Mourning Practices in the Reform Jewish Community: What Traditional Judaism has practiced and where Classical Reform has gone.

What are the Possibilities for the Twenty-First Century?

A Thesis
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Introduction

For centuries, if not millennia, when a family member dies there has been a "Jewish map" to follow. This map walks us from the moment of death through the year that follows. From the burial of Sarah by Abraham in the cave at Machpelah (Gen. 23:2) onward, Jews have been made aware of the importance of the grieving process. Indeed, the Rabbis of the Talmud seem to have known, instinctively, what the doctors of today have 'discovered': it is imperative for people to mourn in a way that allows them to walk through the tunnel of pain that death creates. One must walk through it and acknowledge it so that one can move forward in one's life.

Jewish tradition provides for this process with set parameters. From the rending of clothing, *kri'ah* , through the seven-day intense mourning period, *shiva*, the second period of mourning, *shloshim*, and the eleven months of the daily recitation of the *Kaddish*, these processes involve not only the individual, but the community as well. The community is highly valued in all aspects of Judaism; indeed, a *minyan* is required for certain central prayers. So, too, is community a necessity for the mourner. Without the support of other people, the grieving process is that much more difficult.

Already in the days of the Temple, there was a special gate and a walkway specifically for those in mourning. In this way, the community was able to identify those in mourning and offer them the respect and support they needed to grieve. "As they

walked, they came face to face with all the other members of the community, who greeted them with the blessing, 'May the One who dwells in this place comfort you. May you find God-*HaMakom*-the Holy Place of comfort.' Those walking in the opposite direction, former mourners who had made it through, affirmed by their presence the possibility of healing. Looking into their experienced eyes, the mourners found comfort in the knowledge that one does not walk the mourner's path forever."[1]

Rules restricting elaborate funerals, coffins, and the like were in place almost two millennia ago. The idea that in death the rich and the poor should be treated in the same manner motivated Rabban Gamliel to insist that all Jews be buried in plain linen shrouds and (what came to be) a plain wooden box (b. Moed Katan 27a). Through the centuries, following R' Gamliel, an intricate guide of very specific 'etiquette' was developed, clarifying the rules and everyone's roles. Jewish mourning practice was devised as a series of "graduated periods during which the mourner may express his grief, and release with calculated regularity the built up tensions caused by bereavement."[2] All of these were intended to honor the deceased and to assist those left behind to mourn 'Jewishly.' "In our time funeral homes have taken over functions that were formerly a family responsibility or that of the local Jewish burial society. Because these are business establishments who deal with families when they are truly vulnerable, it is important to understand that Judaism teaches equality in death: '*The small and great are there and the slave is free of his master*' (Job 3:19)."[3]

Interestingly, the Rabbis seemed to have had a sense of the need for healing

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[1] Anne Brener, "Reclaiming the Mourner's Path," *Reform Judaism* (June 1997).
[2] Maurice Lamm, *TheJewish Way to Death and Dying* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969), 77.
[3] Stephen Butterfass, *Religious Living on the Web*, On Death.

emotionally that echoes modern psychology. As Joshua Loth Liebman writes in *Peace of Mind*:

> The discoveries of psychiatry – of how essential it is to express, rather than repress grief, to talk about one's loss with friends and companions, to move step by step from inactivity to activity again – remind us that the ancient teachers of Judaism often had intuitive wisdom about human nature and its needs which our more sophisticated and liberal age has forgotten. Traditional Judaism, as a matter of fact, had the wisdom to devise almost all of the procedures for health-minded grief that the contemporary psychologist counsels, although Judaism naturally did not possess the tools for scientific experiment and systematic study.[4]

In the modern period, much of this rabbinic wisdom has been discarded. As Judaism was being re-formed, especially in America, during the past two centuries, funerals and mourning practices for Jews underwent radical changes. The shift away from tradition, in concert with the desire to assimilate into the larger "American" population, has resulted in death and mourning often being very lonely experiences. The healing process has become more difficult as modern Jews have abandoned the structured approach laid out for them by tradition.

In researching this thesis, it became clear to me that a re-evaluation is in order. The daily recitation of the *Kaddish*, for example, provided Jews over the centuries with an approach to grief, and a validation within the community that has, at its best, proven an effective way to show respect for the dead; to acknowledge our pain and loss; and to make a transition to a life without one's loved one. It is almost impossible today, however, for a Reform Jew to recite, if he/she wishes, *Kaddish* on a daily basis, as tradition would have it, within one's own community. This is not only because the mourner him/herself may be unfamiliar with the traditions, but also because few Reform synagogues have regular, daily services. Therefore, as a rule, the mourner who wishes to

recite *Kaddish* as per tradition, must place him/herself in a more observant setting that might well be foreign, in order to find the *minyan*[5] needed to observe this ritual.

The goal of this thesis is to examine the traditional mourning practices in Judaism; to analyze their underlying theological assumptions and the healing possibilities they present; to understand why Reform Judaism has rejected so many of them; and to evaluate which, if any, can be reincorporated into Reform practice. Chapter One will delineate the steps of the mourning process as well as their rationale in tradition, beginning with *kevod hamet, shomer,* the timing of a Jewish funeral, and traditions and obligations regarding viewing the body and embalming. Jewish tradition has specific ways in which to address those in mourning and they will be addressed in this thesis, as well. The section regarding the funeral will include an examination of the liturgy and *hesped*. The section regarding the burial itself will include discussion regarding *kri'ah, tzidduk hadin* and *Kaddish.* This will be followed by an exploration of the traditions regarding *shiva*, *shloshim*, and the eleven months of mourning that has been traditional Jewish practice. The origins of these practices will be explored by delineating their path through the Torah, Talmud and subsequent legal codes and responsa literature.

Chapter Two will examine current practice in Reform Judaism and consider ways of re-appropriating some of the traditional rituals in a way that would be consistent with Reform theological identity. It will conclude the thesis with some possibilities for Liberal Jews in the twenty-first century; including a discussion of the responsibility Jews have toward one another in a Liberal religious community. Finally, strategies will be

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[4] As quoted in Lamm, 77-78.

[5] Traditionally ten adult Jewish men were necessary to complete a minyan. Liberal Judaism, however, as an integral component to their ideological approach to Judaism, includes adult women as a full and equal part of a minyan.

considered for making this information available, accessible and compelling to congregants in the Reform movement.

CHAPTER ONE: TRADITION

The frightening aspects of death are, for most of us, that death is such an unknown. When will we die? Why do we have to die? What happens after we die? All of this keeps us in a state of powerlessness. The funeral, however, gives us back some of the power. We have rules to follow. There is a blueprint for us to use. We can take charge of this situation, even as we are helpless in the face of death.

1. Kevod HaMeit

Jewish tradition stresses the importance of honoring the deceased. One way in which we accomplish this is through: the retention of a *shomer* (one who sits with the body for the time up until the funeral, so the deceased is never alone; from the Hebrew word, to protect). Jewish tradition mandates that we protect the body and prepare to bury the deceased at the earliest possible moment.

a. Burial in Timely Fashion.

Jewish custom dictates that the dead should be buried in a timely manner. In fact, there is a positive commandment that one should not leave a corpse unburied overnight: "…. [you] must bury him the same day" (Deuteronomy 21:23) or it is an affront to God. However, "for the honor of the deceased it is permitted to leave the

body unburied overnight."[6] If close relatives require additional time to travel to the funeral, it is permissible to wait. Indeed, it shows respect for the deceased. There are no burials on *Shabbat* or Festivals, however.

Burial is among those acts of kindness for which Jews traditionally are said to receive credits in both this world and the next. This concept is not one that is part of the Reform teaching, although it has been part of 'traditional' Judaism. It was deemed so important that the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Peah 1:1)* "asserts that even Torah study, which otherwise is a supreme, ceaseless and continuous Jewish obligation, should be suspended to allow one to take part in a funeral and its preparations."[7]

b. Shomer.

In Jewish tradition, it has always been considered a necessity to have someone standing by the deceased between the time of death until it is time for the burial and to read Psalms and not "indulge in idle talk. In fact it would be better if [one] would pray for the deceased with the Psalms of David."[8] "Personal behavior in the room of the deceased should be consonant with the highest degree of respect for his [or her] person."[9] Included in the list of prohibitions regarding behavior in the room where the deceased is laid out are: no eating, drinking or smoking; No derogatory remarks, even if they are true. We are told to behave as if the person were present and to keep the utmost decorum. In addition, the Rabbis believed that the soul does not leave the body until it has been buried. Therefore one would retain the services of a *shomer*, who will

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[6] Chaim Benjamin Goldberg, *Mourning in Halachah* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1991), 118.
[7] Ibid, 73.
[8] Goldberg. 55.
[9] Lamm, 5.

sit with the body until the burial.

Part of the *shomer's* role is to recite psalms, as was mentioned earlier, during the entire time prior to the funeral, which means that the *shomer* does not go to sleep during the course of his time with the deceased. The Rabbis felt that this was a way to ward off some of the evil spirits that were associated with death as well as not leaving the deceased alone. In dealing with the loss of a loved one, the knowledge that there would be someone speaking the words of the psalms, keeping a connection between the spirit of the deceased and the heavens, seems to have been (and perhaps may continue to be today) a source of comfort for the mourner. "For Jews the recitation of Psalms has often served as a religious activity that simultaneously allows persons to feel as if they are actively doing something and makes them feel they are subject to the superior power of the Creator to whom these Psalms are ultimately addressed."[10]

c. Timing of funeral and preparation of deceased for burial

Our tradition is that no 'preservatives' be used on the deceased. We discourage embalming. God tells Adam "*For dust you are and to dust you shall return*" (Genesis 3:19). Therefore, Judaism believes that the body should be allowed to disintegrate and return to the earth as quickly as possible "While there are instances in of embalming in the Bible (see Gen. 50:26), the later authorities forbade the practice because it involves *Nivul Hamet* and infringes on *Kevod Hamet* and the preservation of the body. Today, for sanitary reasons and by the requirement of civil law, it sometimes becomes necessary to embalm a body. In such cases embalming is permitted as *Kevod Hamet,* i.e., to prevent putrefaction from setting, and to keep the body from becoming malodorous. Since in

most cases burial no longer takes place on the day of death, this is now almost always necessary.[11]

One may use methods of embalming when burial must be delayed for reasons such as the necessity of shipping a body to another city or country or when there is the need to delay the funeral until a mourner can arrive from far away. In fact, sometimes delaying the funeral can be considered as an example of *kevod hamet*, since it would not honor the deceased to have a funeral without their next of kin present.

We do not have open caskets, as some cultures do, because we find it disrespectful to stare into the face of the deceased. In addition, we are not to look onto the face of death but instead leave our deceased free to begin their journey to their eternal rest. Jewish tradition tells us to "reject holding up for display the physical remains of the human being who achieved dignity from the sum of his life experiences."[12] As the prophet proclaims, "May peace come, may they rest in their resting place" (Is. 57:1-2).

Additionally, the Rabbis frowned on this practice (B. M.K. 27a) because "this recent innovation mocks the tradition that the funeral is an occasion for paying respect to the dead, and that consoling the mourners begins after the burial. It is also an affront to the bereaved family, since the obligation of receiving visitors in the funeral home taxes them with social formalities at a time when their hearts are heavy with sorrow."[13]

We do not camouflage the casket with a plethora of flowers either, preferring to address death as part of the rhythm of life and to keep the funeral simple and avoid the appearance of anything resembling pagan ritual. The sweet scent of flowers in modern

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[10] Samuel Heilman, *When a Jew Dies*, 79.
[11] Klein, 276.
[12] Ibid, 30.
[13] Ibid 278

times is seen as a way of making it seem as though nothing has been lost. However, there are references to the use of flowers at funerals, specifically myrtles, in the Babylonian Talmud (Brachot 53a). Today, it is the accepted custom to place the casket in view of the mourners and without embellishment.

Instead of flowers, Jewish tradition encourages people who wish "to express sympathy for the bereaved family in a tangible way to give *tzedakah* to the favorite charity of the deceased or to the synagogue where he/she worshipped."[14]

d. The mourner

The assumption that the funeral is solely to honor the deceased is an incorrect one. The benefits of the funeral experience for the living are great. We learn that we are not alone and that we are not grieving by ourselves. As we walk the path of the mourner, it is easy to be overcome by sadness and pain. With the addition of community, we see that we are not on an island of sorrow.

In addition, the community knew how to mobilize for the family of the deceased. Meals were to be prepared for the mourners, food was provided for those who came to pay their respects. The way that we approach those in mourning is laid out, very specifically, as well. For example: tradition tells us not to initiate conversation with the mourner. Rather, we respond to the mourner's desire to communicate. In addition, the community comes to the mourner only after the burial. This is when, according to Jewish tradition, *shiva* actually begins. Prior to that, the intensity of the loss demands that privacy be respected while close family and friends attend to the needs of those who grieve and assist with the plans for the funeral. This period between the death and the

funeral is called *aninut.* "The bereaved is obligated to attend to the needs of the deceased [and] there should be nothing to distract him from these obligations. It is considered a breach of *Kevod Hamet* to do anything but attend to the deceased."[15]

But the tradition is clear that one is not meant to grieve forever. Indeed, Jewish tradition dictates that one not remain within the community of mourners for more than the prescribed time. Life has too much value do that. Death and loss are part of life. It is important to honor our pain and then follow the mandate to walk out among the living once again. But, even then, it is with the support of the community around us that the mourners re-enter the world of the living and remove them from the public assertion of their grieving.

Jewish tradition has always taught the importance of respecting and honoring the mourner. Even as Reform Judaism moved away from many traditions, there was an admonishment to respect the choices of each mourner. "At no time, however, should we speak in deprecating terms of the so-called "*Kaddish Jews*" whom only affliction reminds of their sacred obligations and allegiance to the synagogue or to religion at all. For, after all, our sages teach us: '*Mitoch shelo lishmah ba lishmah.*' Often people act from lower motives, but are led to act from higher motives."[16]

e. Accompanying the Dead.

The Talmud gives much weight to *leviat hamet*, accompanying the dead. There are several aspects to the *mitzvah* of accompanying the deceased to burial.

The obligation to accompany the deceased is of such importance that the Rabbis

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[14] Ibid 280.
[15] Klein, 274.

ruled it obligatory to stop Torah study if one is needed for a funeral. If one does not do that, he/she, traditionally, is in violation of the prohibition against ridiculing the helpless (*lo 'eg la 'rash).* Even though accompanying the deceased all the way to the burial site would fulfill the mitzvah, it is also fulfilled even if a person walks only eight feet alongside the procession (*Piskei Teshuvah Yorei De'ah 361:2).* If the processional is passing by, the Rabbis required people to stand.

2. The Funeral and Burial

a. Value placed on life

In contrast to many other religions, Judaism places a premium on life in the here and now. Therefore, the focus of the mourning process is on the mourners, rather than on the deceased. Jewish tradition is firm in its belief in the great value on life and so one is taught to approach death as something inevitable and, therefore, indeed, a part of life.

b. Funeral.

One cannot have a Jewish funeral alone. There must be witnesses, an audience, if you will. The pain felt by the family of the deceased would only be multiplied were there no witnesses, no one from the community to support them and to acknowledge that someone has died. A *minyan* is required, halachically[17], to say *Kaddish.* Thus, the emphasis always has been to encourage a large part of the community to attend

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[16] K. Kohler and D. Neumark. (CCAR Responsa. Vol.XXIII, 1913). 176-177.

the funeral to enable the mourner to begin the process of reciting *Kaddish* throughout the *Yahrzeit* period.

The idea of death is such an impossible one to grasp that the ancients believed we ought not, must not, attempt to share the same space with the deceased even while attempting to release them to their final rest, as we try to come to the realization of their passing. "To look directly at the face and body of the dead, is to be struck hard by the undeniability of the corpse's passivity, which makes it difficult to believe that a passage to another kind of existence has begun."[18]

Jewish tradition discourages talking to the mourners at a funeral. Greetings are not to be exchanged, allowing those who grieve to have the space in which to do so, without the need to share pleasantries. The presence of friends and family at the funeral is traditionally thought to be comfort enough. *Shulchan Aruch*: *Yoreh De'ah* 343:2 tells us that exchanging greetings in a house of mourning is like exhibiting one's good fortune (at being healthy and alive) in the face of another's grief and is, therefore, forbidden.

It has become traditional to recite psalms at the start of a funeral. If only one psalm is read, the most commonly used one is the 23rd psalm. Psalm 121 is an often-recited psalm, as well. Nowadays, the funeral service often incorporates poems, readings, favorite stories of the deceased in order to personalize the service, achieving the proper emotion and painting a picture for all who attend of who the deceased was and why he/she will be so greatly missed.

The aim is to celebrate a life well lived. Jewish tradition holds that *life* is the

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[17] Halacha is traditional Jewish law.
[18] Samuel C. Heilman, 76.

important piece for one to cherish and value. According to tradition, it is how one lives that determines who we are and what happens to the souls when a person dies. "The Zohar describes three dimensions of soul-*nefesh, ruach* and *neshamah* (the same word for breath)- and correlates them with facets of inner human existence.....Only humans ask (so we surmise), 'What is the significance of my life?'"[19]

The idea of the soul evolved over a period of many centuries. The Talmudic rabbis differed in their conceptions of what the soul was and how it was connected to us, our bodies and to God. "According to some, neither body nor soul could survive without the other. An apparently more widely held view was that the soul may have a fully conscious life when disembodied, which became the basic concept underlying belief in a medium's ability to confer with the deceased."[20]

The idea of the soul surviving one's death can be traced back to the five books of Moses. The Torah tells us that when Abraham and Isaac, Jacob, Aaron and Moses die, they are "gathered to their people." (Deuteronomy 32:50). Those who interpret this verse literally believe that the souls of our patriarchs join together in *gan eden*.

Since they are not buried together, the Rabbis interpreted this to mean that their souls gathered together after their deaths. "When Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron and Moses die, the Torah says of each that he expired and 'was gathered to his people.' The expression 'gathered to his people' cannot refer to death itself, for the phrase already

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[19] Elie Kaplan Spitz, Does the Soul Survive?, (Jewish Lights Publishing,. Woodstock Vt. 2000). 26.
[20] Ibid, 31.

acknowledges that they died. It cannot refer to burial for it is often followed by a description of burial. Nor is the phrase a reference to an ancestral grave, because Abraham, Ishmael, and Moses were each buried apart from their ancestors. Classic Jewish commentators understand the expression 'and he was gathered to his people' as a reference to survival of the soul."[21]

Jews are promised a place in the world to come in Jewish tradition. But, the tradition seems to hold that there are various 'neighborhoods' in *ha olam ha'ba (*the world to come) and that where your soul is as settled depends on your accomplishments in life. There is, however, a reticence in the Talmud to take a definitive stand on the afterlife. The Jewish tradition is, as stated earlier, "focused on life". Much of this seems to stem from the cultures that surrounded the early Jews, such as the Egyptians, who placed such importance on life after death. The erection of elaborate tombs within which the possessions of the deceased would be placed in order to bring comfort to the deceased is in direct contrast to the notion of a shroud and a plain pine box in Judaism.

c. *Hesped.* The eulogy *(hesped)* is of the utmost importance. Indeed, it is the heart and soul and center of the funeral. Even though it is forbidden to exaggerate in praising the deceased, the *Talmud (Brachot* 62a) states that it is permitted to exaggerate slightly, as long as it is within reason. The parameters are that one may exaggerate the merits of the deceased in areas where the deceased did actually participate, but it is forbidden to create a trait that did not exist at all. If the deceased gave *tzedakah*, the amount might be expanded during the eulogy. If the deceased was not charitable at all, however, it is forbidden to attribute it to him/her after his death.

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[21] Spitz, 33.

It may seem surprising to some that the *Hesped,* the eulogy, is of such a high level of importance. Actually, it is a very ancient custom. We hear about a eulogy in the *Tanach.* "Abraham, the first patriarch of the Jewish people, eulogized his wife, Sarah, and that has been the custom to this day."[22] David eulogizes King Saul and Saul's son, and David's friend, Jonathan. In II Samuel 1:19, we read, "Your glory, oh Israel, lies slain on your heights; How the mighty have fallen." The Rabbis of the Talmud tell us that it is important to praise the deceased, but the eulogy is also meant to bring the mourners to tears, as a release and an expression of their sorrow (*Yoreh De'ah 344:1).*

The purpose of the eulogy is twofold: The first part of the *hesped* contains the praises regarding the deceased as a public declaration for the qualities he/she had which were 'worthy" in life. The second is *"bechi*-expressing the grief and the sense of loss experienced by the mourners and the entire Jewish community."[23]

The idea that Jews value life much more than death is shown by the list of occasions during which the Rabbis forbid eulogies. Most obviously, it is when a death occurs on a Festival day or on the eve of the Sabbath in which case there are no funerals.. There may be one immediately prior to the Sabbath, however. When this occurs, it is not the practice to eulogize the deceased in the same manner as at other times. These restrictions are in line with the idea that "the joyous spirit of the [Sabbath], which devolves on the entire community, overrides the obligation and desire for lamentation by individuals."[24] It is the living that matter most here and it is the living, not the deceased, who are in control of the situation.

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[22] Lamm, 50.
[23] Ibid, 50.

[24] Ibid, 90.

The communal needs take precedence over the needs of the mourner. The Rabbis are very clear that the joy of the Sabbath and the festivals is for the good of the community. While there is, to be sure, concern for the deceased, the cycle of life that includes death cannot interrupt the holiness and sanctity of Shabbat and Festival days. It is still possible, however, to say something about the deceased, even during a Festival. Instead of words of emotion that are meant to bring on tears of grief, though, the tradition says that words of inspiration, from which the community (the audience) might be encouraged to grow, are more appropriate.

Jewish tradition does require that, in our eulogizing, we be balanced and appropriate. It is not permissible to overly praise one who did not warrant it. It is actually considered an affront to the community and to the spirit of the *hesped* to say things that exaggerate the deeds of the deceased.

d. Teshuvah. Our tradition is concerned with t*eshuvah* and forgiveness. We learn that God can offer us forgiveness but only for those transgressions committed against heaven "At present, when the Temple does not exist and there is no altar of atonement, there remains nothing else aside from *teshuvah."* (*Hilkhot Teshuvah 7:*3) [25] "In the post-Temple era, Maimonides is telling us, we have no means of returning to God and to those whom we love other than through the hard work of personal introspection, prayer and earnest attempts to ask for forgiveness."[26] For transgressions that are committed against another human being, it is only that person who may grant us forgiveness. Unless we have turned and faced those we have hurt by our actions and been forgiven by them, God

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[25] Maimonides
[26] Lauren Berken, *Parasha Commentary: KI Titse 5761.*

will not 'wipe the slate clean' and forgive us, as well. This concept is not always embraced within the more Liberal Jewish population Liberal Jews who perhaps perceive themselves as agnostic may not accept the validity of a belief system that requires forgiveness from God. The stronger one's belief in a personal God (or a personal relationship with God) the more likely it may be that they would embrace this philosophy. However, the idea of how we, the living, deal with the pain caused by the one who died can be a difficult issue to resolve.

When someone dies, invariably there is unfinished business with respect to the matter of granting forgiveness for past actions. While the dying person can recite the *vidui*[27] as a path to forgiveness, the survivor may be left with a feeling of regret and incompletion. This is where the concept of saying *Kaddish* for eleven months and on *yahrtzeits* can be helpful. The value of *tzedakah, Kaddish,* and memory helps one to allow the healing process to flow. As we continue the recitations through our pain, enables the mourner to forgive and achieve forgiveness, even without the presence of the deceased.

Our tradition tells us that the funeral is the 'last frontier' for this forgiveness. It is a time, the Rabbis taught, when the spirit is floating about, in preparation for the body's burial and the soul's ascent into the heavens. Therefore, a friend or family members may utilize this 'opportunity' to ask the deceased for forgiveness in the presence of other friends and family, before the burial has occurred. This helps to assuage the pain by focusing on forgiveness. In addition, the process can alleviate the anger and the pain in one's relationships, turning them into possibilities for healing.

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[27] Traditional Jewish confession recited in the moments prior to death. If the dying person is unable to recite it on his/her own, it may be recited for him/her.

"It is customary, after a death has occurred, for family and friends to enter the room where the body lies and speak to it, reviewing their relationship and asking forgiveness for any offense that might have been committed. Since relationships are a complex mixture of many feelings it is likely that one will grapple with emotions or memories that contradict the concept of eulogy, or only speaking favorably about the dead."[28] *"One is not held liable for what is said when suffering."* (b. Bava Batra 16b)

One obscure tradition has the mourner, during these moments, "to ask forgiveness of the deceased, at this time, for any harm or discomfort they might have caused him [her] during his lifetime." [29]This may seem odd in today's secular world. In modern society, greater weight is placed on private grieving and private forgiveness: sharing like this at a funeral may make us feel uncomfortable. The Rabbis, however, believed not only in God's final judgment, but also in the power of community to support the process of *teshuvah*. "When the mourner experiences disorientation and disruption, a sense of agitation and guilt, the *Kaddish* mesmerizes him with thoughts of eternal rest and quiet, and emphasizes over and over again the peace that God made in the heavens and the *shalom* [God] brings to people on earth. One...major technique of consolation in the *Kaddish* is the insistence, because it is a prayer of holiness, that it be recited only in public quorum, never privately."[30]

e. *Conclusion of Funeral.* The funeral service concludes with the recitation or chanting of *El Male Rachamim.* In it we ask "The Lord of many Mercies" to accept the spirit of our deceased and accept it into God's kingdom, accept it into God's embrace.

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[28] Brener, 76.
[29] Lamm, 4.

In *El Male Rachamim,* we insert the name of the deceased. Instead of the phrase, "of blessed memory" which we, traditionally, use to refer to one who has died, here we say the name followed by "who has gone to his eternity." The deceased is said to be flying on the wings of the *Shechina* on the way to what we pray will be a peaceful journey and a peaceful rest. The congregation is asked to stand for this prayer as if, in respect for the deceased, we are showing God that the one who is leaving us and journeying to heaven is worthy of the kindness of God.

"The prayer is self-explanatory. Unlike the *Kaddish*, this is a prayer in behalf of the dead. While it is not technically to be considered a 'lament',"[31] it is a request that our loved one be able to rest in peace. "Traditionally, the service is punctuated by prayer. In this context, prayer may be understood as a move from the powerlessness of grief to the empowerment of enlisting God's grace, an echo of the request to the dead for forgiveness, which evolved into a plea for advocacy. The adjuration is the *El Male Rachamim,* Lord of Many Mercies, among the most common prayers at funerals, which asks to send the spirit of the dead on it's way and appeals to God to accept it upon its arrival at its divine destiny."[32]

Through the chanting of this prayer, it is possible, even those for whom a relationship to liturgy may be distant, for a sense of calm and hopefulness that their loved one is, indeed, receiving a divine embrace. When one feels the full impact of death, there can be nothing more comforting than this notion.

f. Burial

Although the service is concluded, the burial itself is still to come. Those present

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[30] Lamm. 155.
[31] Lamm, 48.

are reminded that interment is to follow and the coffin as about to be transported to the gravesite. The obligation of accompanying the dead is highlighted here. The *mitzvah* has added honor attached to it because the dead cannot reciprocate. It is only through the living that the body may be buried. The coffin is carried (with the body being transported feet first) to the grave.

As the body is being carried, those in the processional traditionally read Psalm 91. This psalm contains words of hope that "God will order the angels to guard [the deceased] wherever [they] go"[33]and is recited with the desire that this will help the deceased on his/her to peacefulness. It is traditional that the procession stops several times: Either seven or three times, depending on local custom. The reason for this is evidenced by the name given to these 'pauses': *ma amadat*, "dramatic displays of hesitation." The pauses demonstrate the desire to hold on to the deceased for as long as possible; thus the procession "hesitates" in arriving at the final burial site and "at last the entire verse is spoken just as the body reaches the grave. The message is unmistakable: only when the dead and the living stand together at the edge of the abyss are those who still live ready to give "the angels charge" to keep the dead in all their ways {in safekeeping]."[34]

The burial itself infuses the mourners with a sense of helplessness before God that death reinforces. It makes one think about one's own mortality and is meant as a reminder to love this life as much as possible, as often as possible, because of the finite nature of human beings. "A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven....A time for birthing and a time for dying..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-6)

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[32] Heilman, 95.
[33] Psalm 91:11

"Jewish law is unequivocal in establishing absolutely, and uncompromisingly, that the dead must be buried in the earth. Man's body returns to the earth as it was. The soul rises to God, but the physical shelter, the chemical elements that clothed the soul, sink into the vast reservoir of nature. God's words to Adam are, "For dust thou are and unto dust shalt thou return."[35] The Torah is very clear and absolute in insisting on the natural decomposition of the remains. From the plain pine coffin (in the United States) to the laws prohibiting embalming, it is clear that Jewish tradition and practice requires that death be a continuation of the laws of nature and of life and that burial be in concert with these laws. "A Jewish funeral is marked by its simplicity, all differences between rich and poor being eschewed in this respect. The shrouded body is placed in a coffin wrapped in a *Tallit*, and the head is laid to rest on earth specially brought from the Holy Land. Jewish law does not approve of cremation, as not being in consonance with the respect due to the body which was one the abode of the divine soul." [36]

Jewish tradition prohibits cremation. Thus, cremated remains may not be buried in a traditional Jewish cemetery. One is not supposed to mourn the deceased if they have been cremated and no *Kaddish* is to be recited for them. In recent years, this steadfast ruling has been relaxed in some segments of the Liberal Jewish population. Indeed, many cemeteries have sections for the burial of cremated remains and permit funerals to be held, as well.

f. Kri'ah. A practice which is specifically tied to mourning is *kri'ah,* the rending

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[34] Heilman, 106.
[35] Lamm, 55.
[36] Samuel Dresner, *The Scandal of the Jewish Funeral* (The Jew in American Life), 1963.

of the garment(s). When in mourning for one's father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter or spouse, the ritual is to tear the garment in the area of the heart. Although the performance of this act has been a ritual for millenia, we are not certain of its derivation. There are several possibilities and it is a tradition carried on until today, even among Jews who consider themselves (or are, in practice) non-observant. However, the practice is not one of tearing the actual clothing, but pinning on a symbolic black ribbon. Many non-observant Jews may not do this at all, perhaps out of ignorance in its regard. Its observance has historically been of the utmost importance, although not mandated by Torah. "The obligation of *kri'ah* is a rabbinic institution. One who knowingly refuses to perform this *mitzvah* is liable to death at the hands of Heaven."[37]

Traditionally, the tearing may take place at one of three times: At the moment one hears of the death, at home or the funeral chapel prior to the funeral, or at the cemetery prior to the burial. "Anyone who is present when the soul departs the body is required to perform *kri'ah.*" Only the mourners, however, are obliged to perform *kri'ah* at home or in the funeral chapel. All of these choices have one thing in common: the tearing is meant to occur at a moment of intense grief. For *kri'ah*, the *kevanah* is key. Usually it is done in the presence of a rabbi and today it is almost always done at the funeral chapel with family close by as emotional support. Originally, though, *kri'ah* took place at the moment of death, as one witnessed the soul of their loved one departs from the body. The mourner knew what to do and how to do it. Then, no rabbi was needed to make the practice known or to guide them through it. The intensity of the pain of losing a loved one made this practice excessive however, and eventually the rabbis began to limit it. Death was to be considered as a natural part of life and Jews were meant to behave with

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[37] Goldberg. 83.

an "appropriate" amount of sorrow and modesty. It was the 'appropriate-ness' of the expression of grief that seemed to encourage the Rabbis to re-evaluate its limitations.

Even as far back as in the days of the *Achronim*, the obligations regarding *kri'ah* underwent change and the time for performing the *mitzvah* was permitted to change as well. "The *Achronim* express surprise at this custom, wondering why the kri'ah should be put off until [a later time than the moment of death]. Regarding the current practice of not performing *kri'ah* until the funeral, when the deceased is taken out to be buried, *Gesher HaChaim* (ch.4, note 1) gives the following explanation:

a. It may be that this is because not everyone is expert in the laws of *kri'ah*. Therefore it is postponed until the time when the deceased is taken out to be buried.
b. By that time, all the mourners have gathered. In the holy city of Jerusalem, the custom is that the children do not accompany their father's body to the cemetery. Therefore, the custom was established to perform the *kri'ah* when all the mourners are together."[38]

The practice of *kri'ah* is very firmly rooted in the Bible. Within the Torah, we read of Jacob tearing/renting his clothes when he hears the news regarding Joseph. (Genesis 37.34) In the Book of II Samuel (1:11), David rents his clothes when he hears of the death of Saul and Jonathan. David orders Joab and his troops to rent their clothes (II Samuel 3.31) upon hearing of the death of Abner's brother. Job (1.20), likewise, expresses his grief by tearing his garments.

Judging from these examples, therefore, it may seem a simple deduction that *kri'ah* is firmly tied to the expression of intense grief for the deceased. In fact, this is one possibility. But, there are more. In the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 340:1 and 374:4) the custom is explained as being in place "in order to arouse weeping and increase the mourner's grief. In addition, however, grief can overwhelm us and the ritualizing is meant to keep a sort of 'border' around the displaying of grief in public. "The *kri'ah* ... comes to take his mind off the death by diverting his attention to the financial loss involved in his tearing his garment."[39]

There are meanings attributed to this practice that are more spiritually oriented, however. The *Zohar* (*Noach 66* and *Zohar, Beha'aloscha*) compare the body to a garment for the soul and suggest that death is comparable to tearing that garment. Therefore, the tearing of one's worldly clothing is an attempt to connect the living to the spirit of the one who has been lost.

Wearing these torn garments, one is also kept aware of one's loss, thereby providing a continual reminder of one's obligations to the deceased. In addition, tearing one's clothes is a visible symbol identifying the mourner's status. This gives the community a way of knowing about the loss, providing the opportunity to respond to the mourner's need and to show respect for the deceased. The *Talmud* (*Moed Katan 3:5)* explains *kri'ah* in a way that seems to explain the emotional and psychological ramifications of mourning. As Jews, we have the obligation and blessing of honoring our parents. When we experience the loss of our mother and/or father, we no longer are able to fulfill this obligation. From this perspective, *Kri'ah* is an expression of the pain we feel

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[38] Goldberg, 88.
[39] Ibid, 88.

at this loss. The rending of our clothes can be deemed an expression of the broken heart we live with now that we are no longer living as the child of a living parent.

The idea is that "just as the death of a once intimate relative results in the world of the bereaved becoming irrevocably torn (required that) the tear that marks that recognition is never to be completely repaired."[40] As the words are recited the mourner traditionally pulls on the tear begun by the Rabbi, thereby acknowledging in what might be seen as a very 'final' way, that a death has occurred. "The grief we express at such moments taps the deepest wells of our humanity.....and the way in which we express it should be no less sacred."[41]

Replacing the actual rending of clothes by using a black ribbon was "invented by enterprising American undertakers"[42] and some detractors in the Orthodox community feel it is a much diluted replacement for the emotional experience of tearing one's own clothing. It has become, however, almost universally accepted practice in the non-Orthodox Jewish communities.

Since this is a custom that has such an intense emotional impact on the mourner, Rabbis of all streams of Judaism need to educate their congregations as to the power of this ritual. When Rabbis need to guide their congregants with regard to *kri'ah*. When they inform their congregants of the tradition and the power of this ritual, this catalyzes the mourning process.

g. The Kaddish

The *Kaddish* deals with life, not death or grief. Derived from the root of the

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[40] Lamm, 80.
[41] Lamm, 42-43.

Hebrew word *kadosh,* Kaddish is "in essence a sanctification of God's name."[43] According to Lawrence Hoffman, the Kaddish, composed before the year 200 CE, celebrates "the ultimate coming of God's sovereign realm." As Lamm puts it, "The *Kaddish* is a vigorous declaration of faith. It is one of the most beautiful, deeply significant and spiritually moving prayers in the Jewish liturgy."[44]

Although we feel a hole in our hearts, our lives must continue, even though the life of our loved one has not. *Kaddish* is a way to "reach out even further into the hole that the rip (*kri'ah)* created. We seek to redeem ourselves and transform our lives. We also seek to redeem the soul of the person who [is being mourned]."[45]

In the same way that Jews traditionally mourn their parents for eleven months[46] and all others for thirty days, so, too, does one recite the *Kaddish* during this time as part of the ritual of mourning .Jewish practice dictates that, along with restrictions which lessen as the mourning period continues, these traditions are in place to assist the mourner in regaining a sense of emotional equilibrium. Although not originally intended to be a prayer for mourners, since about the year 1000 it has been the custom for those who are grieving to publicly recite the *Kaddish* at every service during the period in which they grieve and on the days in which *yahrzeit*[47] is observed. It took on a level of importance that has continued to the present. The words of the *Kaddish* are familiar to most Jews, whatever their level of observance.

The first printed references to the *Kaddish* as a prayer for mourners are found in

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[42] Lamm, 43.
[43] Kolatch, 120.
[44] Lamm, 150.
[45] Anne Brener, 137.
[46] The recitation of *Kaddish* is traditionally counted from the day of death and not from the day of burial as is the custom when observing *shiva.*
[47] Yahrzeit is the recurrent commemoration of the anniversary of a death. Yahrzeit occurs on the

Or Zarua (written by Rabbi Isaac ben Moses in the eleventh century) and in *Machzor Vitry* (dated 1208). In it, the name of God is praised and sanctified. As we acknowledge the sanctity of God during the most painful of times, so do we renew our commitment to the awesomeness of God and to the ultimate authority of God over the cycle of human life and death.

Kabbalah went further in teaching that the *Kaddish* also has the power to redeem the soul of the deceased. "One who recites the *Kaddish* with all his inner power and conviction will merit the abolition of any severe Divine decree directed against him."[48] It was written in Aramaic. One reason, the rabbis contend, is to show how important the liturgy is. Aramaic was a language understood by all of that time. The rabbis felt it of the utmost importance that this liturgy be understood and therefore wrote it, not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic.

Why is it considered such a part of the traditional mourning process even though it does not address death? There is the admission that the mysteries of the world are known only to God and that we need to be reminded of all that we may never comprehend. In life and in death Jews are taught the importance of recognizing the limitations to our understanding of God's purpose for us. In addition, though, the *Kaddish* reminds us of the values that Jews hold to be important: that life is valued and that we are striving, with God's help, to be filled with *shalom,* peace.

Abraham ben Isaac[49] wrote that:

> ... we do not possess any clear information about [the *Kaddish*] from the early sages [in the Talmud]. Later sages claimed that it is founded on this verse in

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anniversary of the death, not the burial. (Orach Hayim 568:8)

[48] Lamm, 151.

[49] Author of Machzor Vitry, 12th Century codification of the law. He lived in Provence around the time of Rashi.

> Leviticus: 'I will be sanctified among the children of Israel.' And from what our rabbis stated [in the Talmud] about this verse, that the *kedushah* may not be recited unless ten men are present, they concluded that anytime ten people are assembled for the fulfillment of an obligation of prayer or an obligation of study, they must sanctify the occasion [with a *Kaddish*].' The *kedushah* is the recitation of the verse from Isaiah-'holy, holy, holy is the lord of hosts'; *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh.* And the word *Kaddish* is itself another form of the word for 'sanctity.' The *Kaddish* hallows."[50]

Since it is an obligation to bury the dead, one recites the Mourner's *Kaddish* after the burial. Since there is an obligation to mourn, one recites the *Kaddish* during the appropriate moments in the service and during the period(s) of time one is in mourning. "The graveside service begins with the *Tsidduk Hadin.* As a justification of the divine judgment, this prayer conveys the essential message of the burial service. The memorial prayer, *El Male Rachamim,* follows, and the mourners then say *Kaddish.* The service usually ends with the verse 'the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' (Job 1:21)"[51]

The *Hatzi Kaddish* is recited in various forms within each service, to punctuate the transitions from one part of the service to another. Indeed, the Kaddish originated as a prayer to separate various rubrics in the liturgy. "Certainly the living make no more profound transition than when we turn our backs on a fresh grave and move into a world without those we have just buried."[52] Thirty days *(shloshim)* of mourning the traditional time except for one's parents, for whom one year is traditional. The one year, twelve months, evolved into a "real" grieving time of eleven months. That is because the soul of a sinner spends up to twelve months in Gehinom.[53]Jewish tradition Throughout

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[50] Leon Wieseltier, (Kaddish, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., NY, 1998). P 30.
[51] Isaac Klein, A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice, 281.
[52] Anne Brener, 84.
[53] Jewish tradition explains Gehinom as a 'netherworld' where the souls of the wicked reside. Since one

life we did all we were able to do for our loved one. Now, after their death, Jewish tradition says that our prayers will help to raise the *neshama* of the deceased. The Rabbis felt that our reciting the *Kaddish* elevated the spirit of the deceased to a higher plane. "The idea of reciting *Kaddish* for the dead was encouraged by thirteenth –century *kabbalists* who contended that this prayer has the power to redeem the souls of the deceased."[54] The longer the deceased's soul remained in Gehinom, the more time the mourner needed to recite the Kaddish. "According to the Talmud, when the most wicked people die, they are consigned to hell for a maximum of twelve months. Since recitation of the *Kaddish* is believed to help elevate the soul of the dead (Sanhedrin 104a), reciting it for a full year would imply that one's parent is one of those wicked people sentenced to a full year in hell."[55] Performing this ritual for twelve months might lead others to conclude that the deceased was in need of the full measure of redemptive prayers; therefore it was symbolically shortened to eleven months.

The idea that it is the responsibility of the living to achieve a place for the deceased's soul in heaven is bound in tradition, in the concept of the eventual resurrection of the soul. Nachmanides wrote that "the final reward entails reunification of soul and body."[56] The most famous *midrash* used as proof text for the importance of reciting *Kaddish* to redeem one's parent recalls Rabbi Akiva:

> Once, R' Akiva saw a bizarre man with a complexion black as coal. On his head, he was carrying a load heavy enough for ten men and he was running as swiftly as a horse. R' Akiva ordered him to stop.

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does not wish to have their loved ones thought of as wicked, the period of mourning which is intended to speed them on their way out of Gehenom is shortened from twelve to eleven months.

[54] Kolatch, 123.

[55] Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy. William Morrow and Co., NY.,1991. p630.

'Why do you do such hard work?' R' Akiva asked.

The apparition answered, "Do not detain me lest my supervisors be angry with me."

'I am a dead man,' he replied. 'Every day I am punished anew by being sent to chop wood for a fire in which I am consumed.'

'What did you do in life, my son? Asked R' Akiva.

'I was a tax collector. I would be lenient with the rich and oppress the poor.'

R' Akiva persisted. 'Have you heard if there is any way to save you?'

'I heard that if only I had left a son who would stand before the congregation and call out *Barchu et Adonai Hamvorach, Bless God, the holy One-* to which the people would respond *Baruch Adonai Hamvorach l'olam Va'ed, Blessed is Adonai, the blessed One, for all eternity.* And if I had only left a son who could proclaim to the congregation *Yitgadal vYikadash Sh'mei Rabbah, May His great name be exalted and sanctified,* to which the people would respond *Y'heh Sh'mei Rabbah M'vorach, May His great name be blessed.* If I had such a son, I would be released from my punishment. But I left no son...when I died my wife was pregnant but even if she had a son, there would be no one to teach him.[57]

(Midrash Tanchuma, Noah).

The story concludes with Rabbi Akiva seeking out the son, teaching him the appropriate prayers and, thereby saving the fathers soul from eternal toil.

What did the tradition hope to achieve by having *Kaddish* recited in public daily for all this time? "Death does not end the relationship. Of course death changes the

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[56] Elie Kaplan Spitz, Does the Soul Survive (Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock. Vt., 2000). 53.
[57] Goldberg, 351

relationship profoundly. But there is still the possibility of saying what needs to be said. The *Kaddish* can be a line of continued communication, a line between the living and the dead."[58] Additionally, the mourner is only to recite *Kaddish* in public, because it "creates a fellowship of the bereaved in a time of profound loneliness and helplessness. It teaches, implicitly, that death is a natural, if often untimely, end to all life: that the rhythm of man has followed the same beat since the days when Adam refused to eat from the Tree of Life."[59]

By the nineteenth century, within the Reform movement, resurrection was rejected as a supernatural superstition. Along with that rejection, the idea, then, of *Kaddish* being a vehicle through which one might "save the souls" of our parent decreased in importance within Reform Judaism. With the removal of resurrection from our theology, the traditional conception of *Kaddish*, as well as the [delete: practice of] daily performance of this ritual, changed as well. What would be the point of performing a mitzvah for something that was not part of the theological teachings of Reform Judaism?

There are other possibilities for the reciting of this liturgy. For example:

> As they [the mourner] increasingly discover that their mourning is not a solitary experience of despair and anxiety but instead one that requires them publicly to identify them and stand amid the community as they grieve, they recite *Kaddish*. One might suggest that the recitation of *Kaddish*, the paradigmatic traditional expression of bereavement, is a 'rite of intensification,' an occasion that brings both the mourners and those who console them closer together and reaffirms the long-held Jewish cultural value that 'life is with people.'"[60]

3. Shiva.

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[58] Brener, 137.
[59] Lamm, 155.
[60] Heilman, 162

The funeral itself is traditionally followed by the period of *shiva*. These seven days (beginning immediately after the burial) provide the mourner with time to talk and share emotions and memories with the community. Surrounded by friends and family, he/she is taken care of and begins the road to healing through the expressed sympathy that surrounds him/her. The ways in which one processes the first days, the first month and the first year, are very different from those outside the Jewish community. We do not observe customs such as having the deceased lie in 'wake' for viewing, as some non-Jewish custom would. We do not embalm our dead. We do not traditionally cremate.

The requirement for Jews to mourn differently was already set in Deuteronomy: "You are children of the Lord your God. You shall not gash yourselves or shave the front of your heads because of the dead. For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God." (Deut. 14:1-2). "The custom of comforting the mourners is derived from Job 2:13, when Job is joined by his friends as he mourns the loss of his children: '*So they sat down with him upon the ground for seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him for they saw that his grief was very great.*' The point of this quote is that one is not supposed to say anything to the mourner until the mourner speaks first.

During the week of *shiva,* the ribbon, or the tearing, is but one sign of grief. Traditionally, the mourner is provided with a series of rituals for expressing their pain. Mirrors are covered; men refrain from shaving during this period, for example. "Paying undue attention to one's physical appearance during the seven-day mourning period is

considered a pleasurable activity and hence is prohibited"[61] By refraining from some of the outer signs of 'normalcy' (shaving, grooming), we are also not 'covering up' the pain that we are feeling. Often, the tendency for people is to take one's mind off of difficult issues by trying to forget them. The Rabbis seemed to sense that we require a period of time during which we confront the new sense of loss before resuming day-to-day life.

The *shiva minyan,* a daily gathering for prayer which would traditionally be held in the house of mourning, evolved because, although the mourner is "obligated" (in tradition) to pray once his/her relative has been buried, the custom has been that he/she not leave the house during the week of *shiva* . Therefore, the service, would, of necessity, be done at the home of the deceased or the home of the designated member of the family.

There is an obligation to recite *Kaddish* daily as part of a prayer service during the *shiva*, and since a *minyan* is mandated in order to recite *Kaddish,* and one in mourning is not supposed to leave the house even to go to the synagogue, the *minyan* comes to the mourner as another sign of the support and compassion of the community.

Although *shiva* is traditionally meant to last for seven days (*shiva* means seven in Hebrew) there have always been accommodations to that time-period for special circumstances. It is not only in our modern times that people were concerned about finances and loss of income, which staying away from one's work for a week of mourning might result in.

"If the family of the deceased is in desperate economic circumstances, its members are permitted to return to work after three days of mourning. In the past, when the Jewish community was less affluent, this leniency was utilized more

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[61] Alfred J. Kolatch, The Jewish Mourner's Book of Why, Jonathan David Publishers, Inc.., Middle Village, NY. 1996, 174.

frequently. Solomon Luria, a great Polish rabbinical scholar of the sixteenth century, was asked by a *melamed* (a teacher who tutored young boys in Hebrew) if he might return to work before *shiva* was complete; otherwise he feared the parents would hire another teacher for their children. Rabbi Luria gave him permission on the grounds that his livelihood was at stake and on the further, rather pathetically humorous grounds that since a Hebrew teacher's life is quite miserable, everyone would know he was not returning to work out of pleasure."[62]

4. Shloshim.

Shloshim, the thirty day period following the burial (*shiva* plus 23 days) was laid out as a time for the mourner to begin to venture out and start to return to the world of the living. Although there is a return to the everyday normalcy of work and routine, there is also the knowledge that the grieving is still in a very raw and tender place. In tradition, the mourner would not engage in activities that are entertainment oriented, but instead, allow him/herself time to heal.

In addition, the name of the deceased is read aloud in the synagogue at daily services during this time. It serves as a reminder to the congregation that one of their community is in mourning.

5. The Eleven Months.

For the eleven months following burial, the daily recitation of the *Kaddish,* in public, surrounded by a *minyan* provides a public recognition of continuing healing, while allowing for the process of return to a normal life to occur. "To be human is to remember. To lose memory is to lose a piece of yourself. To lose all of memory is one

[62] Joseph Telushkin, Jewish Literacy, 629.

of the great human tragedies; some part of the divine light within us goes out with loss of memory." [63]

6. After the First Year.

At the end of the eleven months, the bereaved is not expected to continue his mourning, except for brief moments when *yizkor* or *yahrzeit* are observed.Tradition suggests that "on the last day of *Kaddish* recitation, the mourner should receive an *aliyah,* A Torah honor." [64]

During the service that the mourner attends at the end of the mourning period, since it is a 'regular' service for all except the mourner, there are no set pieces that are mandated for inclusion. The mourners are expected to return to a fully normal life. The *Shulchan Aruch (394:1)* explains that "whoever grieves excessively [after the year of mourning is complete] is really grieving for someone else. Continuing back into life is the way that Jews remember that death is but a part of the continuum of life and "the entire pessimistic conception of life and death should give way to that optimism which made Rabbi Meir write down on the margin of his Bible, where it says, "And God saw all that He made and, behold, it was very good"—even death" [65](*Bereshit Rabba 9.5*

. While our tradition tells us that we are not to mourn excessively, the paradox is that we are also encouraged to let the emotions out. Attempting to rein in these feelings is tantamount to attempting to be a master over the proceedings and, therefore, over death. Acknowledging that, try as one might, the pain of grief cannot be fully prescribed, there are several occasions each year when the dead are memorialized. "The most significant

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[63] Arthur Green. Ehyeh, (Jewish Lights Publishing. Woodstock, Vermont, 2003). 133.
[64] Lamm, 163.
[65] Solomon Freehof, Funeral Folklore, (Reform Responsa, pp 174ff; "*Greeting Mourners*," Current Reform Responsa, pp 125 ff.

of these is *yahrzeit*. As is the case in all Jewish holidays, *yahrzeit* observance begins at night. A twenty-four candle is lit and, [as some traditional will say], 'the spirit of the dead person fills the room again for twenty-four hours.' One [would traditionally] attend synagogue services...and again recite the *Kaddish.*"[66]

In addition, there are four times a year (On Yom Kippur, and the final day of Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot) , when a special memorial prayer (*yizkor)* is recited in the Synagogue for one's deceased relatives.

[66] Telsuhkin, Jewish Literacy, 632.

articulated not with our words [only] but with our entire bodies....When we take part in a religious ritual, it connects us not only to God but to those who share our commitment, to those performing the same ritual across the globe. And it also binds us to those who performed this exact same ritual centuries ago, and to those who will perform it centuries ago, and to those who will perform it centuries after we've gone."[67] As we have moved further away from these traditions, much of the knowledge of what we have left behind has been lost as well.

As far back as 1913, it was clear to some leaders that the Reform movement needed to guide their congregants through mourning in a much more specific way than had become the norm "The people want to be guided by us, expecting our religious advice in matters which are of the deepest and holiest concern to them, when their innermost feelings cry for an outward expression."[68] It became (and continues to be) a source of Reform "ideological" concern, however, that personal choice not be forgotten and that, therefore, 'requirements' of traditional *halakhic practice* not be imposed on members of our congregations. What has happened in actuality is that lack of imposition has become lack of knowledge in many Reform settings Today, there is often a sense that Liberal Jews do not want to be taught or understand what traditions there are which are available to them, in times of need such as when a loved one dies. The result becomes, then, that there is, in much of the Liberal community, an inability to confront these traditions and make a personal choice.

Liberal Jews have not, en masse, 'decided' that they require a return to these traditions. However, there has been a return to a more traditional sensibility within the

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[67] Naomi Levy, To Begin Again, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., NY, 1998. p237.
[68] K. Kohler and D. Neumark, *Reform Responsa, Mourning Customs,* vol.23(CCAR responsa, 1913), 176.

CORRECTION

CHAPTER TWO: Reform

1. Classical Reforms

We no longer live within the confines of a small community as we did in, for example, the *shtetlach* of Eastern Europe, or even in the more self contained communities of 19th and early 20th Century America. As recently as 50 years ago, the concentration of Jewish people in "neighborhoods" in cities like Brooklyn facilitated the carrying out of many traditional customs, even as the 'religiosity' of second and third generations of Jews began to decrease.

In addition, as Jews lived further and further apart from their families, the ability to be present for a week of *shiva* became more difficult. Without the shared memories and the shared grieving which such times provide, the grieving process took on a very different tone, often making it much more of an invisible and solitary pain, since there were fewer to openly share it with.

In many ways, this separation from the traditional sense of community that Judaism was meant to provide is highlighted by the way we, as American liberal Jews, observe the rituals of mourning. "We are hungry for rituals because they give our lives a sense of drama and grandeur. They transform mundane routines into scared encounters and give us a way to express ourselves without speaking. A ritual is a prayer that is

articulated not with our words [only] but with our entire bodies....When we take part in a religious ritual, it connects us not only to God but to those who share our commitment, to those performing the same ritual across the globe. And it also binds us to those who performed this exact same ritual centuries ago, and to those who will perform it centuries ago, and to those who will perform it centuries after we've gone."[67] As we have moved further away from these traditions, much of the knowledge of what we have left behind has been lost as well.

As far back as 1913, it was clear to some leaders that the Reform movement needed to guide their congregants through mourning in a much more specific way than had become the norm "The people want to be guided by us, expecting our religious advice in matters which are of the deepest and holiest concern to them, when their innermost feelings cry for an outward expression."[68] It became (and continues to be) a source of Reform "ideological" concern, however, that personal choice not be forgotten and that, therefore, 'requirements' of traditional *halakhic practice* not be imposed on members of our congregations. What has happened in actuality is that lack of imposition has become lack of knowledge in many Reform settings Today, there is often a sense that Liberal Jews do not want to be taught or understand what traditions there are which are available to them, in times of need such as when a loved one dies. The result becomes, then, that there is, in much of the Liberal community, an inability to confront these traditions and make a personal choice.

Liberal Jews have not, en masse, 'decided' that they require a return to these traditions. However, there has been a return to a more traditional sensibility within the

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[67] Naomi Levy, To Begin Again, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., NY, 1998. p237.
[68] K. Kohler and D. Neumark, *Reform Responsa, Mourning Customs,* vol.23(CCAR responsa, 1913), 176.

Reform movement. The Ten Principles which were written by Rabbi Richard Levy and presented to and accepted by the leaders of the Reform movement show that the Liberal Jewish communities are examining, if not embracing some traditions that had been removed from Reform ideology/practice for decades.

One of the by-products of the past century's Reforming became the loss of the original place for change within the community. How can one "Re" form something for which the substance and the possibilities are not known? What parameters can we find that would address the need for choice and the need for community and tradition, as well?

Today, the custom of actually tearing one's clothing has often been replaced by the pinning of a symbolic black ribbon over the heart, where the tear would have been. The black ribbon is transferred from garment to garment as the week of *shiva* progresses. When the actual tearing was replaced by the ribbon, for example, it was thought that it would make it easier to keep the ribbon-as-symbol of grieving in sight, if the mourner could pin the ribbon onto their clothing each day during *shiva.* However, often today, the ribbon is worn on the day of the funeral and not afterwards. This is a departure that is further from the original intent of the tearing as a symbol both to the mourner and to the community. Even as this custom of utilizing the ribbon has become more and more widespread there are those who feel it is a desecration of the meaning behind *kri'ah.* There is, for these critics, a sense that one cannot and should not attempt to lessen the impact of the emotional pain by substituting a pre-prepared ribbon. The sense of despair that one feels in the tearing their actual clothing cannot, in this view, be replaced by a 'pre-cut' version.

Liberal Jews are not responding to the criticisms of the more traditional segments

of Judaism. Rather, the larger issue is whether the need of the mourner is being served by the changes in practice.

There seems to be a need for a balance between an expression of grief that might be seen as out of control (and therefore against what the rabbis felt would be appropriate behavior for Jews) and one that is "too controlled." The basic requirement is that, as we do the tearing, we recite the invocation, *Tzidduk HaDin* , which reminds us that "God is the true judge." Death is something that happens to all of us, whether we can understand it or not.

The power of this ritual seems to have been diluted in the liberal streams of American Jewry. As more and more Jews became assimilated into the Protestant-ization of America, the emotions associated with death have become more and more repressed. As a result, many Jews today choose to bypass this expression of grief. Either *kri'ah* is limited to the day of the funeral itself, with the ribbon removed after the funeral is over, or the ceremony of *kri'ah* is skipped entirely. The Liberal Jewish Communities need to encourage their members to examine places that may serve as 'containers' for their [Jewish] feelings in order to give them the opportunity to make choices. These opportunities are most necessary prior to the times of actual need, when it is so difficult to make decisions.

"In contrast to the way in which the responsible Jewish community, upheld by the strength and the consolation of their faith have experienced death-ministering the last rites, attending to the burial and mourning, first at home and later in the synagogue in open acknowledgement of the fact of death- the twentieth century has sought to play

down such frankness."[69] The changes in the ways that death is portrayed and accepted in modern times has played a part in the ways that the Jewish communities may look at death and, in addition, mourning: "In the twentieth century there seems to have been an unremarked shift in prudery; whereas copulation has become more and more "mentionable," particularly in Anglo-Saxon societies, death has become more and more 'unmentionable' as a natural process."[70]

When the Rabbi has explained the process and the meaning behind it, it becomes possible for the community to recognize the ribbon as a sign of mourning and empower them, as well, to the possibilities of participation in the entire grief process. They may then look at the larger picture as a signal that as the friends and neighbors of the mourner, they might be supportive in ways that they had not known before. One is that there could be a sense of responsibility to the mourner. Indeed, as long as the ribbon is worn, those with whom the mourners are in contact can identify them as still living in the sea of bereavement.

Often, though, the processes are either skipped entirely or enacted in a very modified manner. This is either because of a lack of knowledge or because of a mourner's actual choice. I believe that, in modern times, often it is the former. The result can be loss of the ability to choose a path of grieving that is meaningful to the mourner. In addition, one might suffer a loss without the support of one's community. The acceptance of death and the eventual healing that the rabbis intended our rituals to provide is connected to these practices. As Judaism moves further away from the outward responses to death, so too does it limit the participation we can expect from those around

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[69] Samuel Dresner
, 13.

us.

Today, when a *shiva minyan* is being organized, it is customary for the quorum to meet at the house of mourning and to hold prayer services there. If there is someone who can lead the short service, a clergy person is not needed. In the Reform community, oftentimes there is no one and the rabbi is called to officiate. This, in and of itself, may not appear to be a "problem" but when there are those within the community who can fill this role, the possibility of the mourner and the community to feel included as participants rather than as "audience" is heightened. There can be great power in being cognizant of all that one may choose to do in this regard. Indeed, one of the issues within the Liberal Community has been the lack of "ownership" and empowerment felt by so many Jews due to their discomfort within the walls of the synagogue and within the pages of the *siddurim*.[71]

In discussing the decline of *shiva*-observance in the modern era, Rabbi Samuel Dresner describes a scene that portrays what he considers to have been a "scene of true consolation" and support within the traditional Jewish community:

> It is an early weekday morn. A quiet residential street of the dynamic city is still enveloped in drowsy stillness. Soon life will awake in its silent and comfortable houses and noisy children, after a hasty breakfast. will leap through doors, schoolward bound. Men can be seen entering one of those houses. Their bearing is marked by reverence and solemnity. Sorrow has recently visited one of the homes on the street and friends are gathering

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[70] Geoffrey Gorer, *The Pornography of Death*, "Identity and Anxiety. Glencoe Free Press, 1960. 405-7.
[71] Jewish daily prayerbook.

> for the mourning service. Within the residence, candles are lit, tefilin and talesim are quietly donned and the voice of prayer is heard in the hushed atmosphere.

He continues:

> The friends are no longer individuals come to express sympathy, each in his own particular way, with the feeling that the degree of his own friendship with the mourners dictates. The individuals have merged into a 'minyan,' a congregation. The have coalesced into an 'eidah,' a community. Though this community is small in numbers, it represents in every religious detail the larger K'lal Yisrael of which each identified Jew is part. Thus does a community symbolically and actually share in the sorrow of one of its members. The grief of the individual re-echoes in the life of the group. No Jew stands alone in his [or her] bereavement, while his {or her} personal anguish serves as a wall between him and all those upon whose way in life the dark shadow has not fallen. A people closes ranks and encircles its stricken member with the warmth of brotherly sympathy.[72]

As modern communities grow more distant and withdrawn, within gates, locked doors and neighborhoods where one may not know those who live next door, how much more difficult is it, then, for those whose sorrow is not met with the support of a community? How do Jews, in this twenty-first century, attempt to break down those walls, both in a literal and figurative sense?

The Reform responsa written in the early years of the 20th Century attempted to

address how some rituals might be adapted or considered for the liberal communities:

> What does a Rabbi, for example, answer those who wish to know how long to observe the mourning period involving *Kaddish?* Originally, the *Kaddish* recital for the dead rests on a view that has no root in our system of belief;[73] but, like all funeral rites at a later stage, it assumed the character of respect for and honor of the dead. All the more it behooves us to do away with such customs and practices as still bear the character of crude superstitions. Accordingly, Dr. Solomon of Hamburg proposed at the Rabbinical Conference of Breslau to have the eleven months of the *Kaddish* changed into a recital during the whole year of mourning. Certainly, this ought to be generally adopted by the members of our Conference."[74]

The Classical Reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were making decisions based on the perception that increased distance from the traditional ideologies was an imperative. They "saw themselves as champions of the image of modern Jews as dignified, respectable, mainstream forever striving to be in accord with the postulates of reason." While they did, in fact, attempt to jettison some of the "folkways" and some aspects of traditional Jewish theology into the 'new' practices, the result did not always lead to the inclusion of these pieces of tradition. Thus, many of the rituals associated with traditional Judaism were withdrawn from Classical Reform

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[72] Samuel Dresner, 18.

[73] This refers to the idea that this ritual could keep our parents from the 'fires of Gehenna.' Moses Isserles of Cracow says in the name of Isaac of Corbell (13th Century) that it was felt to be unbecoming for a sun to regard his father as so sinful as to be subject to the full twelve months (as stated earlier in this thesis) punishment in Gehenna and therefore it became customary to cease reciting the *Kaddish* eleven months after his father's [and mother's] death. (CCAR Responsa 121, volume XXIII, 1913).

[74] CCAR Responsa 121, "Length of Tome for Recital of *Kaddish.*' Volume XXIII, 1913. p 173.

teaching. The disuse resulted in a loss of accessibility to the practices, about which each succeeding generation knew less and less.

2. The Principles and Reform in 2000

Rabbi Richard Levy, in his draft proposal for what was to become his Ten Principles of Reform Judaism, encourages us to "listen to the call of mitzvoth, not only out of our 'individual understanding of what is holy in our own time,' which Reform has always done, but also out of the ever-growing body of interpretations by *Knesset Israel.*"[75] In these Principles Reform Jews are encouraged to examine and, ultimately, look to the observation of many traditions that had formerly been outside the realm of Reform ideology. "The Principles advocate a disciplined commitment to life-long Torah study in the 'widest sense-biblical, Rabbinic, medieval, and modern texts"[76] as a way to enhance our relationship with God and with Judaism. Jewish practice is, Levy suggests, and a "major thrust of the Ten Principles is a call to bring a greater sense of *kedushah* (holiness), into our lives..."[77] In everyday life, as well as in the traditions associated with mourning, we have the ability to transform what can easily be felt as ordinariness of life (*Chol*) into something that shows the holy {*Kodesh*} in our lives as Jews.

What, then, does that suggest about Reform Jewish practices in the twenty-first century? If the ideas and ideals of Classical Reform are to be continued, how does the evolution take shape? Reform Judaism believes in the continual questioning of tradition They hold a strong belief in the autonomy of the individual and the dialogue with tradition to see what resonates with individuals. There then continues to follow a re-

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[75] Richard Levy, Reform Judaism, Winter 1998, p.18.
[76] Reform Judaism, Winter 1998, p.18.

shaping of practices to adhere to the needs of the present generations. How, then, do rituals become realities or even possibilities for a community that has not been exposed to them?

Kaufmann Kohler wrote in 1913 that one "must not lose sight of the respect and pious regard we owe to the departed and of the true sentiment of tender love and affection that must find its proper expression at the loss of the beloved." What proscribed ways are the leaders of Reform Judaism suggesting as the 'proper' expressions? Kohler continues by saying that "religion, above all, must step in to offer its balm of comfort to the bruised heart and to hallow the grief by special hours of devotion and prayer, and by abstention from the daily pursuit of business for a certain period, and by some expressions of sympathy on the part of friends and fellow members or to local customs."[78]

The questions remain: What, exactly, is meant by "a certain period?" And what would "some" expressions of sympathy include? Without specific parameters how is it possible for one who is in mourning to even recognize the possibilities that might be available to them?

"Where traditional Judaism was psychologically sound in its approach to death, much liberal religion has been unsound. We moderns have assimilated from our environment a sense of shame about emotionalism and a disinclination to face the tragic realities of life, both leading to unwise repression and emotional evasion. Liberal rabbis....are continually committing psychological fallacies. They arrange funerals in such a way as to make death itself almost an illusion.....The same noble motive animates the friends and relatives of the mourners when they attempt to distract the mind of the

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[77] Ibid
[78] Ibid

bereaved. Startling though this may seem at first, all this is wrong. It proceeds on the assumption that men [and women] should not give in to themselves; that indulgence in emotion is harmful; that the bereaved must be protected against despairing thoughts; that the tragic realities of life should be glossed over and avoided."[79]

One of the by-products of the movement away from the restrictions and theological positions of the Jewish past has been the often chaotic questioning that ensues when there is a death in a family. The bereaved do not know what is "proper" and what is "expected;" they do not know what THEY might expect.

Rabbi Moshe Goldblum, a Conservative rabbi, discusses how tradition dictated the details of mourning and.; therefore, the individual "did not feel that [he] has the personal right to deviate from the norms set down by Jewish tradition."[80] In his discussion, he suggests that "with the breakdown of the Kehilla system, there was a release from the discipline of Jewish corporate life. The exodus from ghetto living and the relatively sudden transition to the modern world, gave the individual Jew a feeling that he no longer had to accept the dictates of Jewish tradition. He could decide for himself as to how he should regulate his religious life. The deviations from the traditional norm are well known and most likely are more clearly evidenced in the customs of death rather than in life."[81]

What he suggests is that the only "organization" in America that can address the possibilities and teach the individual Jews, is the synagogue. Then, it follows, that the only personages who can affect this learning would be the clergy. How might the synagogue increase its role in the teaching and guiding of its congregants? What does that

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[79] Joshua Liebman, 122-124.
[80] Moshe Goldblum, Conservative Judaism.

look like?

3. Possibilities for teaching within the Reform Community

The following is a case study regarding only one part of the grieving process. It is not meant as an all-encompassing blueprint, but as a possibility for discussion and, perhaps, a point at which to begin further consideration.

I received a call from a man in his thirties. He asked that I officiate at the funeral of his mother. We made an appointment so that I might talk with him and his Sister and 'interview' them about their mother. I did not have the honor of Having known the deceased and the responsibility of eulogizing depends on my learning as much as possible about how the family would like their parent memorialized.

When they came in, it was clear that their loss was extremely painful for them. They acknowledged immediately that they were not 'observant' Jews and were not knowledgeable about Judaism or Jewish customs. They also added, however, that they wanted to honor their mother in the "right" way.

We spent an hour discussing their mother, her place in their lives and in the lives of their community and family. They shared stories and emotions were high as they recounted to me that they were the ones who nursed their mother through the several months leading up to her death. They took turns living at her house so that she could be at home and in the comfort of her surroundings.

"What do we do now?," they asked. "How do we mourn after the funeral is over?"

I told them I could not 'tell' them what to do but I would be happy to investigate

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[81] Moshe Goldblum, Conservative Judaism.

some of the opportunities available to them through Jewish custom. We then spent the better part of an hour going through the meaning of shiva and what they might expect in the way of emotional support from their friends and family. Although they expected a large 'crowd' at the funeral, they were extremely unsure as to whether or not anyone of the many people they were expecting at the funeral would indeed know what to do regarding shiva. They also were very uncertain as to whether or not they wanted to 'open their home' for a week. "We're not religious. We wouldn't know what to do every day."

I suggested that they might choose any number of options and that I would be Available to come and assist in one or more shiva minyanim during the week, Should they desire it. I also assured them that I would add a discussion to my eulogy an explanation of what shiva means and the part that the friends and family can play in helping the family through their grieving.

We left each other with the understanding that they would discuss it with each other and call me that night, so I might be prepared for the funeral the next day.

At 11pm, I received call from "Jack" who told me that they had decided to observe some form of shiva, to honor their mother, for the entire week. They had decided to 'open the house' each day from 4pm until 9pm and that they would like to have three shiva minyanim: the night of the funeral, the 4th night and the last night. They were nervous. They were skeptical. But they were looking for the possibility of an emotional support system that they had never thought of prior to our talking.

I did explain to the many friends and relatives who attended the funeral what was being done at the deceased's home. I explained shiva and I explained the tradition of providing nourishment, both physical and emotional, during this time. I gave a sort of mini-lesson on shiva-as-nurture.

At the end of the week, when I arrived for the final minyan, I was greeted by Jack and "Barbara." Jack hugged me and said, "I never expected anything like this. Everyone showed up every day, starting at 4pm, just as you said they would. They brought food, they cleaned up, they sat with us and they shared stories about mom. We laughed and we cried. I have never felt so taken care of."

After the final minyan, several people came up to me. They had been there regularly during the week. In essence, they said that they were appreciative of the learning that they were exposed to this week. It enabled them to feel useful, to put their own need to 'help' into play.

One couple, who appeared to be in their mid-sixties, said to me: "We have been going to visit people in mourning all of our lives. But we didn't know what we were 'really' doing. WE only knew we were 'supposed to do something'.

This was a very different experience for us. It gave a new purpose to our desire to pay respects to a dear, sweet friend who will be so missed and to be of service to their children, who have been a part of our lives since they were babies."[82]

This is, of course, not a conclusive "study" on the possibilities or the needs of any community. It is only one example of one family's decision and what that decision brought to them. But, I believe, as a place of beginning, the implications are great. The

choices can only be made if the community is educated about their options.

The synagogue as a "Jewish *Community* Center" can re-vitalize aspects of community life by addressing the universal and inevitable processes of mourning. Mourning as it affects a community. Mourning as it INVOLVES community. Indeed, mourning as a touchstone FOR community within a Reform synagogue's life.

4. Conclusion

I believe that as Rabbis, there is a place for taking responsibility for the education of our congregants in ways that, perhaps, Classical Reformers have shied away from. The idea that one may indeed have a responsibility to be involved in Jewish practice has not been a popular notion within the Reform, indeed, the liberal, Jewish Communities. But, it may be that popularity is not the motivator here. Responsibility does not always translate as popularity. As Jewish leaders, there has been a sense that asking "too much" would result in having a decreasing affect within the ranks of our congregations. In fact, it is possible, perhaps likely, that the reverse is true: Because we have asked so little of our congregants we have not only gotten less, but given them, perhaps, the notion that there was nothing to fill them up within Judaism. Without rules and without guidance, what keeps us united?

This is not meant to infer that Reform Judaism has not provided rules, guidance or a spiritual base for its members. It does mean to suggest, however, that there are large holes within the practical observances within Liberal Judaism. If they were solely the result of informed choice that would present one (clear) picture, but when this is behavior resulting from the lack of information, choice becomes impossible. We need

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[82] Yossi Carron. Case Study, Los Angeles, California, 2003.

to return the option of choice to our congregants.

Part of a Caring Community project within the synagogue might include community members who are available to "make" a *minyan* during the week of *shiva*. They might be available as teachers, leaders who set a specific tone by performing the *mitzvah* of visiting the house of mourning and bringing nourishment to the bereaved. There may be a "post-shiva" component to the Caring Community, which would participate in any number of things that might help heal those who have suffered a loss.

Post-shiva visits:

After the first week is over and the families go home, there is a void that is made all the more evident as the mourner attempts to walk out into a life without their loved one. When their community becomes a part of the healing process, it can provide a sense of hope that might otherwise be lost. A call from a fellow congregant, to meet for coffee or a walk; an invitation to join them for Friday night services; a walk; dropping off a meal; all of these are areas that can be a part of a Community that cares.

Kaddish:

When the possibilities inherent in the utilization of practices such as the daily [or perhaps weekly] recitation of *Kaddish* are taught, some members of the community may wish to observe the custom of saying *Kaddish*. They may, in fact wish to experience this in a traditional way, perhaps on a daily basis. Whether it be once a week or every day, the possibility exists for the formation of a committee that would be available as a support system to "make a *minyan*" each day. They would make a commitment to be there for

those in mourning and commit with the understanding and the *knowledge* that there can be no service, no *minyan,* and therefore, no opportunity for the recital of *Kaddish,* if they do not show up as they had obligated themselves to do.

Skeptics may say that Reform Jews cannot or will not make this a priority. Perhaps that is so or perhaps we are short-sighted and are not expecting enough. Many of our involved congregants, for example, come to meetings or classes more than one night each week. How much more would it entail to ask them to come a few minutes earlier to satisfy the *mitzvah* of comforting the mourner and being present for *kaddish?* How many of our congregants who volunteer so tirelessly for community-related events such as feeding the homeless or any number of social-action-based activities? I suggest that we incorporate the sense of communal responsibility to one another into the program-based considerations which Reform Judaism has based so much of its ideology.

This is in no way an attempt to denigrate the extraordinary importance of the social action that Reform Judaism does. Indeed, this is, I suggest, a natural connector to that social action. When we can re-evaluate our commitment to each other in a personal and inter-communal way, we are, indeed, accomplishing social action of a profound nature.

Which traditions do we pay attention to? Do we observe any of them? Why? How? What do we do about teaching our congregants when the notion of death is something that seems to be avoided in our modern age, until the moment we are confronted by it. By creating or re-imaging, the 'caring' way a Jewish Community has historically been portrayed, we have, as Jewish leaders, an opportunity to give the sense of *shalem*, fullness, to our congregations. The seeds must be planted and nurtured from

the inside out.

When the need for a connection to the Holy One, to the Creator, is acknowledged, the opening has been presented. Our task is to portray Caring and the possibilities inherent in both the giving and receiving of that care, in a way that excites, challenges and motivates our communities. Before we can expect the seats to be filled in between High Holy Days, we must put the tools in their hands and in their hearts: Tools that will enable them to examine the parts of their lives as Jews and as part of a greater whole than they had imagined before.

By taking a position, by taking a stand, we enable those before whom we stand to "know before whom they stand" as well. The modifications that occurred within Liberal Judaism were long overdue. There is still much to be done. But, along with those modifications we need to challenge and assist those we have the opportunity to teach. We need to challenge them with their own possibilities. And we need to challenge them with the possibilities that Judaism has at its core.

Judaism teaches us to value life even as we mourn the death of a loved one. Our process is a finite one. Yes, the rabbis knew that there is no way to put a cap on our grief. We must re-enter life in order to honor our dead.

Yossi Carron
Spring 2003

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Yossi Carron
March 26, 2003

Ezekiel 24:15-27

15. And the word of Adonai came to me, saying:

16. "Son of man, behold, I am here to take from you the treasure of your eyes, through (by) a plague/sudden epidemic[1]; You will not mourn[2] nor cry nor let tears flow from you.

17. Sigh silently, make no mourning for the dead, put your headgear on your head[3] and put your sandals on your feet and do not wrap yourself over your upper lip[4] and eat the bread of the people[5].

18. I spoke to the people in the morning and on the evening that my wife died as I was commanded.

19. And the people said to me, "Won't you tell us what these things are that you are doing[6]?"

20. And I said to them, 'The word of Adonai came to me, saying:

21. 'Speak to the house of Israel'; thus said Adonai my Lord: ":Behold, I will desecrate my holy place[7], the pride and delight of your eyes and the favored (place)[8] of your soul; and your sons and your daughters that you have abandoned shall fall by the sword."

22. And you shall do as I have done[9]: You will not cover your upper lips, nor eat the

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[1] suddenly
[2] eulogize; express words of grief.
[3] Possibly tefillin, which one would not wear while in mourning, under normal circumstances.
[4] "A mourner wraps him(her)self up to his lips and weeps" (Jastrow, p 1063).
[5] The first meal after the funeral is traditionally provided by the community for the mourner(s).
[6] "What is the meaning behind the way you are acting?"
[7] my sanctuary
[8] the longing of your soul.

bread of the people.

23. And your head-attire shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; and you will not grieve/eulogize or cry; and you will not give anything additional in your iniquities[10] and you will moan to one another.

24. And Ezekiel will be a sign unto you, as (all that) he has done, so shall you do; In its coming[11], you will know I am Adonai, your Lord.

25. And you, son of man, will it not be on that day (that) I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their glory, the treasure of their eyes and the desire of their soul, their sons and their daughters.

26. On tbat day the one who was ejected[12] will come to you, to cause (your) ears to hear it.

27. On that day your mouth will be opened to the ejected one and you will speak and you won't be dumb any longer and this will be a sign to them; and they will know that I am Adonai.

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[9] And you will then follow the example I have set.
[10] You will live with your own guilt (which caused this to happen).
[11] When the time comes and all of this comes to pass.
[12] A fugitive