage regarding priests - that a priest must become impure for them – a mourner is obligated to mourn for them. These are they: his wife, his father, his mother, his [paternal] brother, his [paternal virgin sister], his son and his daughter. The rabbis added to them: his maternal brother and maternal virgin sister, and his married sister, either paternal or maternal.

Just as he mourns for these relatives, so does he mourn for their secondary relatives; these are the words of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Shimon the son of Elazar says, "He only mourns for his son's son and his father's father." But the sages say, "He mourns along with any relative for whom he would himself mourn."

It seems that the view of the sages is the same as Rabbi Akiva's? The difference between them is whether or not he is with him [the immediate relative who is mourning] at home. As Rav said to Chiya, his son, and so Rav Huna said to Rabbah, his son, "You must observe mourning in her presence, but you do not need to observe mourning when not in her presence."

The son of Mar Ukva's father-in-law died. He thought to sit *shivah* for him for seven days and to observe *shloshim* for thirty days. Rav Huna went into visit him and he found him observing the mourning rituals. He said to him: "You want to eat a mourner's meal?" They did not say [that one mourns for one's wife's relatives] out of respect for one's wife, rather for his father-in-law or his mother-in-law.

Obligation to Mourn

תנו רבנן: כל האמור בפרשת כהנים, שכהן מיטמא להן - אבל מתאבל עליהן, ואלו הן: אשתו, אביו, ואמו, אחיו, ואחותו, בנו, ובתו. הוסיפו עליהן אחיו ואחותו הבתולה מאמו, ואחותו נשואה בין מאביו בין מאמו.

וכשם שמתאבל עליהם - כך מתאבל על שניים שלהם, דברי רבי עקיבא. רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: אינו מתאבל אלא על בן בנו ועל אבי אביו. וחכמים אומרים: כל שמתאבל עליו - מתאבל עמו.

חכמים היינו תנא קמא - איכא בינייהו עמו בבית. כי הא דאמר ליה רב לחייא בריה, וכן אמר ליה רב הונא לרבה בריה: באפה - נהוג אבילותא, בלא אפה - לא תינהוג אבילותא.

מר עוקבא שכיב ליה בר חמוה, סבר למיתב עליה שבעה ושלשים. על רב הונא לגביה, אשכחיה. אמר ליה: צודנייתא בעית למיכל? לא אמרו לכבוד אשתו אלא חמיו וחמותו.

Session #2

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce learners to the customs associated with learning of the death of a relative and the soon-to-be mourner's responsibilities. Also, the learner will be exposed to prohibitions of mourning and the custom of *keriah*.

Objectives (At the end of this lesson, students will be able to):

- Explain the origin of the custom of *keriah*.
- Compare and contrast the prohibitions of mourning.
- Create a new ritual to respond to hearing about a relative's death.

Learning Experiences:

Introduction

- Ask students to share times when they have heard about a death in the family. How did the members of the family initially respond? What actions were undertaken? Indicate that this lesson will begin with a text discussing one's responsibilities when there is a deceased relative.

Text Study

- Read the first text.
 - When someone dies, what is the living relatives' obligation? *Make burial preparations*
 - What might be some challenges in fulfilling this obligation? *Not all of the relatives are around – might have to delay the funeral, don't know the deceased wishes, Shabbat or Jewish Festivals*
 - What do the rabbis seem to be worried about? What are the tensions the rabbis seem to be dealing with? *The responsibility of the deceased relative' to bury and taking care of themselves, keeping a separation between the deceased and the living, priority of preparing the deceased for burial vs. observing mitzvot, separating weekdays from Shabbat.*
 - How do the rabbis navigate these challenges and tensions? *Give multiple options depending on the circumstances, release the living relative from positive*

commandments in order to enable them to make burial arrangements, since burial is not practiced on Shabbat – the living relative is obligated in positive commandments

- Has anyone experienced a relative dying in their home? Please describe the experience and what you did when the relative died.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the rabbis exempting the living relative from positive commandments, except on Shabbat? *Allows the living relative to arrange for burial, allows the living relative not to think about theology and God's role in the death, on the other hand – if the living relative has made all the arrangements and has to wait for the burial, they may need something to do to occupy themselves. It may also be difficult for the living relative to fulfill the positive commandments on Shabbat while they still may be in shock after learning about the death.*
- Explain that the 1st period of mourning is called *aninut* and it refers to the period from the death until the funeral. At this time the living relative is not considered a mourner and does not take on the mourning prohibitions. Their number 1 responsibility is to arrange for the burial of the deceased. Therefore they are released from observing the positive *mitzvot*. However, on Shabbat, they are obligated to observe the positive *mitzvot* since burial cannot take place.
- Read the 2nd text.
 - What do these verses teach us about burial? *That one is obligated to bury the deceased on the same day. Although these verses are only referring to someone who is put to death by a court sentence, this requirement is extended to all deceased. Therefore, in Judaism, the goal is to bury the deceased as soon as possible.*
- Read the 3rd text.
 - How do Reuben and Jacob respond when they “learn” about Joseph’s death? *Tear their clothing*

- How is tearing a suitable response to hearing about the death of a loved one? *It is a physical act, destroying something tangible reflects the pain that one feels at this moment*
 - What are some other physical ways that people respond when they hear about the death of a loved one? *Crying, screaming, writing in a journal, fall on the floor*
 - Explain that Reuben and Jacob's response to Joseph's death is the origin of *keriah* – tearing one's clothing upon hearing of a death of a relative and that you will explore this custom further in a little bit.
- Read the 4th text.
 - Explain that a baraita is a source from the same time period as the Mishna but it was not codified into the Mishna. Often they are quoted by the rabbis in order to support another opinion or to raise an objection.
 - How would you categorize the list of activities one is not to do during the period of mourning? *Private sphere vs. public sphere, attending to one's body, attending to one's mind, personal needs vs. communal needs*
 - Which of these prohibitions surprise you and why? Which do not surprise you and why?
 - When you have previously mourned, which of these prohibitions did you observe? Which did you not? How come?
 - Why might the rabbis have made an exception for teachers who are needed by the community to lecture?
 - Are there any prohibitions that you would take away? Any that you would add? Please explain.
 - Read the 5th text.
 - What seem to be the differences between how one mourns for a parent versus a different relative? Why might the rabbis make a distinction between parents and other relatives? *At the time of the Talmud, parents played an integral part in one's life, they also gave birth to the child, they often supported the child even after marriage. Perhaps the rabbis also considered the strong emotional tie that*

exists often between parents and children. In addition, people have only one father and mother, whereas it is possible to have multiple siblings, children, spouses.

- Read the 6th text.
 - According to Shmuel, when does one rent their garments regarding a death? *At the time of intense grief*
 - When might that be? *Upon hearing the news of the death - immediately*
 - When do we tear a “garment” today? *At the funeral - tear a ribbon*
 - What might account for the difference between Shmuel’s opinion and what we do today? *Many adults do not feel comfortable walking around in torn garments, people are not aware of the tradition. It is important to acknowledge that some Jews still follow this custom and tear their own clothes upon hearing of the death of a relative. However, most liberal Jews tear a ribbon at the funeral.*
 - How is the story of Rav’s death a challenge to Shmuel? *He rent 12 garments, meaning that he rent his garments 12 days in a row (one on each day), how could each one be at the time of intense grief?*
 - How might this story help us today? *Even though it is shocking to hear about the death of a relative, often the funeral is a time when people feel intense grief. Since Shmuel rent his garments at other times, perhaps we can follow a similar custom.*

Activity

- Today, most non-Orthodox Jews do not practice tearing our clothes when we hear about the death of our relative for the first time. It does not seem to be a custom liberal Jews are comfortable with, although this custom is practiced by some Jews. In small groups, students will discuss other physical responses people can perform when hearing about the death of their loved one. Groups should share their created rituals with each other and discuss how they can be carried out.

Moed Katan 23b

One, whose deceased lies before him, should eat in another house. If he does not have another house - he should eat at a friend's house. If he does not have a friend's house - he should make for himself a separation of ten *tefachim* (~40 inches) high. If he has nothing with which to make the separation - he turns his face away and eats. And he does not eat while reclining, and he does not eat meat, and he does not drink wine, and he does not recite a blessing before the meal, and he does not recite the blessing after the meal and others do not recite the blessing on his behalf and he is not included in the special invitation to begin the blessing after the meal (*zimun*). And he is exempt from the recitation of the Shema and from prayer and from putting on tefillin and from all the commandments stated in the Torah. But on Shabbat, he may recline while eating, he may eat meat, he may drink wine, he may say the blessing before a meal, he may say the blessing after the meal, and others may recite the blessing on his behalf, he may be included in the special invitation to begin the blessing after the meal (*zimun*), he is obligated in the recitation of the Shema, prayer, tefillin and all of the commandments stated in the Torah.

Responsibilities before the Burial

מי שמתו מוטל לפניו - אוכל בבית אחר, אין לו בית אחר - אוכל בבית חברו, אין לו בית חברו - עושה לו מחיצה עשרה טפחים, אין לו דבר לעשות מחיצה - מחזיר פניו ואוכל. ואינו מיסב ואוכל, ואינו אוכל בשר, ואינו שותה יין, ואין מברך, ואין מזמן, ואין מברכין עליו, ואין מזמנין עליו, ופטור מקריאת שמע, ומן התפלה, ומן התפילין, ומכל מצות האמורות בתורה. ובשבת - מיסב ואוכל, ואוכל בשר, ושותה יין, ומברך, ומזמן, ומברכין ומזמנין עליו, וחייב בקריאת שמע ובתפילה ובתפילין ובכל מצות האמורות בתורה.

Deuteronomy 21:22 - 23

If a man is guilty of a capital offense and is put to death, and you impale him on a stake, you must not let his corpse remain on the stake overnight, but must bury him the same day.

Genesis 37:29 - 34

When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes. Returning to his brothers, he said, "The boy is gone! Now, what am I to do?" Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered goat, and dipped the tunic in the blood. They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?" He recognized it and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins and observed mourning for his son many days.

Moed Katan 21a

The Rabbis taught in a baraita: These are the things forbidden to a mourner: work, bathing, anointing, sexual relations, wearing shoes. And it is forbidden to study the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, the Mishnah, Midrash, halachot, Talmud and Aggadah. But if the public needs him to lecture, he should not refrain from doing so. It happened that the son of R. Yose died in Tzipori and he entered the house of study and lectured for the entire day.

Timing of Burial

וכִי־יִהְיֶה בְּאִישׁ חֲטָא מִשְׁפָּט־מוֹת וְהוּמָת וְתָלִית אֹתוֹ עַל־עֵץ: כג ל אֶתְּלִין גְּבֻלָּתוֹ עַל־הָעֵץ כִּי־קָבוּר תִּקְבְּרֶנּוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

Tearing

וַיָּשֶׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל־הַבּוֹר וַהֲגִיד אֶינִי־יוֹסֵף בְּבוֹר וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו: וַיָּשֶׁב אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִילָד אֵינָנו וְאֲנִי אֵנָּה אֲנִי־בָא: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כֶּתֶן יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת־הַכֶּתֶן בַּדָּם: וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־כֶּתֶן הַפָּסִים וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מָצָאנוּ הַכְּרִנָּא הַכֶּתֶן בְּגָד בִּנְךָ הוּא אִם־לֹא: וַיִּכְרְה וַיֹּאמֶר כֶּתֶן בְּנִי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתָהּ טָרֵף טָרֵף יוֹסֵף: וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שָׂמֶל תִּיּוֹ וַיִּשֹׁם שָׂק בְּמַתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־בָּנוּ יָמִים רַבִּים:

Mourning Prohibitions

חנו רבנו, אלו דברים שאבל אסור בהן: אסור במלאכה, וברחיצה, ובסיכה, ובתשמיש המטה, ובנעילת הסנדל, ואסור לקרות בתורה ובנביאים ובכתובים, ולשנות במשנה, במדרש ובהלכות ובתלמוד ובאגדות. ואם היו רבים צריכין לו - אינו נמנע. ומעשה ומת בנו של רבי יוסי בציפורי, ונכנס לבית המדרש ודרש כל היום כולו.

Moed Katan 22a-b

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother), if one expedites taking the bier to the burial site - this is praiseworthy; for one's father or mother – this is improper. But if it was Friday or the eve of a festival – this is praiseworthy, since he is only doing this for the honor of his father and mother.

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) - if he wishes he restricts his business activity, and if he wishes he does not restrict; for his father or mother - he must restrict.

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) - if he wishes he bares his shoulder, and if he wishes he does not bare; for one's father and mother - he must bare....

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) - one may cut his hair after thirty days; but for one's father or mother - until his friends reproach him.

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) – one may enter a house of celebration after thirty days; for one's father and mother – until after 12 months.

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) – one rends his garment a handbreath; for one's father and mother – until he exposes his heart. R. Abahu said: what is the scriptural proof? “And David took hold of his garment and rent them” (II Samuel 1:11). And “taking hold” is not less than a handbreath.

For all deceased relatives (other than one's father or mother) – even if one is wearing ten shirts, he rends the outer one; for one's father and mother – one rends all of them, but his kerchief is not necessary, both a man and a woman. R. Shimon son of Elazar says: a woman rends the inner garment and turns it to her back, and then she rends the outer one.

Other Relatives vs. Parents

על כל המתים כולן, מדחה מטתו -
הרי זה משובח, על אביו ועל אמו -
הרי זה מגונה. היה ערב שבת, או
ערב יום טוב - הרי זה משובח,
שאינו עושה אלא לכבוד אביו
ואמו.

על כל המתים כולן, רצה ממעט
בעסקו, רצה אינו ממעט, על אביו
ועל אמו - ממעט.

על כל המתים כולן, רצה - חולץ,
רצה - אינו חולץ. על אביו ועל אמו
- חולץ.

על כל המתים כולן מסתפר לאחר
שלשים יום, על אביו ועל אמו - עד
שיגערו בו חבריו.

על כל המתים כולן - נכנס לבית
השמחה לאחר שלשים יום, על
אביו ועל אמו - לאחר שנים עשר
חדש.

על כל המתים כולן - קורע טפח,
על אביו ועל אמו - עד שיגלה את
לבו. אמר רבי אבהו: מאי קרא -
(שמואל ב' א') ויחזק דוד בבגדיו
ויקרעם ואין אחיזה פחות מטפח.

על כל המתים כולן, אפילו לבוש
עשרה חלוקין - אינו קורע אלא
עליון. על אביו ועל אמו - קורע את
כולן, ואפיקרסותו אינה מעכבת,
אחד האיש ואחד אשה. רבי שמעון
בן אלעזר אומר: האשה קורעת את
התחתון, ומחזירתו לאחוריה,
וחוזרת וקורעת את העליון.

Moed Katan 24a

Shmuel said: any rent that is not made at the time of intense grief is not a proper rent....

Any rent that is not made at the time of intense grief is not a rent? But when they said to Shmuel, "Rav died," he rent over him twelve garments and said, "Away has gone the man of whom I was afraid!" They told R. Yohanan that R. Chaninah died, he rent over him thirteen robes of fine silk and said, "Away has gone the man of whom I was afraid!"

Rending over the death of rabbis is different, for since their teachings are constantly mentioned, it is always like the time of intense grief.

Tearing and Teachers

דאמר שמואל: כל קרע שאינו בשעת חימום - אינו קרע.

כל קרע שאינו בשעת חימום אינו קרע? והא אמרו ליה לשמואל: נח נפשיה דרב. קרע עליה תריסר מני, אמר: אזל גברא דהוה מסתפינא מיניה. אמרו ליה לרבי יוחנן: נח נפשיה דרבי חנינא. קרע עליה תליסר אצטלי מלתא, אמר: אזל גברא דהוה מסתפינא מיניה.

שאני רבנן, דכיון דכל שעתא מדכרי שמעתייהו - כשעת חימום דמי.

Session #3

The goal of this lesson is to introduce the learner to the sources for observing *shivah* and *shloshim*. The sources will also discuss the role of a visitor to the *shivah* house and the response when someone sees an acquaintance who was a mourner after the period of *shloshim*.

Objectives (At the end of this lesson, students will be able to):

- Name the 3 time periods of mourning and explain how they are different (aside from the length).
- Provide at least 2 examples of how the rabbis studied in the text navigate the tensions surrounding mourning.
- Create a document that will educate others about how one should and should not interact with mourners.

Learning Experiences:

Introduction

- Ask students what they know about the time periods of mourning. Explain that today they will explore the origins of these customs.

Text Study

- Read the 1st text.
 - How do the rabbis derive the length of the mourning period known as *shivah*?
They found a verse from Amos that refers to Festivals and mourning, therefore they deduce that since Festivals (i.e. Sukkot and Pesach) last for 7 days, so too does mourning.
 - Do you find this proof convincing? Why or why not?
 - How many of you have observed, in the past, 7 full days of initial mourning? How did it feel to hold *minyan*/have people over/observe the mourning rituals for 7 full days?
 - If you did not observe 7 full days, how many did you observe? How did you arrive at this number? How was that experience for you?
 - What are the benefits and challenges of observing 7 full days of *shivah*?
- Read the 2nd text.

- What tensions do the rabbis seem to address? *Observing mourning for one's relative vs. the need to support oneself and one's family, observing mourning for one's relative vs. comforting other mourners*
- What seems to be the minimum requirement for observing shivah? *Three days, since one is allowed to return to work, although only in the home. Point out that this is why many Reform rabbis encourage mourners to observe at least three days of shivah.*
- If you needed to convince someone to observe shivah, what might you say?
- Read the 3rd text.
 - What is Rabbi Yochanan's advice about visiting a shivah house? *Do not start the conversation with the mourner; let him or her begin the conversation.*
 - How is Rabbi Yochanan's advice beneficial? *It helps people not to say something insensitive to the mourner, can alleviate anxiety on the part of the visitor so that they don't have to think of something to say*
 - How does Rabbi Yochanan's advice help the mourner? *It can prevent the mourner from having to make "small talk", it allows the mourner to direct the conversation or to avoid a conversation*
 - Has anyone experienced an "inappropriate" conversation with the mourner at a shivah house? Please share. Emphasize the importance of Rabbi Yochanan's advice.
- Read the 4th text.
 - How is this piece of Rabbi Yochanan's advice different from the previous one? *Before he spoke about what to do at the beginning of the visit, now he is referring to the end of the conversation*
 - What might be Rabbi Yochanan's rationale for this piece of advice? *The role of the visitor is to comfort the mourner, once the mourner is comforted, the visitor has fulfilled their obligation. The visitors may tire out the mourner, this is a way for the mourner to prevent this from happening. This also relieves the visitor from feeling like he or she has to entertain the mourner.*
 - How else might the mourner indicate that the visitor is permitted/should leave?
 - Has anyone ever experienced a visitor who has "overstayed their welcome" in a shivah home? How did you handle the situation?

- Read the 5th text.
 - How do the rabbis explain the length of the mourning period known as *shloshim*? 1) *Through a gezeirah shavah- if the same word or phrase appears in 2 places in the Torah, and a certain law is explicitly stated in one of these places, we may infer on the basis of “verbal analogy” that the same law must apply in the other case as well. Since nazirut lasts for 30 days, so must the prohibition of not cutting hair for a mourner.* 2) *Gematria – playing with the numerical value of the verse.*
 - Are either of these proofs convincing?
 - Interestingly, there might be an easier proof for the rabbis for *shloshim*. The Torah records that a 30 day mourning period was observed after the death of Aaron and Moses. However, maybe since these were extraordinary members of the community, the rabbis did not want to use them as proof texts, just as they don’t like to use David and Job as examples of certain mourning rituals, since they are “different.”
- Read the 6th text.
 - What is the difference between offering condolences and greeting someone? *Condolences – expressing your sympathies; greeting – asking how someone is doing, small-talk*
 - What might the rabbis be worried about? *That people do not know when to stop offering condolences or when not to greet mourners, mourners having to socialize with people when they are not ready.*
 - What is bothering Rabbi Meir? *People will offer condolences after the mourner is already finished the appropriate period of mourning and that they are not thinking of the mourner but about themselves.*
 - Are the opinions of the Baraita and Rabbi Meir applicable to today? Is the time period for condolences seem appropriate for how people mourn today? Do they need to be extended? Shortened?
 - What kind of advice would you add to Rabbi Meir’s?
- Read the 7th text.
 - What does it mean the Festivals to cancel *shivah* or *shloshim*? *Means that the mourning period ends and the mourning prohibitions end as well.*

- What does it mean for the restrictions to be cancelled but for the days not to be cancelled? *You are still in the period of shloshim but are not obligated to observe the mourning prohibitions.*
- How is Rav Sheshet's opinion different from Rav and Rav Huna? *According to Rav and Rav Huna, the mourning restrictions are cancelled by the Festival. According to Rav Sheshet, the mourning prohibitions are only cancelled if the mourner took advantage of the upcoming Festival and shaved on the eve of the Festival. If he shaves on the eve of the Festival, then he does not observe the mourning prohibitions after the festival. Shloshim ends for him.*
- How might this opinion of the Gemara impact a mourner? *They may be forced to stop mourning too soon after the death of their relative, the mourner may need an out and might be relieved to celebrate the Festival instead of mourning.*

Activity

- In small groups, students will create a document (to be distributed to the community) that will educate the congregation about what one should and should not do when encountering mourners during the period of *shivah*, *shloshim* and *shanah* (for parents), using the texts studied in the sessions so far, experiences of the group and what would seem appropriate.

Moed Katan 20a

R. Chiya bar Abba, R. Ami and R. Yitzhak Napcha were sitting on the porch of R. Yitzhak the son of Elazar and the following matter came up between them: What is the scriptural source of the mourning period of *shivah*? For scripture says: And I will turn your festivals to mourning (Amos 5:10). Just as festivals are seven days, so mourning is seven days.

Moed Katan 21b

The rabbis taught in a Baraita: A mourner during the first three days is forbidden to work, even if he is supported by *tzedakah*. From then on - a mourner may work discreetly in his home. And a woman after the third day spins with her spindle within her home. The rabbis taught in another baraita: A mourner during the first three days may not go to another house of mourning. From then on - he may go but should not sit together with the consolers but rather with those who are being consoled.

Moed Katan 28b

Rabbi Yochanan said, "Those who are counseling the mourner are not permitted to say a word until the mourner opens his mouth, as it is stated in Job 3:1, 'After that (Job's friends sat with him on the ground for seven days and no one spoke to him) Job opened his mouth.' And subsequently, 'Eliphaz the Yemenite then spoke up.'"

Moed Katan 27b

Rabbi Yochanan said: a mourner, once he nods his head [indicating that he has been comforted], the comforters are no longer permitted to sit beside him.

Shivah

יְתִיב רַבִּי חִיָּא בַר אַבָּא וְרַבִּי אֲמִי
רַבִּי יִצְחָק נִפְחָא אֲקִילְעָא דְרַבִּי
יִצְחָק בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר, נִפְק מִלְתָּא
מִבִּינֵיהוּ: מִנִּין לְאַבִּילוֹת שְׁבַעָה? -
דְּכְתִיב (עֲמוֹס ח') וְהִפַּכְתִּי חֲגִיכֶם
לְאַבֵּל מַה חֵג שְׁבַעָה - אִף אֲבִילוֹת
שְׁבַעָה.

תְּנו רַבָּנִן: אֲבֵל, שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים
הָרִאשׁוֹנִים - אֲסוּר בַּמְּלָאכָה,
וְאַפִּילוּ עֲנֵי הַמִּתְפַּרְנֵס מִן הַצְדָּקָה.
מִכָּאֵן וְאֵילֶךְ - עוֹשֶׂה בְּצִינְעָא בְּתוֹךְ
בֵּיתוֹ, וְהָאִשָּׁה טוּוּה בַּפֶּלֶךְ בְּתוֹךְ
בֵּיתָהּ. תְּנו רַבָּנִן: אֲבֵל, שְׁלֹשָׁה
יָמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים - אֵינוֹ הוֹלֵךְ לְבֵית
הָאֲבֵל, מִכָּאֵן וְאֵילֶךְ - הוֹלֵךְ, וְאֵינוֹ
יוֹשֵׁב בַּמָּקוֹם הַמִּנְחָמִין אֶלָּא בַּמָּקוֹם
הַמִּתְנַחֲמִין.

At the Shiva House

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: אֵין מִנְחָמִין
רְשָׁאִין לֹאמַר דְּבַר עַד שִׁפְתָּח
אֲבֵל, שְׁנֹאמַר (אִיּוֹב ג') אַחֲרֵי
כֵן פִּתַּח אִיּוֹב אֶת פִּיהוּ וְהִדַּר
וַיַּעַן אֱלִיפָז הַתִּימָנִי.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: אֲבֵל, כִּיּוֹן
שְׁנִיעֲנַע רָאִשׁוֹ - שׁוֹב אֵין
מִנְחָמִין רְשָׁאִין לִישֵׁב אֲצִלוֹ.

Moed Katan 19b

From where do we derive the thirty-day period of mourning? It is derived from "growth, growth from the case of a *nazir*" (Numbers 6:5). It is written here (Lev. 10:6), [when Moses forbade Aaron and his sons to engage in mourning] "Do not let the hair of your head grow..." and it is written there [in regard to *nazir*] "the growth of hair on his head shall grow." Just as there [in the case of the *nazir*] it is 30 days, so too here [in regard to the prohibition of shaving] it is thirty days. And from where do we derive that it is 30 days for a *nazir*? Rav Matanah said, "The standard period for a *nazir* is 30 days." What is the reason for this? The verse says, "it [his hair] shall be holy". "It shall be" has the numerical value of 30.

Moed Katan 21b

They contrasted this with the following baraita: one who meets his friend who is mourning, during the thirty days offers him condolences but does not greet him. After the thirty days he greets him and does not offer him condolences.

They contrasted this with the following baraita: one who meets his friend who is in mourning during the twelve months offers him condolences but does not greet him. After twelve months, he greets him but does not offer him condolences. But he may indirectly speak consolingly to him about his loss. R. Meir said: One who meets his friend who is mourning after twelve months and offers him condolences to what can he be compared? To a person whose foot broke and healed; a doctor then met him and said to him: come to me for treatment, I will break it again and cure it, so you should know how fine my remedies are.

Shloshim

שלשים יום מנלן? - יליף פרע
פרע מנזיר: כתיב הכא (ויקרא
'י) ראשיכם אל תפרעו וכתיב
התם (במדבר ו') גדל פרע
שער ראשו, מה להלן שלשים
- אף כאן שלשים. והתם
מנלן? - אמר רב מתנה: סתם
נזירות שלשים יום. מאי טעמא
- אמר קרא (במדבר ו') קדש
יהיה. יהיה בגימטריא תלתין
הו.

After Shloshim

ורמינהו: המוצא את חברו אבל,
בתוך שלשים יום - מדבר עמו
תנחומין ואינו שואל בשלומו, לאחר
שלשים יום - שואל בשלומו ואינו
מדבר עמו תנחומין.

ורמינהו: המוצא את חברו אבל,
בתוך שנים עשר חדש - מדבר עמו
תנחומין ואינו שואל בשלומו, לאחר
שנים עשר חדש - שואל בשלומו
ואינו מדבר עמו תנחומין, אבל מדבר
עמו מן הצד. אמר רבי מאיר: המוצא
את חברו אבל לאחר שנים עשר
חדש, ומדבר עמו תנחומין, למה הוא
דומה - לאדם שנשברה רגלו וחיתה.
מצאו רופא ואמר לו: כלך אצלי,
שאני שוברה וארפאנה, כדי שתדע
שסממנין שלי יפין. - לא קשיא: הא
- באביו ואמו, הא - בשאר קרובים.

Moed Katan 19a

Mishnah: One who buries his dead relatives three days before the festival, the restrictions of *shivah* are canceled for him. If the burial was eight days before the festival, the restrictions of *shloshim* are canceled for him. For the sages said: Shabbat is included in *shivah* and does not cut them short but the festivals cut them short and are not included. Gemara: Rav Said: The restrictions of *shloshim* are canceled but the days themselves are not canceled. And so said R. Huna: The restrictions of *shloshim* are canceled, but the days themselves are not canceled. Rav Sheshet said: even the days themselves are canceled. In what sense are the days canceled? In that if he did not shave on the eve of the festival, he is forbidden to shave after the festival.

When Shabbat and Festivals Occur

משנה. הקובר את מתו שלשה ימים קודם לרגל - בטלה הימנו גזרת שבעה, שמונה - בטלו הימנו גזרת שלשים. מפני שאמרו: שבת עולה ואינה מפסקת. רגלים - מפסיקין ואינן עולין. גמרא. אמר רב: גזרת - בטלו, ימים - לא בטלו. וכן אמר רב הונא: גזרת - בטלו, ימים - לא בטלו. ורב ששת אמר: אפילו ימים נמי בטלו. מאי טעמא ימים לא בטלו? שאם לא גילח ערב הרגל - אסור לגלח אחר הרגל.

Session #4

The purpose of this lesson is to explore the role *honor* plays in death and mourning. Also, the learners will explore the communal obligation bury the deceased.

Objectives (At the end of this lesson, students will be able to):

- Identify the concerns of the rabbis in the texts studied.
- Create ways to de-emphasize the distinctions between the deceased.
- Develop an outline for educating others about their responsibility to the deceased and to mourners.

Learning Experiences

Introduction

- Ask students what they know about the kind of casket one is to be buried in. Explain that today they will be studying the source for the tradition of being buried in a simple casket. This kind of sensitivity also extends to other mourning and burial customs.

Text Study

- Read the 1st text, "Importance of Honor". After each paragraph, pause to discuss the following questions.
 - What do the rabbis seem to be concerned about? *The honor of the living and the dead, the poor, the ones afflicted with poverty and disease, embarrassing others because of certain conditions*
 - How do they seem to resolve their issue? *Using the lowest common denominator in all of the situations*
 - How are the customs of the text similar and/or different to what we do today? *Similar – some people follow some of the customs outlined in this text such as being buried in simple burial shrouds like Rabban Gamliel, not exposing the deceased during the funeral, burying their relatives in simple caskets (~a simple bier vs. a dargash, which is a fancy bier). Different – we do not immerse the utensils on behalf of women and men as prescribed, some people choose not to follow the customs outlined in the text and bury their relatives in dress clothes,*

have open casket funerals, select fancy caskets or caskets made out of other materials besides wood.

- What do you think of the rabbis' solution? What are some other ways we could lessen the distinction between the deceased?
- How do we distinguish today between different kinds of people? What might we do to limit the distinctions we make between the deceased?
- How can this text also help us as we think about the other kind of ceremonies that take place in the synagogue, i.e. bar and bat mitzvah parties? *Just as the Rabbis limited what should be done at the funeral/shivah, so too we can set up guidelines for parties, in order to lessen the embarrassment some families might feel. Also, this text teaches that death is an equalizer and it is not a time to be thinking about physical pleasures. So too, a bar/bat mitzvah is a time to celebrate reaching Jewish maturity and not to "one up" the other parties.*

- Read the 2nd text.

- What do the rabbis seem to be concerned about? *Mourners being alone, mourners needing to provide for themselves when they are in intense grief, families/individuals not being able to prepare their deceased relatives for burial*
- How do the rabbis address their concerns? *Prohibit mourners from eating alone, prohibit residents of the city from working until the deceased is buried to ensure that the deceased is buried and that families/individuals receive help from the community when preparing their relatives for burial.*
- How do these texts play out in our community today? *Usually a Jewish community has a chevra kaddisha which prepares the body for burial. Members of the synagogue community arrange for shiva minyans to take place at the home of the deceased or their relatives' and arrange for food to be provided.*

Activity

- In small groups: Imagine that the synagogue would like to create different “burial societies” within the congregation. Prepare an outline of what you would teach these groups about their responsibilities to other members of the group. What else do you need to know?
- Plan a trip to a funeral home, with a guided tour of how the body is prepared for burial.
- Train the students to serve in a *chevra kaddisha*.

Moed Katan 27a-b

The Rabbis taught in a Baraita: Originally, they would deliver [food] to a house of mourning: the wealthy – in baskets of silver and gold; the poor – in baskets of peeled willow twigs, and the poor would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that all should bring in baskets of peeled willow twigs, out of concern for the honor of the poor.

The Rabbis taught in a Baraita: Originally, they would serve drinks in a house of mourning: the wealthy – in white glasses; and the poor – in colored glasses, and the poor would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that all should serve [drinks] in colored glasses out of concern for the honor of the poor.

Originally, they would [leave] uncovered the faces of the wealthy while they would cover the faces of the poor, for their faces were blackened by famine, and the poor would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that they should cover the faces of all, out of concern for the honor of the poor.

Originally, they would take out [the corpses of the deceased]: the wealthy – on a *dargash* (fancy bier); and the poor – on a bier, and the poor would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that everyone should be taken out on a bier out of concern for the honor of the poor.

Importance of Honor

תנו רבנן: בראשונה היו מוליכין בבית האבל, עשירים - בקלתות של כסף ושל זהב, ועניים - בסלי נצרים של ערבה קלופה. והיו עניים מתביישים, התקינו שיהו הכל מביאין בסלי נצרים של ערבה קלופה, מפני כבודן של עניים.

תנו רבנן: בראשונה היו משקין בבית האבל, עשירים - בזכוכית לבנה, ועניים בזכוכית צבועה, והיו עניים מתביישים. התקינו שיהו הכל משקין בזכוכית צבועה, מפני כבודן של עניים.

בראשונה היו מגלין פני עשירים ומכסין פני עניים, מפני שהיו מושחרין פניהן מפני בצורת, והיו עניים מתביישים. התקינו שיהו מכסין פני הכל, מפני כבודן של עניים.

בראשונה היו מוציאין עשירים בדרגש, ועניים בכליכה, והיו עניים מתביישים, התקינו שיהו הכל מוציאין בכליכה, מפני כבודן של עניים.

Originally, they would place incense under those who had died with intestinal disorders and the living who had intestinal disorders would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that they should place incense under everyone, out of concern for the living with intestinal disorders.

Originally, they would immerse utensils on account of menstruating women who had died and living menstruating women would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that they should immerse on account of all women, out of concern for the honor of the living menstruants.

Originally, they would immerse utensils on account of *zavim* (one who had a seminal emission) who had died and living *zavim* would feel ashamed. [The Rabbis] instituted that they should immerse utensils on account of all, out of concern for the honor of the living *zavim*.

Originally, the expense of taking out the deceased was even harder on the relatives than the death, to the point that the relatives would leave the corpse and flee until Rabban Gamliel came and treated himself lightly by going out in plain linen garments. Following his example, the people went out in plain linen garments. Rav Pappa said: Nowadays, it is the custom of the people to [dress the corpse] even in canvas worth a zuz.

בראשונה היו מניחין את המוגמר תחת חולי מעים מתים, והיו חולי מעים חיים מתביישין, התקינו שיהו מניחין תחת הכל, מפני כבודן של חולי מעים חיים.

בראשונה היו מטבילין את הכלים על גבי נדות מתות, והיו נדות חיות מתביישות, התקינו שיהו מטבילין על גבי כל הנשים, מפני כבודן של נדות חיות.

בראשונה מטבילין על גבי זבין מתים, והיו זבין חיים מתביישין. התקינו שיהו מטבילין על גב הכל, מפני כבודן של זבין חיים.

בראשונה היתה הוצאת המת קשה לקרוביו יותר ממיתתו, עד שהיו קרוביו מניחין אותו ובורחין. עד שבא רבן גמליאל ונהג קלות ראש בעצמו ויצא בכלי פשתן, ונהגו העם אחריו לצאת בכלי פשתן. אמר רב פפא: והאידנא נהוג עלמא אפילו בצרדא בר זוזא.

Moed Katan 27a

Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rav: A mourner on his first day of mourning is forbidden to eat of his own bread. From that which the Merciful One said to Ezekiel: and the bread of [other] people you shall not eat. Rabbah and Rav Yosef exchanged their meals with each other.

And Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: If someone dies in the city, all the residents of the city are forbidden to engage in work [until the funeral].

Rav Hamnuna arrived in Darumasa and heard the sound of a shofar indicating a death. He saw that certain people engaged in work. He said to them, "May those people be excommunicated! Is there not a dead person in town?!" They replied, "There are different societies in town." He said to them, "If so, the excommunication is released for you."

Communal Responsibility

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אבל, יום ראשון - אסור לאכול לחם משלו, מדאמר ליה רחמנא ליחזקאל (יחזקאל כ"ד) ולחם אנשים לא תאכל. רבה ורב יוסף מחלפי סעודתייהו להדדי.

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: מת בעיר - כל בני העיר אסורין בעשיית מלאכה.

רב המנונא איקלע לדרומתא, שמע קול שיפורה דשכבא. חזא הנך אינשי דקא עבדי עבידתא, אמר להו: ליהו הנך אנשי בשמתא לא שכבא איכא במתא? אמרו ליה: חבורתא איכא במתא. - אמר להו: אי הכי - שריא לכו.

Session #5

This is the concluding class of the series. Although the different mourning times were discussed previously, in this session the learners will study about the time periods from a different lens.

Objectives (At the end of this lesson, students will be able to):

- Compare and contrast texts discussing mourning time periods.
- Create a metaphor for the mourning process.
- Explain the dangers of excessive mourning.

Learning Activities

Introduction

- Review the different mourning time periods previously studied and what the rabbis said about them. *Most of the texts discussed what the mourning could not do during shivah, shloshim and shanah.* Explain that today the learners will explore texts discussing the different time periods but from a different lens.

Text Study

- Text #1
 - What is the difference between the 1st opinion of the baraita and Rabbi Yehuda? *The rabbis begin the 4 week period right after the burial (~shloshim). Rabbi Yehuda begins the 4 week period a week after the burial (~shloshim +).*
 - How does this text differ from the ones studied previously, relating to mourning periods? *Previously, texts were concerned about prohibitions and when they ceased. Also spoke about what the comforter could/could not say to the mourner. This text speaks more to the psychological mourning process and the slow entrance of the mourner back into “normal” life.*
 - What are the advantages/disadvantages of these stages? *May push the person into the community too fast, it is a slow progression, not sitting in*

one's regular place and not speaking signifies that something is different and encourages other congregants to check in with the mourner

- This text uses stages that were appropriate in its own historical context. What stages might we use today?
- For those who have mourned a relative, what were your stages?

- **Text #2**

- How is this text different from the previous one? *Different stages (1-3 days, 3-7 days, 7 days + vs. week 1, week 2, etc...), internal psychological process vs. external psychological process*
- What is the message of the last sentence of the text? *The death of a relative is always with us but the emotional/physical pain can lessen as time goes on.*
- What metaphor would you use to describe the grieving process?

- **Text #3**

- What are the rabbis worried about? *People will mourn for their relatives too much, to the point where they may cause hardship on themselves or their families, including their own death or the death of another relative.*
- What role does Rav Huna's story play in this text? *It is brought as support for Rav Yehudah's statement in the name of Rav.*
- What are the dangers of grieving too much? *Extreme emotional distress, neglect to take care of yourself or of others, inability to integrate back into "normal" life.*
- How is the quote from Jeremiah helpful/not helpful? *If one believes that God is responsible for the death of the relative, then it would be affront to God to grieve too much since it would seem as if the mourner is not accepting the divine decree.*

- **Text #4**

- Explain that the endings of the Books in the Bible and the Tractates in the Talmud try to end on a positive note, *nechemtah*. Read through the text.
- Why should we say “Go in peace” when leaving a dead person? *This is the phrase used in the Bible to say that someone has died, when King David said this to Absalom – he died, so we should not say it to a living person.*
- Why should we say “Go to peace” when leaving a living person? *Saying “go in peace” is a bad omen but “go to peace” is a good omen.*
- Use this opportunity to encourage the students to continue to study and be students of Torah.

Moed Katan 23a

The Rabbis taught in a Baraita: A mourner, during the first week, does not go out the door of his house. The second week - he may go out but does not sit in his regular place. The third week - he may sit in his regular place but does not talk. The fourth week - the mourner is considered like every other person. Rabbi Yehuda says, "It is not necessary to say that during the first week the mourner does not leave his house, since everyone enters the mourner's house to comfort him. Rather, during the second week the mourner does not go out the door of his house. The third week - goes out but does not sit in his regular place. The fourth week - sits in his regular place but does not talk. The fifth week - the mourner is like every other person."

Moed Katan 27b

Rabbi Levy said, "A mourner, the first three days, shall see himself as if there is a sword lying between his thighs. From three days to seven days - as though the sword is lying in front of him in the corner. From then on - as if the sword is passing in front of him in the marketplace."

Moed Katan 27b

And Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav, "Anyone who grieves over their deceased relatives too much will weep for another deceased relative." There was a certain woman who lived in Rav Huna's neighborhood who had seven sons. One of them died and she cried excessively over him. Rav Huna sent to her a message, "Don't do this." She did not comply. He sent her another message, "If you listen to me, fine; but if not - do you want to prepare burial shrouds for another one?" Another son died...and they all died. In the end he

Stages of Mourning

תנו רבנן: אבל, שבת ראשונה - אינו יוצא מפתח ביתו, שניה - יוצא ואינו יושב במקומו, שלישית - יושב במקומו ואינו מדבר, רביעית - הרי הוא ככל אדם. רבי יהודה אומר: לא הוצרכו לומר שבת ראשונה לא יצא מפתח ביתו - שהרי הכל נכנסין לביתו לנחמו. אלא: שניה - אינו יוצא מפתח ביתו, שלישית - יוצא ואינו יושב במקומו, רביעית - יושב במקומו ואינו מדבר, חמישית - הרי הוא ככל אדם.

אמר רבי לוי: אבל שלשה ימים הראשונים - יראה את עצמו כאילו חרב מונחת לו בין שתי יריכותיו, משלשה עד שבעה - כאילו מונחת לו כנגדו בקרן זווית, מכאן ואילך - כאילו עוברת כנגדו בשוק.

Excessive Mourning

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: כל המתקשה על מתו יותר מדאי - על מת אחר הוא בוכה. ההיא איתתא דהות בשיבבותיה דרב הונא, הוה לה שבעה בני. מת חד מינייהו, הוות קא בכיא ביתירתא עליה. שלח לה רב הונא: לא תעבדי הכי לא אשגחה ביה. שלח לה: אי צייתת - מוטב, ואי לא - צבית זוודתא לאידך מית. ומיתו כולהו. לסוף אמר לה: תימוש זוודתא לנפשך, ומיתא. (ירמיהו כ"ב) אל תבכו למת ואל תנדו לו, אל תבכו למת - יותר

said to her, "You are preparing burial shrouds for yourself." And then she died. "Do not cry for a deceased, and do not shake your head for him" (Jeremiah 22:10). "Do not cry for a deceased" - too much, "and do not shake your head for him" - beyond the measure. How so? Three days for weeping, seven days for eulogizing, thirty days for refraining from ironing clothes and haircutting. From then on, the Holy One says, "You are not more compassionate on the deceased than I am."

Moed Katan 29a

And Rabbi Levi son of Chayasa said, "One who departs from a dead person should not say to him, 'Go to peace' but 'Go in peace.'" One who departs from a living person should not say, 'Go in peace' but 'Go to peace.'" One who departs from a dead person should not say to him, "Go to peace" but "Go in peace" for it is stated "You shall come to your ancestors in peace" (Genesis 15:15). One who departs from a living person should not say, "Go in peace" but "Go to peace" for when David said to Absalom, "Go in peace," (II Samuel 15:9) he went and was hanged, but when Yitro said to Moses, "Go to peace," (Exodus 4"18), he went was successful. And Rabbi Levi said, "Whoever goes from the synagogue to the study hall and from the study hall to the synagogue will merit the face of the Divine Presence. As it is stated, "They go from multitude to multitude, appearing before God in Zion" (Psalms 84:8). Rav Chisda son of Ashi said in the name of Rav, "Torah scholars have no rest even in the world to come." As it stated, "They go from multitude to multitude, appearing before God in Zion" (Psalms 84:8).

מדאי ואל תנדו לו - יותר מכשיעור. הא כיצד? שלשה ימים - לבכי, ושבעה - להספד, ושלשים - לגיהוץ ולתספורת. מכאן ואילך - אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אי אתם רחמנים בו יותר ממני.

ואמר רבי לוי בר חיתא: הנפטר מן המת לא יאמר לו לך לשלום אלא לך בשלום הנפטר מן החי לא יאמר לו לך בשלום, אלא לך לשלום. הנפטר מן המת לא יאמר לו לך לשלום אלא לך בשלום - שנאמר ואתה תבוא אל אבתיך בשלום. הנפטר מן החי לא יאמר לו לך בשלום אלא (שמות ד') לך לשלום, שהרי דוד שאמר לאבשלום (שמואל ב' ט"ו) לך בשלום - הלך ונתלה, יתרו שאמר למשה (שמות ד') לך לשלום - הלך והצליח. ואמר רבי לוי: כל היוצא מבית הכנסת לבית המדרש, ומבית המדרש לבית הכנסת - זוכה ומקבל פני שכינה, שנאמר (תהלים פ"ד) ילכו מחיל אל חיל יראה אל אלהים בציון. אמר רב חייה בר אשי אמר רב: תלמידי חכמים אין להם מנוחה אפילו לעולם הבא, שנאמר ילכו מחיל אל חיל יראה אל אלהים בציון.

Analysis of Bavli Gittin Chapter 5

The fifth chapter of Bavli Gittin contains several aggadic discussions about the destruction of cities in Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem is attributed to an incident which involved a man named Kamza and a man named Bar Kamza. Often this story is used to teach the importance of honoring people, not shaming people in public, and the consequences of senseless hatred. However, when one delves into the story within the context of the fifth chapter of Gittin, other themes emerge.

The Kamza/Bar Kamza narrative begins on Bavli Gittin 55b. An unnamed individual decides to host a dinner party. He has a friend named Kamza, and an enemy named Bar Kamza. The host asks one of his servants to invite his friend Kamza to the dinner party. The servant accidentally invites Bar Kamza and brings him to the dinner party. When the host realizes that his enemy, instead of his friend, is at the party, he decides to kick him out. Bar Kamza pleads with the host to let him stay, because he does not want to be publicly humiliated by being forced to leave the party. Bar Kamza makes repeated offers in an attempt to persuade the host to let him stay: he offers to pay for his drinks, he offers to pay for half of the dinner party, and he even offers to pay for the whole dinner party. The host does not agree and physically removes Bar Kamza from the venue. Bar Kamza becomes angry and notices that the rabbis in attendance at the party do not intercede on his behalf. Therefore, he thinks, they must have approved of

what happened. He decides to repay them by spreading slander against them in the King's palace.

Bar Kamza appears in front of Caesar and informs him that the Jews are rebelling. In addition, Bar Kamza develops a way to test the rabbis' allegiance to the Roman Government: Caesar will send an animal to sacrifice in the Temple¹. As Bar Kamza delivers the animal, he makes a blemish in the animal's upper lip (or in the cataract of the eye), a place that is considered a blemish for Jews but not for the Romans. The rabbis consider sacrificing this animal in order to maintain peace with the Romans, but Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas objects because he is concerned about creating a precedent for sacrificing blemished animals in the Temple. Then, the rabbis consider killing Bar Kamza so that he would not report back to the King. However, Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas objects again because he is concerned that people will erroneously conclude that the punishment for blemishing an animal set aside for sacrifices is death. The narrative is interrupted by a statement of Rabbi Yochanan who blames the destruction of the Temple, the burning of the Sanctuary of the Temple and the exile of Jews from the Land of Israel upon the patience/humility of Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas.

¹ It is interesting to note that this story involves the rabbis possibly sacrificing an animal in the Temple. At the Temple, only priests were able to sacrifice animals. In this story, it is not clear if the rabbis see themselves as the halakhic authority of the Temple or if they took upon themselves the role of sacrificing animals. Perhaps this element of the story is an attempt by the rabbis to retroject their leadership to the Temple period.

The narrative resumes with a description of how Nero destroyed Jerusalem and later converted to Judaism out of fear of God's vengeance. The narrative continues with Vespasian's siege of Jerusalem and how different people handled the situation. The narrative continues with the famous story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zackai and his effort to continue Judaism through the establishment of an Academy at Yavne. Next, the Gemara relates some of the rabbis' opinions about Vespasian and Titus, a description of Titus' torturous death and experience in the afterlife, and descriptions of how Onkelos b. Kelonikos performed necromancy on Titus, Balaam and Jesus. Eventually the narrative returns to the story of Kamza and Bar Kamza with a statement of Rabbi Elazar, "Come and see how great is the power of shame! For God assisted Bar Kamza and destroyed God's Temple and God's sanctuary" (Bavli Gittin, 57a).

Often the story of Kamza and Bar Kamza is utilized when teaching about the power of shame. This seems to be the message the redactor of the Talmud wants the reader to receive, since the statement of Rabbi Elazar is used to end the narrative of the destruction of Jerusalem. This message is also reiterated in Bavli Yoma 9b,

Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things that existed there: idolatry, inappropriate sexual relations and the shedding of blood.... But during the Second Temple period, the people were engaged in Torah study, in observing commandments and performing acts of loving kindness; why was it destroyed? Because baseless hatred existed there – to teach you that baseless hatred corresponds to idolatry, inappropriate sexual relations and the shedding of blood.

It seems appropriate to extract a lesson on baseless hatred and shame from the Kamza/Bar Kamza text, since it plays a central role in the narrative. We do not know why the host dislikes Bar Kamza but he chooses to shame him in public, even though he could financially benefit from letting Bar Kamza stay at his dinner party. The rabbis at the party do not intervene when the host publicly shames Bar Kamza without any apparent reason. Bar Kamza shames the rabbis in public by informing on them to the King with a lie. Bar Kamza also creates a situation of potential shame when he blemishes the animal that is to be sacrificed. Rabbi Elazar's statement is rooted in many examples in the narrative. However, Rabbi Yochanan's statement, that the patience/humility of Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas caused the destruction of Jerusalem is often not highlighted.

It is interesting that Rabbi Yochanan condemns Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas' actions. After all, the rabbi was trying to protect the integrity of the sacrificial system and the life of Bar Kamza. According to Rabbi Yochanan, protecting the sacrificial system and Bar Kamza's life was not as important as keeping peace with the Roman Government. Although Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkulas was following the letter of the law, that seems to be not the best response to the situation. Perhaps, Rabbi Yochanan is critiquing the actions of Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkelus, because they do not seem to be aligned with the theme of the *mishnayot* of Gittin chapter 5: the need for rabbinic leadership to benefit society. Perhaps Rabbi Yochanan's statement is meant to highlight the

importance of rabbinic leadership, especially at a time of upheaval, to ensure the survival of the community.

The first *mishnah* of Gittin chapter five continues the theme of *tikkun olam* introduced in the previous chapter. In context this term refers to decrees made by the rabbis for the benefit of society. The rest of the chapter includes numerous examples of the sages adjusting and changing previous rabbinic laws and even Toraitic laws. The rabbis felt that certain laws had the potential to strangle society. Therefore, the rabbis enacted decrees that would benefit the society and preserve it.

The first example in Mishnah Gittin 5 of rabbis adjusting laws is the collection for damages from superior land (5:1). There is a disagreement between the sages which part of this statement is a rabbinic decree since there is a parallel to this statement in the Torah. Exodus 22:4 states that when a person's livestock grazes in another person's field and leaves it bare, the owner of livestock must pay for the impairment of the other person's field. In Hebrew, the phrase for impairment is **מִיֵּטֵב שְׂדֵהוּ**. Since **מִיֵּטֵב** can also mean better, the rabbis infer that this verse is the proof text that the damager must make restitution from/for the best field. The question arises, whose best field is the verse referring to? According to Rabbi Yishmael, the verse refers to the damaged party's property. Abaye points out that if one followed Rabbi Yishmael's reading of the verse, then the statement by the Tanna is a rabbinic decree because it forces the damager to pay from his own best property. This

would benefit society because people would be motivated to be more careful about damaging other people's property since they would have to give up their best property (Bavli Gittin 48b).

Rabbi Shimon is also of the opinion that the Tanna is evoking a rabbinic decree for the benefit of society (Ibid 49b). Rabbi Shimon is thinking of thieves who steal and extortionists who take property from others by force. The rabbis wanted to create a deterrent for thieves and extortionists similar to the one created for damagers. They believed that if these people knew that they would have to make restitution from their own best property, they would be less inclined to steal and to extort. Rabbi Shimon continues that the decree for a creditor to collect from average land is also for the benefit of society. The decree was enacted to prevent creditors from loaning money under false pretenses. Perhaps a lender would be quick to loan money because he wanted to obtain the borrower's best field. Instead the rabbis decreed that a creditor can only collect debts from average land so that the lenders would not lend money to individuals who were poor credit risks with the intention of collecting the borrower's best property. In both of these cases (collecting damages and collecting debt) the rabbis seem to be looking out for the people, to ensure that they are not taken advantage of, and their property, to ensure that people do not damage others' property.

Ulla offers a different explanation for the rabbinic decree which allows creditors to collect debt from average land (Ibid, 50a). According to

Deuteronomy 24:11, when a creditor collects debts he is not allowed to enter the borrower's house. Rather, he waits outside while the borrower brings the pledge out to him. Ulla reasons that the borrower will bring out his inferior utensils as collateral for the loan. Consequently, when paying with land, the borrower would also pay from his inferior property. The rabbis reasoned however, that this type of repayment would deter lenders from giving loans, since they could only collect from the borrower's inferior land. Rather, the rabbis did not want to "lock the door in the face of the borrowers" so they allowed the lenders to collect more than the Torah guaranteed them. This decree was for the benefit of society because it allowed money to flow between the rich and the poor and to maintain order in the society.

In an effort to protect people's property, the rabbis also considered women as possible schemers. Mishnah Gittin 5:1 states that a woman may collect the value of her *ketubah* upon divorce from inferior land. The rabbinic decree limited what kind of property a woman may collect from, to prevent women from marrying men with the intention of provoking their husbands into divorcing them. Upon the divorce, the woman could collect the value of her *ketubah* only from inferior land. The rabbis believed that this decree would prevent women from marrying men under false pretenses. They also seemed to think that this decree would uphold the institution of marriage. People would

decide to marry each other for the sake of marriage, instead of the benefits obtained upon divorce.²

The examples above illustrate the importance of amending laws enacted by the Rabbis, and even the Torah, in order to maintain order in society and to uphold Jewish values. Jeffrey Rubenstein writes that one of the important messages of the 5th chapter of Bavli Gittin is, “the necessity of strong rabbinic leadership and of the sages’ responsibility to act as the spiritual, moral, social and political leaders of the community” (Rubenstein, 39). The rabbis in the examples above followed this principle, but the sages of the Kamza/Bar Kamza narrative did not. Instead of protecting their community, they decided to follow the letter of the law. They would not sacrifice a blemished animal to appease the Roman government and they would not kill Bar Kamza to protect the community. They failed to act as leaders. They also could have possibly prevented the whole incident by intervening at the dinner party and not allowing the host to humiliate Bar Kamza in public. Perhaps Rabbi Yochanan realized the role he should play as a rabbi and communal leader and thus blamed Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkelus for the destruction, because he did not allow the rabbis to act.

On the other hand, patience and humility (both possible translations of ענוותנות) are usually seen as honorable traits by the rabbis. Why would

² It is interesting to note that the rabbis ascribe to women enough business insight to create such elaborate schemes.

Rabbi Yochanan see them as destructive? Rubenstein argues that humility and patience are praiseworthy when individuals act on their own behalf. However, when they serve as communal leaders they need to act with confidence, determination and courage (Ibid). Instead of following the letter of the law, as Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkelus suggested, the rabbis needed to act with courage. They needed to protect their community and should have either sacrificed the blemished animal or killed Bar Kamza. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai persevered in the face of danger and managed to find a way to preserve Judaism and Jewish leadership. Perhaps, had the rabbis responded differently to Bar Kamza, they could have also saved Jerusalem.

The narrative of Kamza and Bar Kamza also reveals the rabbis' understanding of destruction. Previously, the Biblical tradition usually associated national disasters with the people's transgressions. Prophets repeatedly reprimanded the Israelites, on behalf of God, and warned them about the impending doom if the people did not abandon their evil ways. On the one hand, the rabbis seem to perpetuate this Biblical theology. They associate the sin of shaming someone with the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. On the other hand, the rabbis are not speaking about a nation sinning, rather individuals sinning. Rabbi Elazar's statement condemns the host of the dinner party (and possibly the group of rabbis in attendance), while Rabbi Yochanan's statement condemns Rabbi Zechariah b. Avkelus. Perhaps the rabbis want to convey the message that even one person's actions can have grave

consequences. The rabbis also seem to be saying that in addition to sin, punishment may come as a result of stupidity (Goldenberg, 521). Destruction of Jerusalem is “a call to repentance to a demand for greater common sense and political flexibility among Jewish leaders” (Ibid).

The story involving Kamza and Bar Kamza is an excellent teaching tool. The story illustrates the power of shaming someone in public and the ramifications of that act. The story also demonstrates different ways people shame others. Seen in context of the fifth chapter of Bavli Gittin, the story also teaches about rabbinic leadership. Numerous examples in the chapter illustrate that there are times when rabbis need to amend or change laws to benefit society. At times, this is the only way to maintain order and make sure that the society is able to survive. The inability of the rabbis in the Kamza and Bar Kamza narrative to act resulted in the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. One rabbi, Yochanan ben Zackai, was able to act, and found a way to continue the Jewish community. However, had the rabbis intervened with Bar Kamza this may not have been necessary.

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Analysis of Bavli Brachot Chapter 9

Mishnah Brachot Chapter 9 contains a varied list of blessings one is to recite on different occasions. Several of the blessings are for occasions when a person visits a place, such as a place where miracles were performed on behalf of the Jewish people or where idolatry was uprooted. Several of the blessings are for occasions when a person sees wonders, such as: shooting stars, earthquakes, thunder, winds, lightning, mountains, hills, seas, rivers, deserts and the Great Sea (the Mediterranean). Another blessing is for occasions when one acquires new possessions, such as a building a new house or acquiring new clothes. In addition, the Mishnah includes blessings upon hearing different kinds of news: upon rainfall, upon good and bad tidings, on a calamity which has the potential to be a favorable occurrence and on a favorable occurrence which has the potential to be a calamity. This paper will explore the theology of these blessings, some of the challenges the blessings raise, and possible solutions.

The sixth chapter of Bavli Brachot discusses the blessings one says before eating different kinds of food. As the Gemara tries to find a proof-text for this custom, it introduces a concept that one is forbidden to enjoy/benefit from something in this world without reciting a blessing (Brachot 35a). This concept is derived from Psalm 24:1, "The earth is God's and all its fullness, the world and its inhabitants." The rabbis compare not saying a blessing before enjoying something to stealing from God. Rav Yehudah says in the name of Rav, "Whoever derives benefit from this world without reciting a blessing, it is as if he

derived benefit from the consecrated property of Heaven” (Ibid).³ Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa offers a different metaphor, “Whoever derives benefit from this world without reciting a blessing, it is as if he robs God and the Assembly of Israel” (Ibid, 36b). Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav and Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa’s statements imply that reciting a blessing is comparable to asking God for permission to use something that belongs to God. By not reciting a blessing, one is stealing, because everything belongs to God. Rashi offers a different explanation. The person who does not recite a blessing is robbing God of the blessing due to God, that is, the honor and praise due to God for providing the object from which the person is benefiting. Rashi also explains that one who does not recite a blessing before enjoying something will eventually teach others to do the same. Consequently, other people will transgress, resulting in the loss of their crops (Ibid).

The theology presented by Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav and Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa is one of acknowledgement and gratitude. By reciting blessings before eating or enjoying something people acknowledge that what they have is not really theirs. These objects or food belong to God. The recitation of the blessing is an acknowledgment that without God we would not be able to enjoy these things. Therefore we praise God for what we potentially will have and ask permission to use the specified objects or food. Many

³ The process of atoning for mistakenly using consecrated Temple property is discussed in Leviticus 5:15-16.

blessings in Brachot Chapter 9 however, do not refer to objects that one comes into possession. Rather, the blessings refer to activities that use the senses of seeing, feeling and hearing. What is the benefit on these occasions that one is acknowledging by reciting a blessing?

At the beginning of the Gemara's commentary on Mishnah Brachot Chapter 9, the rabbis discuss whether one recites a blessing upon encountering a place where a miracle was performed for an individual versus for the masses. The Gemara resolves the difficulty by stating that for a place where a miracle was performed for the masses, everyone is obligated to recite a blessing, but for a place where a miracle was performed only for an individual, only that individual is required to recite a blessing (Bavli Brachot 54a). The benefit one is acknowledging upon seeing such a place is the benefit of life. The examples the rabbis give of places where miracles were performed for the masses are all from the Jewish Bible. Their understanding of history is of God intervening at various points in time to save the Israelites. The crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the crossing of the Canyons of Arnon, the stones of Beit-Horon, the stone that Og, King of Bashan wanted to throw at the Israelites, the stone upon which Moses sat when Amalek attacked, are all examples of God interceding on behalf of the Israelite nation. As a result of our ancestors being saved from destruction, we are alive and are able to experience the miracle of life. We are also able to connect to our ancestors and celebrate the miracles that were performed for them.

Although all of these places are described in the Jewish Bible, and the rabbis writing about them seem to be aware of their locations, it would seem that the people living in the Talmudic period would not have access to these locations. The majority of Jews in this time period were not living in or near the Land of Israel, but rather in Babylonia. Perhaps that is why the Gemara on 54a relates the incidents of several individuals for whom miracles were performed. This adaptation allows individuals to praise God for the miracles they can relate to and for the miracles that occur in their lifetime. Instead of focusing only on miracles that were performed for their ancestors, people are able to acknowledge and appreciate the miracles that have occurred to them when they visit the specific locations.

Starting on 58b, the rabbis discuss the blessing one recites upon seeing (and hearing) wonders in nature: shooting stars, earthquakes, thunder and lightning. The blessing recorded by the Mishnah is, "Praised are you, Adonai our God, Whose power and might fill the world." The rabbis are writing about wonders in nature in a non-scientific age. As they try to make sense of their world, they record their understanding of nature, that God is responsible for it. While discussing earthquakes, several opinions are given for their cause: Rav Ketina explains that earthquakes are caused by God clapping, R. Nassan explains that earthquakes are caused by God sighing, the rabbis and Rav Acha bar Yaakov explain that earthquakes are caused by God moving God's feet. The rabbis are also familiar with examples from the Jewish Bible in which God uses natural

wonders to cause death and destruction. The plagues that befell Egypt, the earthquake that killed Korach and his followers, the sulfurous fire (~lightning) that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps the benefit one is acknowledging when reciting a blessing upon seeing natural wonders is gratitude for one's life. Instead of natural wonders causing one's death, one is able to see them and acknowledge God's grace.

At this point in the chapter, the rabbis seem to be introducing a second theological message. Not only are we to recite blessings in gratitude for what we have received but also to acknowledge God's role in the universe and God's power over nature. This theme continues in the discussion about saying a blessing upon hearing good news or bad news. The blessing upon hearing good news is, "Praised are you, Adonai our God, Who is good and Who does Good." In an agrarian society, hearing about rainfall is the ultimate good news. It ensures that the farmer's crops will grow properly and that the fields will receive the proper sustenance. Reciting this blessing enables the farmer to acknowledge his bounty and to also acknowledge God's role in providing the rain.

It is usually comfortable for people to praise God when good things are occurring in their lives, such as rainfall or the birth of a new baby. However, it is not always easy to praise God when something terrible happens. Mishnah Brachot 9:5 states, "One is obligated to praise God upon the bad, just as one praises God upon the good." Why do the rabbis obligate us to praise God when something bad happens? Usually when bad things happen, people want to curse

God. How could God allow such-and-such to happen? This emotional response is present in the story of Job. As Job loses his possessions and family members, his wife tells him that he should curse God so that God will strike him dead and Job will be put out of his misery. In the story, although God allows death and destruction to occur, it might appear as if Satan is the culprit because he encourages God to test Job. The religions of antiquity often explain the presence of evil through dualism: one god responsible for the good in the universe and another responsible for the evil. Yet, Judaism is a monotheistic religion and had to insist that there is only one God who is responsible for both. Therefore, the rabbis insisted that people acknowledge God's role in the bad, just as they acknowledge God's role in the good. Moreover, the rabbis want people to acknowledge that God's decrees are true and just. The recitation of the blessing is a way for people to express their faith in God, even when their life might be falling apart.

The blessing one recited upon hearing bad news, such as death of a relative, is "Praised are you, Adonai our God, the true judge." The phrasing of the blessing correlates to the rabbis' belief that God is responsible for all that happens in life. At first glance, it does not seem to be what one would want to say upon hearing about the death of a loved one.⁴ Being part of a Jewish movement which adapts blessings and rituals when they do not seem to be

⁴ Today this blessing is often recited at the funeral, when mourners perform the custom of tearing a ribbon.

meaningful to people, I decided to ask Reform clergy if they have changed the wording of the blessing above. I was under the impression that when a person has suffered a loss, especially in the case of a child, it would be too hard to call God a true judge. I received eleven responses from the HUCALUM listserve (an e-mail list for graduates of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion). Out of the eleven respondents, only two offered a variant of the blessing above. The other nine respondents stated that saying “Praised.... the true judge” was actually comforting, although several choose not to translate it literally or offered an interpretation.

Rabbi Adam Fisher commented that the word *dayan* can also be translated as “ruler.” Saying, “Praised be the true ruler of the universe” connects the blessing to the opening lines of the Kaddish. Death is then seen in the context of God’s rule which means that as awful as it may seem, it ultimately fits in God's benevolent plan.

Rabbi John Sherwood translates the blessing as, “We praise the Eternal, who causes death, yet challenges us to life” or “Thank God it is over, for you, and for him/her”.

Rabbi Andy Vogel commented that the blessing reminds us that there are some things that are just beyond our control.

Rabbi David Ostrich translates *dayan haemet* as “Who judges us in truth.” His interpretative translation speaks to the faith/hope that God will indeed judge us fairly and he hopes to give a comforting message to the mourners.

Rabbi Apothaker understands *emet* not as true in the philosophical sense but as “stable” or “reliable” in the instrumental sense. He sees the blessing as a statement not about the past, but rather about the future. The blessing is a way to express hope that God will partner with humanity to re-stabilize the family in the future.

Rabbi Shelley Kovar Becker uses this introduction to the blessing,

At this time of intense grief when our hearts are torn and we wear the kria ribbon as the outward sign our tradition tells us we must bless God. It is difficult to bless God at this moment. We do so because we mortals do not know our life spans, we do not know God's plan and so we utter these words that God is a righteous judge even when we want to rail against God. Because God has given us this dear one to love and we praise God for the plan we do not know and for the wonderful memories of the one now gone from our midst.

Rabbi Amy Scheinerman calls upon us to reinterpret how we view God and God's role in the universe in order to find the words of the blessing “Praise...the true judge” comforting.

If people believe that God rewards and punishes, or micromanages the universe, then "Barukh dayan ha-emet" will be understood as holding God responsible for the death. That paints God as cruel (and possibly arbitrary), especially in the case of one who died young or after great suffering. How do we respond to, or worship, a God who either causes such suffering, or could prevent it but chooses not to? For some, however, there is comfort in the notion of God "in charge of the universe" and especially for those harboring guilt that they somehow caused or contributed to the death (usually by neglect); this can be comforting because it tells them they don't have that much power. The notion of the omnipotent, omniscient God controlling the universe, however, begets more problems than it solves. If, however, people believe that God is inherent in the creativity, dynamism, and energy of the universe, but not a coercive power that rewards and punishes, then "Barukh dayan ha-emet" comes

to affirms life, which is precious but not infinite. It also is a reminder that we, who are invested with God's tzelem, bear responsibility for how we live our lives; sadly, sometimes our choices lead to premature death.

Rabbi Larry Freedman explains why "Praised... the true Judge" is precisely the proper blessing to say,

It's very difficult to accept death when the casket is just feet away. It is hard to accept that someone we love is gone and it's hard to accept that there is a God so mean. But *dayan ha-emet* is in the spirit of *tziduk ha-din*, that is we accept God even when angry and we are reminded that anger does not have to mean rejection. Yes, some deaths are too early, some are too painful but all die eventually. Everyone will suffer the same fate and that is what we keep in mind when we say that little *bracha*. It is not personal. It is not a mean God. It is not an attack on you or your *met*. It's how it goes. People die but God is still there to bring some comfort to mourners and accept the soul of the deceased. God is the true judge in that our souls, all our souls, go before God on some level. We all face that day and there, I hope, is comfort. The circumstances may be ordinary or traumatic but all will face that day.

Judaism provides a rubric for offering blessings for different occasions.

The blessings over food serve as a reminder that one person alone could not have provided the food that he/she is about to eat or have eaten. The blessings that are said upon seeing wonders of nature allow the observer to acknowledge the beauty that he/she has witnessed and the greater power that is perhaps responsible for it. Judaism also contains blessings upon the good and the bad that occurs in one's life. It would seem that when a tragedy occurs, the last thing on one's mind would be to praise God. In many liberal communities, rabbis delay the mourner's recitation of the blessing offered by the Talmud from the moment of hearing about the death until the funeral. The Reform rabbis, whose

responses are included in this paper, suggest that the blessing “Praised... the true judge” offers the mourners an opportunity to express their feelings of anguish and confusion. Many of the rabbis interpret this blessing as a way to say that human beings cannot understand why death of a specific person has occurred. Some people may hold God responsible and are able to express this belief through calling God a true judge, even if they do not understand why God has caused the death. Others may understand God as a force in the universe and can call God a true judge with the understanding that but ultimately death is a part of life. All will experience it someday and all one can do is to accept this reality.