HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

New York School
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Doctor of Ministry Project Final Approval

To: The Members of the Doctor of Ministry Faculty

I hereby submit the signatures of approval from my advisors and Reverend Ann Akers for my completed Doctor of Ministry Project.

The title of the completed Project is:

A BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP TO EVALUATE THE CLINICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUE OF JEWISH MOURNING CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

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A BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP TO EVALUATE THE CLINICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUE OF JEWISH MOURNING CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Doctor of Ministry Degree

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Chapter I

Statement of the issue addressed by the Project

Grief and bereavement are experienced by every one who loves and then loses an important person in their life. The death of a parent, spouse, child, brother, sister, extended family member or dear friend must be grieved and mourned by the person who is left behind. The process of mourning and the experience of grief is a difficult and painful journey during which many intense emotions are experienced. The process of mourning may be different in various cultures and religions but the emotions experienced are common to all humanity. Each culture and religion has its own prayers, liturgies, traditions and memorial customs to aid the mourner in his journey through the vicissitudes of loss. The funeral customs, prayers of his/her religious or cultural background provide some structure to the mourner at a time when the mind is in denial and emotional crisis.

The Prayers, liturgies, traditions and customs are intended to provide comfort and consolation after the initial period of denial and shock. Funeral rites, prayers and customs also help the mourners remain in contract with their spiritual life at a time when they may feel God has abandoned by God.The memorial traditions of Judaism begin at the time the person becomes aware of the death. These traditions, prayers and customs continue to provide direction throughout the period of grief and mourning and well into the future. These laws and customs are to assist the mourner in accepting the death of the

loved one, to recall the loved one without intense sadness or grief, and to find a way to honor the memory of a beloved one in their own lives. These goals are achieved over a period of months and years as the mourner travels on the road to acceptance and healing from the loss. Jewish mourning customs permit the mourners to grieve their loss fully. The goal of Jewish mourning is to affirm that the intense period of mourning eventually must come to an end. The memory of the deceased continues to live forever in the heart of the mourner. The mourner honors the memory of the deceased by living his/her own life fully and finds in the sacred gift of memory not sadness but abiding blessings.

The religious care giver in the Jewish tradition is the Rabbi and/or Cantor and to a lesser extent the entire Jewish community. They will guide the family through the funeral preparations and burial services and will advise the family on matters of Jewish law pertaining to the time of the funeral services, selection of a casket, writing the eulogy (*hesped*) and having other family members participate in the funeral service. The Rabbi or Cantor will also advise the family of the laws pertaining to the observance of the Shivah (period of intense morning lasting seven days) and will lead or provide leaders for the evening services that will take place at the home of the mourner. The Rabbi and/or Cantor provide guidance in religious laws and spiritual guidance at this time. They help the family make the appropriate arrangements for the funeral and interment.
Following the burial the family returns to the home to begin the intense period of mourning (shiva) which usually lasts for three to seven days. The family does not observe formal morning on the Sabbath, Festivals or High Holydays. The family is

visited by friends and family during this period and their daily needs, such as food preparation and care of the household, are provided by the community.

Mourners are forbidden to work, cook or otherwise to attend to daily activities. In the more traditional sects of Judaism, mourners sit on low stools and do not wear shoes as a symbol of mourning. At the conclusion of the shiva period, the second less intense period of mourning period begins. It is called Sh'loshim, which is the Hebrew word for thirty. The sh'loshim period lasts thirty days and during this time the mourners are permitted to return to school and work. During this period the mourners do not attend social functions that have music and dancing. The mourners do attend religious services but may choose not to attend the social hours that follow the religious service. The name of the loved one may be read aloud at the conclusion of services during these thirty days. This announcement is a way of honoring the deceased as well as informing the community in attendance that this family has experienced a recent death and should be approached with words of consolation. The extended period of mourning begins after the first thirty days of mourning and lasts 11 months from the day of the death. Beginning with the interment at the grave site, members of the family are required to say the Kaddish prayer. Strictly observant Jews will recite this prayer daily during the entire extended mourning period. Others will recite it when they attend weekly Sabbath and Festival services. A mourner is required to recite Kaddish for a parent, spouse, child, or sibling. Kaddish can be recited by other family members but it is not mandatory upon them. At the conclusion of the eleven months of mourning, the family places a headstone or permanent grave marker on the grave of the deceased. This is called an "unveiling" as the permanent marker is

"unveiled" by removing a cloth covering over the name and the date. This brief ceremony can be conducted by the Rabbi/Cantor or family members themselves. This ceremony concludes the formal period of mourning and the family is no longer required to say Kaddish for the deceased on a daily or weekly basis. On the anniversary of the death of a parent, child, spouse, brother or sister (called *Yahrzeit*) the name of the deceased is read, a memorial candle is lit and Kaddish is recited in the home and at the synagogue, and a gift of charity is made in memory of the deceased.

The preceding background information is offered as a brief overview of Jewish funeral practices and customs. We will discuss these and other customs in much greater detail in the remaining chapters of the project. The major customs that have been illuminated so far are experienced to some extent by every Jewish mourner regardless of their present involvement in synagogue life or concern with Jewish law. These customs will be explained both from a religious and clinical perspective in the ensuing chapters. The specific needs that this project will attempt to address is to find out whether these Jewish rituals, prayers and customs were comforting to the mourner and provided structure during this difficult time. After the funeral and shiva are concluded the Rabbi and Cantor may lose touch with their congregants as they continue to mourn their loss. The focus of this project will be to speak with men and women who have sustained a loss at least a year ago and are further along in the process of healing. This population was selected because the emotional wound is not as raw as in the first few weeks and months of grieving. We hope to find out whether or not the clergy care offered was appropriate and comforting during the initial phase of grief (time of loss through the shiva period) and beyond. The project will also attempt to discern what prayers, customs, rituals, and

liturgies were also comforting during the extended first year of mourning and if the mourner has continued to find Jewish sources and rituals that will continue to provide consolation and healing into the future. The project will explore other less known Jewish customs and rituals of which the congregant may not have been aware to determine if these may have some value to other mourners in the future. In the exploration of these mourning practices the project may prompt the creation of new prayers, customs and rituals that may be more relevant to individual mourners. These new rituals (should they be forthcoming) will be shared with the clergy in the hope that we can continue to provide compassionate care and guidance to the members of our congregation. The project will also allow those whose mourning is more remote to connect with others as part of the group process by sharing their personal experiences with these mourning customs and rituals.

The specific relevance of this project to ministry in a wider context is to explore the feelings and needs of mourners within their own faith community. All of the major religions have specific mourning rites, prayers and customs. It is difficult to find out from our congregants how the rituals and prayers of the church or synagogue helped or did not help to ease their pain of loss. Most congregants are not eager to share their feelings both positive and negative with the clergy that performed the funeral. They may have doubts about their faith after a loss but are reluctant to seek out their Rabbi, minister or priest after the funeral and shiva period have ended. They may seek professional psychological help with issues that may also have a religious origin. This project will assemble a small group to create a dialogue where these feelings can be shared and honored. I will be leading the group for six sessions. The information we will gather

may help clergy care givers to minister more effectively using Jewish sources for congregants who are in emotional and spiritual crisis. From this project the participants may create new prayers, liturgy or texts that will be of help to others who are also experiencing grief or are in the process of mourning. The project may also affirm that the rituals and customs that we have are comforting and relevant in today's ministry. The outcome of the group will be an avenue toward increased explorations of the journey through the grief process and how it has impacted their lives and will continue to influence their spiritual life going forward.

Chapter II

Principles that guide and inform:

"Life is a day that lies between two nights-the night of "not yet,' before birth and the night of ""no-more," after death. (Yalom 2008)

This quote is from Irvin Yalom's book, Staring *at the Sun overcoming the terror of death*. The Jewish view is somewhat different. According to Jewish tradition death is a night that lies *between* two days. (Lamm 2000) The first day is the one that is spent upon earth during one's earthly existence and the second day is after death in the world to come. Man's existence and demise can be seen as parts of life that are separated by a veil which divides every portion of life, from fetal existence , birth, life and eternal life. When death takes someone we love, we are like onlookers to someone who has embarked on a journey from which they will never return. We are left staring helplessly into this void filled with bewilderment, agony, numbness, fear, anger and futility. Judaism is a religion which embraces the whole of life. Death is a part of life. As in Ecclesiastes (3:2) "there is a time for birth and a time for death, a time to dance and a time to mourn." Judaism embraces both the dance and the tears as part of the totality of human existence. Death confuses us with its lack of logic. We cannot grasp how some live to ripe age and others have such a brief sojourn on earth. Death remains uncharted territory, a voyage which all of us will inevitably take completely alone. The accumulated wisdom of Jewish thought gives clear guidelines to lead mourners through these days of sorrow and confusion. Judaism has no miraculous cure for the agony of separation, but does have avenues that help the hurting heart to express its pain with love and respect. These guide-

lines can help us to return to our full personhood and keep us from becoming angry, resentful and bitter.

The Jewish View of Immortality:

The concept of the immortality of the soul has been part of Jewish Religious thought throughout the millennia. Each generation has had to come to terms with its concept of immortality. The purpose of this section is not to trace a detailed history of the Jewish view of immortality since biblical times which would be a thesis paper on its own. However, it is important to provide for the reader some background information about the role of immortality in Jewish religious thinking through the ages. The immortality of the soul and one's personal theology of death will no doubt be part of any discussion that will commence as the bereavement group begins its work. The belief in the afterlife of the soul and the resurrection of the body differ not only in historical perspectives, but between the various sects of Judaism itself. For the purposes of this project the discussion will be from the point of view of liberal Judaism namely from Reform and Conservative sources. The discussion of the Jewish view of death and the immortality of the soul will be a part of the project. The death of a loved one is a great loss for the grieving person. It is also a stark reminder of his/her own mortality. Judaism does not claim to have the answer to the eternal question: What happens when I die? Judaism does not demand the acceptance of a particular doctrine of faith in order to enter the world to come. Judaism is a religion based on law and the performance of the mitzvot. The mitzvot (commandments) help us to live in a way that we will be worthy of entrance into the next world, whatever that may be. Yalom writes of the "Mortal Wound," the wound that comes with self awareness. As humans we know that we will grow, blossom,

diminish and inevitably die. When our loved ones have made the final journey we are faced with the fact that we will also make that lone journey into the shadows. We experience the mother of all anxieties the anxiety of death. All religions have developed a way to ease and cope with death anxiety. Yalom believes that religion first evolved as a way of soothing the death anxiety and as a means to help humanity cope with the "mortal wound". Religions only secondarily developed systems for man to create societies based on law and morality. In Ancient Egyptian religion it was believed that the dead lived on in the realm of the god Osiris. Egyptians created elaborate funeral rights and built necropoli to house elaborate funeral chambers. The Egyptians believed that the dead lived on in another existence in the netherworld. The Persian texts from the period of the middle of the ninth century to the second century BCE speak of resurrection and final judgment. Jews lived in Persia during this time frame and it would seem plausible that some cultural borrowing between the cultures took place. (Gillman 96) Within the three branches of Judaism there are similarities and differences in the views of the afterlife and particularly bodily resurrection. All sects of Judaism do agree on one concept. We do not know what happens to us after we die spiritually. We are acutely aware of the decaying process of our bodies. We struggle with the fear of not consciously "knowing." During our group sessions we will talk about death anxiety in general, how it affected members of the group in their mourning process and what wisdom Judaism has to offer. Judaism as a religion celebrates and hallows the sanctity of life. We are never enjoined to hasten or to look forward to one's death. All the laws of Sabbath observance can be broken to preserve life. Once death has occurred Judaism does not do anything which will deny that the person is dead and only appears to be asleep. No cosmetics are applied to make

the body appear as it did in life. The body is buried as quickly as possible and in a manner so that its decomposition will not be delayed by artificial means such as the practice of embalming. Psalm 49 reads: “Man does not abide in honor; he is like the beasts that perish”. The only thing that separates us from the beast that perishes in the field is that we know that we shall perish while the beast does not. The knowledge that we will die is both a frightening and an empowering piece of knowledge. A simple view of death and its finality is the overwhelming message of the Hebrew Bible. The patriarchs in the Torah are laid to rest with the phrase that they sleep with their fathers. It is only during the end of the biblical period that the finality of death begins to be challenged by the mention of something beyond this life. (Gillman2006)

In the book of Daniel Chapters 10-12 there is mentioned that those who are inscribed in the book will be rescued and many who sleep in the dust of the earth will be awakened to eternal life, reproaches or everlasting abhorrence. Daniel is told that the meaning of this passage is a secret and will be sealed until the end of time. (Gillman85).

The idea of resurrection and immortality of the soul developed later in Judaism. If as the prophet Isaiah promises that G-d can “create a new heaven and a new earth” (Isaiah 25:8) than why cannot G-d have power over one’s ultimate fate? The emergence of a new G-d who has concern for the fate of the individual and would have the power over both death and life changed the Jewish view of immortality.

In second century Pharisaic Judaism the idea emerges that the body will be resurrected after death. This is an enlargement of the small amount of attention it receives in the book of Daniel. In the Dead Sea Scrolls in “The Messiah Apocalypse” (100-80 BCE) there is a section which appears later in rabbinic liturgy:

*For He will heal the sick, **revive the dead**, and give good news to the poor.*

From this point in Jewish history, G-d is envisioned as more powerful than death itself. The concept of the immortality of the soul enters Jewish thought during the end of the biblical age and the beginning of rabbinic Judaism. (Gillman105) The soul is an entity which exists distinct from the body and can have an existence independent of the body after death. This view that humans possess both a corporal body and a non-corporal soul had a great impact on the development of religions, particularly its adoption as doctrine by the Christian Church. Judaism did not fully accept this dual concept. Maimonides believed in bodily resurrection although he also believed the ultimate destiny of man's fate was for the soul alone. His contribution to the idea that the soul embarks on a spiritual journey after death was embraced by liberal Jews for whom bodily resurrection was not a plausible belief.

The late eighteenth century with the coming of the Enlightenment for the Jews and the political counterpart of the Emancipation transformed Jewish thinking about resurrection and immortality. The Emancipation enabled Jews to read and study other books, enter universities and to apply these ways of understanding the world to Judaism. This knowledge brought with it new doctrines about belief in bodily resurrection and an affinity for more emphasis on the immortality of the soul. In the process of this project the aspect of the immortality of the soul and what that means will be the subject of at least one of our group meetings. When we lose someone we love, whose life was entwined with ours, we confront our own non-being. At this point in time we can not avoid the issue of our own mortality. After we have witnessed the demise of someone we

love and wish to have with us forever we are forced to think of our own finitude and what we will do with the time we have left.

Although we will never know what lies beyond the portal of death we do know that we shall enter it. We cannot avoid it although we may do our best to delay it, forget about it and deny it. Knowing that our days here on earth are numbered our death anxiety can help us to form a plan for life energy. (Yalom2008) Yalom, who does not believe in a caring omnipresent, omnipotent God, or in the immortality of the soul, still believes passionately that his life has meaning in and of itself. He believes in human generated doctrines of wisdom, morality and loving relationships with those around him. His "non theology of theology" has brought him to the same place as someone whose theology is God based. The difference is that Yalom cannot make the leap of faith that religion requires, namely that we continue to live in ways that we do not understand, as part of a continuum of life that cannot be destroyed and is part of the natural order. (Yalom 192)

In John Hick's Death and Eternal Life he attempts to unify the paradox of man's existence that to accept death as finality is to revert to chaos: "Any religious understanding of human existence-not merely of ones' own existence but of the life of humanity as a whole- positively requires some kind of immortality belief and would be radically incoherent without it." (Yalom2008)

Although I have discussed at great length the concept of the impact our mortality has upon our religious beliefs and practices, this project will also study other aspects of Jewish mourning practices. It is my intention not to ignore the issue of each person's own death anxiety and how it was changed after the death of a loved one. We will also

discuss in the group setting, the periods of mourning that are experienced during the grieving process for their value in the clinical aspects of the project.

Period One: The period between death and burial (Aninut). This is the time of greatest despair. Social amenities and major religious responsibilities are cancelled. The mourner is literally not in a mental state that is receptive to consoling. This time the mourner should be allowed to grieve and does not have to respond to greetings or engage in prayer. The wound is so fresh that nothing can soothe it. The mourner's only task is to make the appropriate arrangements for the funeral. After the burial, during the first days of Shivah, the mourner is left to accept the finality of the death and to fully embrace the depth of his/her loss.

Towards the end of the Shiva period the mourner may begin to enter a new state of mind where he/she is able to talk about the loss and to be accepting of words of comfort from family and friends. He/she may begin to be able to participate in the minyan service and reciting Kaddish. The third stage is the period of thirty days following the burial, the stage of *Sh'loshim*. The mourner slowly leaves the protection of his/her house and rejoins society slowly. The final stage is the twelve month period (which includes the *Sh'loshim) during* which the mourner returns to work and social activities. The mourner says Kaddish during this entire period. The history, meaning and purpose of the Kaddish will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 as it is a very important part of Jewish mourning prayers.

In summary, the religious principles that are pertinent to this project will be those that have had an impact, either positive or negative, on the mourner. The customs and traditions will be explained by the group leader to the group participants so that they have an idea of the purpose for which they were originally **i**ntended. The members of the group will have a chance to explore their own experiences and if they wish they can share them with the group.

Clinical Principles Pertinent to the Project:

Ethnologist Konrad Lorenz (1963) described this grief-like behavior in the separation of a goose from its mate. The first response to the disappearance of the partner consists in the anxious attempt to find him again. The goose moves about restlessly by day and night, flying great distances and visiting places where the partner might be found uttering the tri-syllable long-distance call. The searching expeditions are extended farther and farther and quite often the searcher itself gets lost, or succumbs to an accident. All the objective observable characteristics of the goose's behavior on losing its mate are roughly identical with human grief. (Lorenz, 1963, quoted in Parkers, 2001, p.44) This tender paragraph about loss of a mate in the animal kingdom serves to remind us how devastating a loss is for a human being. The bird longs for the mate. The human being has the added burden of knowing that eventually the relationship in which they have so much invested will end with the death or one or the other. The way to value life, the way to feel compassion for others, the way to love anything with greatest depth is to be aware that these experiences are destined to be lost. (Yalom147)

The attachments that we make as humans are necessary not only for our physical survival but our mental and spiritual health. These attachments cause us to experience the unique features of grieving that are common only to human beings. All humans no matter where they reside or in what culture they are raised report that upon the death of a loved one the initial reactions are similar. The initial attempt is to regain the lost love object by denying the death. If the lost object cannot be regained then there is a belief that there is an afterlife where they can be reunited. (Worden16)

Normal grief is identified by George Engel (1961) in his essay published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* "grief represents a departure from the state of health and well being, and just as healing is necessary in the physical realm in order to bring the body back into homeostatic balance, a period of time is likewise needed to return the mourner to a similar state of psychological equilibrium." (Worden16)

Worden defines the difference between grief and mourning and bereavement. Grief is the *experience* of one who has lost a loved one to death. Mourning is the term applied to the *process* that occurs when adapting to the death of the person. Bereavement defines the *loss* to which the person is attempting to adapt.

The project will use the four clinical stages of mourning as described by J. William Worden in his book Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy to interface with the Jewish mourning customs, prayers and liturgies used at these various stages in the process.

The first phase in the clinical period of mourning is one of numbness and denial that occurs shortly after the loss. The fact that the loss has occurred can be denied for brief periods during this time. This denial may afford the mourner the time to make

arrangements before the real scope of the loss is grasped. This is the period that in Judaism is called *Aninut.*

The second period is the time after the burial when the loss can no longer be denied and the mourner yearns for the lost one to return. This corresponds to the Shivah and Sh'loshim periods. The psychological wound is experienced when the mourner realizes that the loss is permanent and the deceased will never return. Phase three is the period of disorganization and despair, when returning to the tasks of living is difficult or overwhelming for the mourner. The final or fourth phase is when the mourner can begin to reorganize his/her life and begin to function without the presence of the deceased. The deceased continues as an image in the mind of the mourner. The mourner is able to begin to cultivate new loving relationships. These stages are not distinct in time periods but may overlap or even regress as the mourning process continues. In Judaism, the first year of mourning would include tasks one through three. The completion of task four can take much longer, particularly for a spouse or child.

Mourning is a process toward adaptation to life without the beloved person's physical presence. The mourner must come to terms emotionally by first accepting the fact that the person is dead and that death is an irreversible event. Grief is a cognitive process which causes the mourner to think about the deceased, his/her experience of loss and how the world will be restructured by the loved ones absence. Clinically it is called grief work because of the difficulty of the process and the pain that is involved before the healing can take place.

This work of grieving begins with the task of accepting that the person is dead and will not return. Judaism supports this task by insisting on a speedy burial, no cosmetic enhancement of the body, simple caskets that will disintegrate within the earth and no public viewing of the remains. It is normal in the first days of mourning to long for a reunion with the deceased. Gradually these feelings should pass as one accepts the finality of the loss.

The second task is to process the pain of grief. The pain of grief is manifested both emotionally and physically. The following are common physical manifestations of grief: hollowness in he stomach, tightness in the chest, tightness in the throat, oversensitivity to noise, sense of depersonalization, breathlessness, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy and dry mouth. (Worden p. 24) The cognitive manifestations of grief pain are: disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, and unusual behaviors. The more common altered behaviors are: sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, sighing, restless hyperactivity and frequent crying.

The religious care giver should be aware of these manifestations of grief and understand that they are not unusual in times of severe psychological stress. The mourner needs to go through the pain of grief in order to get the grief work done. (Parkes 1972). Anything that continually causes the mourner to avoid the pain may contribute to a prolonged morning period. During the first year of mourning Judaism shows special regard for the mourner and the mourner's family. The mourner is encouraged to engage in frequent conversation about the deceased and about the loss that they are feeling.

The third task of mourning is to make adjustments in three areas of the mourner's life.

The death of a loved one affects day to day functioning in the world, the mourner's sense of self and the spiritual beliefs and assumptions about the world that may come into question. These adjustments take time and effort on the part of the mourner. The mourner must work at finding new meaning in life, even in the face of loss. This task may require that the mourner develop new skills and to see themselves as persons without their former family member around them. It is in this stage that one can get "stuck". Failure to adapt to the loss can cause the mourner to dwell on their own helplessness and hinder there ability to regain or learn new coping skills.

The final task of mourning is defined by Worden as "withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in another relationship". (50).

The mourner must find a way to stay emotionally connected to the deceased in a way that will enable him/her to embark on a new life. The goal of Jewish Mourning practices is to reach this goal in a reasonable amount of time. Judaism provides for a year of formal mourning. Grieving time tables are only an approximation. Each person's grief journey is unique. The important thing to remember is not the amount of time the mourner spends in grief work, but the healing that is taking place. After the formal year of mourning is completed the deceased is remembered on Yom Kippur, the Three Festivals (Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot). These High Holyday and Festival services have a section within them for a memorial service when we call to mind those we love who are no longer with us. We recite special memorial prayers and say Kaddish. We make a place for them in our heart through memory. We do not ignore the fact that at these holiday times we feel their absence more keenly. On the anniversary of the death of a loved one we also light a memorial candle, and make a charitable donation in their

memory. Judaism reminds us that we perpetuate the memory of our beloved dead by doing deeds of loving kindness, giving charity and engaging in study. These acts give us a way to continue to "have" what we have lost. This is one of the goals of grieving. Death also is a great teacher. We learn that even a long life is just a small amount of time in the cosmos. The knowledge that we are here for a short stay can influence the way we relate to our spouses, our children, our parents and our friends. In the group sessions I plan to draw on this clinical knowledge of grief counseling to guide our sessions. We will discuss each of these stages and how Jewish mourning rituals and customs interface with these clinical principles of grief counseling and therapy. At the conclusion of the project we will report and discuss the outcomes of the sessions and compare how the clinical and spiritual principals related to each other.

Chapter III

The goal of this project is to determine whether or not Jewish mourning rituals, prayers and customs actually provided comfort and healing to the mourners who observed them. In order to find this information out the method of carrying out the project was to find a group that would meet the criteria for the project. The group would need to be comprised of persons who had sustained a significant loss. Specifically the loss would be a parent, child, spouse, partner or friend. The other criteria were that the members of the group would not have experienced this loss within six months or less from the beginning of the project. Members of the group were not restricted as to age or gender. Rabbi Bennett Miller, (Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, New Brunswick, NJ, one of the mentors for this project offered to gather a list of congregants from his synagogue membership who would meet the criteria for the group. Rabbi Miller also offered a room in the temple where we could meet for the six sessions. Rabbi Miller sent the letter under his signature on October 21, 2009 to those members who would qualify to be part of the group. The following is the text of the letter that was sent:

Dear _____,

I am extending an invitation to you to be a part of a support group of those in our Temple Family who have experienced the death of a close family relative or friend during the past two years.

The group will be led by Cantor Lee Coopersmith who served Anshe Emeth as its Cantor from 1987-1992 and will meet for six sessions. The focus of the group will

consist of exploring the meaning and power of various Jewish mourning customs, prayers, rituals and melodies associated with grief and mourning and how these Jewish spiritual resources have influenced their grief and bereavement process. The group will honor each person's grief as a unique journey with respect and confidentiality. The group will meet for six weeks on Sunday mornings at the Temple from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon beginning on Sunday December 6th. The format will be three fold: The group will meet for a brief coffee hour. Cantor Coopersmith will speak about the particular area of Jewish practice or text topics to be covered during the session with questions and answers and comments from the group. The session will conclude with a sharing session where participants can share and listen to others in the group who are coping with their loss.

Of course if you have any other questions, I will be happy to speak to you about them.

I hope you will want to participate in this group. I believe you will find it of interest and also will be beneficial to you. Cantor Coopersmith will be in touch with you.

Very sincerely,

Bennett F. Miller

Rabbi

We were hoping that we would receive a positive response from enough people to assemble a group of six to eight participants. There were originally ten responses to the letter. I contacted each person who responded and spoke with them to see if the group would be a good fit for them. I explained that this was not a therapy group in the traditional sense, although the group experience may in fact have a therapeutic affect. I

also explained how members of the group would be asked to share their experiences with various mourning customs and rituals and how they might have influenced their grief journey. In each session, I would be using about thirty to fourty minutes of the hour and forty five minute session to give a didactic overview of the Jewish mourning rituals that we were going to discuss in that session. We would then have a brief question and answer session. The final part of the session would give the participants the opportunity to share their feelings—either positive, negative or neutral about these particular mourning customs. Since some time had passed since the death, it was my expectation that the members of the group would be able to step back and recall these various rituals and be able to verbalize what was going on at an emotional level at that time. We would also be evaluating the value of these customs from a clinical standpoint and how they were important in moving through the four tasks of bereavement as set forth in Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, (Worden2009)

These stages are:

- Accepting the reality of the loss
- Processing the pain of grief
- Adjusting to a world without the deceased
- Finding an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life. 2 (Worden p. 42-53)

I spoke with each of the ten respondents. Three of the ten respondents indicated that they would be interested in the group but were going to be on vacation during part or most of the time the group would be in session. The remaining seven women agreed to be part of the group and to make every effort to attend all six sessions. Unfortunately one of the

women in the group had a serious fall and was not able to continue. The group ultimately consisted of six women, ranging in age from the mid forties to late sixties. I will refer to the participants by number rather than pseudonyms. Participant number one lost both of her parents in a one month period. Participant number two was widowed four years ago. Her husband died at the age of 55 from an aggressive cancer. Participant number three had lost one of her parents six months ago. Eight years earlier she experienced the death of her one day old twins. The death of her parent had reactivated that previous tragic loss. Participant number four was widowed a year and a half ago. Her husband died of cancer. Participant number 5 had lost her husband about a year and half previously also from cancer. Participant number six was widowed about nine months ago when her husband was killed in a horrific car accident. His body was burned beyond recognition and she was unable to view his body.

The first meeting of the group was held on December 6, 2009. I had coffee and donuts set up in the temple's library. The group arrived and I gave each of the participants a name tag to wear for the first meeting. Some of the group already knew each other from temple activities but they were not socially friendly with each other. After about fifteen minutes we moved into a conference room with a square table. I introduced myself to the group and restated what I had discussed with them over the phone about the purpose of the group and its relationship to my D.Min project. I also asked each of the participants to agree to a pledge of confidentially of anything that was said by the group in the room. I also pledged my confidentiality to the group. I also told the group that I would be using the information gathered from our sessions as part of my Doctor of Ministry Project for Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Post Graduate Center for Mental

Health in New York City. Everyone agreed to the guidelines and we began our first session together. The participants introduced themselves and told the group the person(s) for whom they were mourning and how much time had expired since the death. Some of the participants shared stories of how their loved ones died, others did not. This took about a half hour of our first meeting time. There was a large amount of material regarding Jewish mourning customs that I wanted to cover in the didactic portion of the session in our six meetings. I had to make a decision as to how I would organize this material. I wanted to use the order of the topics as a way to help the group to gradually develop trust among each other and with me. I chose the Kaddish Prayer because it is the prayer that is usually associated with the dead. The prayer itself makes no mention of death. It is a prayer which sanctifies Go-d's name even in the midst of great sorrow and personal loss. The prayer is in Aramaic, not Hebrew. The very sound and meter of the language evokes an emotional response from Jews whether they are reciting it or just listening to it. I hoped that by starting with something that was familiar the group would feel comfortable. I decided to put off the more emotionally charged topics such as the funeral, interment and shiva for later sessions.

Session #1 December 6, 2009

Saying Kaddish

The word Kaddish comes from the Hebrew Root *l'kadeysh* to make holy. Kaddish is an ancient Aramaic Prayer dating from Geonic Times (seventh to ninth centuries CE) it was originally a doxology recited at the conclusion of Talmudic study in the Babylonian Academies. Later it was integrated into the liturgy as part of the service.

- The Kaddish has five forms:

  The Burial Kaddish recited at the graveside. It has references to the messianic redemption and resurrection of the dead,) not usually recited now by liberal Jews.)

- Scholars Kaddish recited after Torah study.
- Half or chatzi Kaddish is recited at various transition points in the service
- *Kaddish Shaleim,* the full Kaddish recited at the end of the complete service
- Mourner's Kaddish recited by mourners for eleven months after the death.

Nachmanides indicates that Kaddish was originally recited only for scholars. Then, not to put others to shame, it was recited after every burial. The earliest reference to the Kaddish as a memorial prayer was its recitation for orphaned children in the thirteenth century by Rabbi Isaac ben Moses of Vienna. (1180-1250). (Raphael p. 437)

The impetus of medieval death traditions were brought about by the Crusades and the Black Plague. Mega death required new rituals for memorializing departed loved ones. Over a period of two centuries the Kaddish and Yizkor were successfully added to the rituals in both Ashkenazic and Sephardic liturgy. Recitation of the Kaddish is a public act. It is recited in both morning and evening prayer services and only in the presence of a *minyan* (ten men in traditional congregations, in liberal Judaism ten persons of either gender).

The Kaddish was supposed to be said for the full twelve months that the new soul might have to spend in Gehenna. Gehenna was a realm where the soul would remain until it was purified enough to enter the *Olam Habah*. The more exemplary the life the less time

the soul would spend in Gehenna. Gehenna has a parallel in Christianity called Purgatory.

In Judaism the maximum amount of time that the soul would spend in Gehenna would be twelve months. Rabbi Moses Isserles limited the recitation to eleven months out of respect that one's parents could not possibly require the full twelve months of soul purification in Gehenna. In today's world a mourner completes the cycle of Kaddish 30 days before the first anniversary of the death. (Raphael 2009)

Kaddish is not just a prayer; it is part of the psychological healing of the bereaved. Judaism uses the Kaddish as a means to aid in the recovery of loss and bereavement. It is a communal process that tries to help the mourner to move from denial to acceptance. Regardless of whether or not a mourner is saying the Kaddish on a daily or weekly basis, the Kaddish enables the mourner to be in touch with his/her feelings of grief on a daily basis and not to deny the intense feelings that emerge in response to a loss of a loved one. The mourner must also interact with the congregation. It prevents total withdrawal from society during the time when the mourner is not engaging in purely social gatherings with the community.

Kaddish keeps the mourner in touch with the memory of the person's life. It can also replace the intense feelings of sadness with the legacy that they have left behind.

The Kaddish can also help the mourner to evaluate the relationship that existed between the deceased and the mourner. The Kaddish, although a ritual act, helps the mourner to work through the nature of the relationship that existed between them.

The Kaddish helps to connect the mourner to the deceased so that resolution of unresolved issues can take place. The same process is done when one takes time to think

of the lost person in meditation, journal keeping, walks in nature, or even long drives in the car.

In mystical traditions of Judaism this year of mourning is a transit period for the afterlife journey of the soul. During this period there is an interconnection between the soul of the deceased and the one saying the Kaddish. The act of saying Kaddish is not only healing for the bereaved but affects the post death journey of the soul. The feeling of interconnectedness can help the mourner not to feel cut off, alienated and alone with their grief, helplessness and even anger. These traditional Jewish practices of 'soul guiding" also are aided by gifts to charity (, *g'milut chasadim*) and study of Torah. These acts of kindness and study contribute to the psychological healing of the mourner. In a greater sense these acts contribute to the repair of the world (*tikun olam).*

During the Kaddish period mourners can dedicate time to spiritual study in honor of the deceased. In the book "Kaddish" by Leon Wieseltier he chronicles his entire year of saying Kaddish daily and process of study in meticulous detail. His year became a meditation in memory of his Father. (Wieselteir 1998)

During the Kaddish year a soul guiding view of Kaddish may help the mourner to recognize the self changes that are occurring. The Kaddish can help us to accept the finality of death. It can be a vehicle to move us from pain to acceptance. The recitation of Kaddish can also help us to understand more fully the ambivalent relationships we have had with our deceased. It represents an ongoing spiritual connection to the deceased. The time allotted to the didactic part of the morning was completed and we then discussed the Kaddish and its meaning to those in the group. The theological and clinical principles of each of the six sessions will be discussed in Chapter IV. I

concluded the didactic portion of the session with the recitation of a poem. I read aloud the following poem and gave each person in the group a copy to take home.

HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

Hold on and let go.

On the surface of things contradictory counsel

But one does not negate the other,

The two are complementary, dialectical

Two sides of one coin.

Hold on- death is not the final word

The grave no oblivion.

Hold on in *Kaddish, Yahrzeit, Yiskor*

No gesture, no kindness, no smile

Evaporates__

Every kindness, every embrace

has its afterlife

in our minds, our hearts, our hands.

Hold on and let go.

Sever the fringes of the *tallit* of the deceased

the knot that binds us to the past.

Hold on

Not enslaving memory that sells the future

to the past

nor recollection that makes us passive,

listless, resigned.

But memory that releases us for new life.

Lower the casket, the closure meant

To open again the world

of new possibilities.

Return the dust to the earth

not to bury hope

but to resurrect the will to live.

Artists, aerialists

on a swinging trapeze

letting go one ring to catch another

to climb to higher heights.

Hold on and let go

a courageous duality

that endows our life with meaning.

Neither denying the past

nor foreclosing the future

The flow of life

the divine process

gives and takes

retains and creates.

old and new yesterday and tomorrow

both in one embrace.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Harold Schulweiss

Session #2 December 13.2009

The topics for the second session were Yahrzeit and Yiskor. I chose these milestones in Jewish mourning customs because they follow the conclusion of the Kaddish period. Kaddish is recited for eleven months. After the passing of another month the mourner observes his/her first Yahrzeit for their loved one.

Didactic Portion of the Session: *Yahrzeit and Yiskor*

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit (from the Yiddish meaning year's time) is the anniversary of a death. It is a time for commemoration of the death of a family member or a friend.
The deceased is honored for their life and legacy and in the performance of ritual acts which are observed by the family. Yahrzeit is observed on either the Hebrew or the English date. If the exact date is not known then the *Yahrzeit* can be observed on the approximate date. The first reference to the custom of observing the anniversary of a death is found in the Book of Judges 11:4 "And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Japhthah the Gileadite, four days in a year". In Talmudic times *Yahrzeit* was observed by fasting on the anniversary of a parent's death. (Raphael 2009)

There are a few simple customs that the family of the deceased observes:

- Lighting a memorial candle that burns for 24 hours.

  "A person's spirit is the lamp of the Lord." Proverbs

- No formal prayers are recited although it may be comforting to say a prayer and to connect to one's own feelings and memories.
- The custom of fasting for one's parents is not widely practiced today. Instead it is customary to contribute to charity, to perform charitable deeds, sponsor a Kiddush or temple event in memory of the deceased. Another way to honor the memory of a loved one is to dedicate funds to build or refurbish the synagogue facility.
- The mourner attends temple services and rises to recite the Kaddish. The Kaddish is recited on the yearly anniversary of the death.

The Psychological Function of Yahrzeit:

The function of Yahrzeit is simple. It gives the mourner the opportunity to remember the dead and the legacy that they have left behind. This is important as the physical memory of the person begins to fade. At each Yahrzeit one can reconnect with the feelings that were experienced in the past and how these feelings have changed with the passing of time. The first Yahrzeit can be a powerfully emotional time for the mourner. The reality that the family will forever live with the absence of that person's physical presence replaces the initial period of denial. It is an affirmation that in spite of a year in which great psychological pain was experienced, some healing has taken place. At this time the memories of the circumstances of the death, the funeral, and the *shiva* may bring back feelings of intense sadness. It is very important for the mourner to honor these feelings and not try to repress them. They remind us that the loss we feel is the remnant of the affection we had for our family members when they were alive.

The first Yahrzeit either consciously or unconsciously marks a change in the bereavement experience. This is not to say that the grieving process is over. A close relationship is maintained with the deceased long after the first anniversary of the death. It is a milestone because the cycle of a year has past. Four seasons and many holidays have gone by without the physical presence of the loved one. The mourner has made it through the first dark days of grief and is aware that life has continued without their loved one. The task of mourning is to accept the sadness and longing that will continue, but to also appreciate that life goes on.

Yahrzeit as Soul Guiding:

The Yahrzeit candle is the symbol of the immortal soul. The lighting of the lamp is a symbol of our continuing relationship with our beloved dead even though they have passed from this world. Isaac Luria, the medieval Kabbalist said that the act of lighting a memorial candle continues to elevate the soul to a higher sphere in "Gan Eden". According to the mystics the soul continues its journey for many years after death and the act of remembrance helps the soul to ascend to a higher level more quickly.

The Chasidim have a custom of making a sacred meal a *seudah,* at the time of the Yahrzeit. Family members and friends sit around the table and remember the good deeds of the deceased. The family offers a toast "l'chayim" in honor of the person and recites this special petition to G-d: "*De neshomo zol hobn an aliyah",* May the soul ascend to a higher level". Yahrzeit suggests that the relationship with the dead continues and during the Yahrzeit period these rituals open the "window of eternity". (Raphael 2009)

The following poem by Harold Schulweiss was read aloud and a copy was given to each of the participants to take with them.

A Yahrzeit Candle lit at home
The Yahrzeit Candle is different
announcing neither Shabbat nor festival
No benediction recited.
No song sung
Before this unlit candle
without quorum I stand
unstruck match in my hand.
It is less distant now
the remembrance ritual of parents deceased
I am older now
closer to their age than ever before
I am older now
their aches in my body
their white hairs beneath my shaved skin
their wrinkles creased into my face.
It is less distant now
this ritual
once made me think of them
Now makes me think of me

Once it recalled relationships to them

Now it ponders on my children's relationship to me.

Once I wondered what to remember of them.

Now I ask what my children will remember of me

what smile, what grimace

What stories they will tell their children of me

It is less distant now

How would I be remembered

How would I be mourned

Will they come to the synagogue

light a candle

recite the Kaddish

It is less distant now

Once Yahrzeit was about parents deceased

Now it is of children alive

Once it was about a distant past

Now it is about tomorrow.

Harold M. Schulweis

Yizkor

Yizkor is the Hebrew word for remembrance. It specifically refers to special memorial services that are held four times a year. These services are held on *Yom Kippur* and on the last day of the festival of *Sukkot, Pesach,* and *Shavuot*. The custom of remembrance of the dead first appears in the fifth century but was not a wide spread custom until the

twelfth century. It was not until the eighteenth century that *Yizkor w*as recited at services on the festivals. It is customary to recite *Yiskor* prayers for a parent, child, spouse, brother or sister. It is also appropriate to remember the six million who perished in the Holocaust. Although it is recommended that the mourner attend synagogue services, *Yizkor* can be recited at home. It is a common practice to give charity in memory of the deceased and a memorial candle can be lit after sundown on the day of the festival. *Yizkor* provides yet another sacred time in which the mourner can reconnect with those who have died. It is also at these holiday times that the empty chair at the table reminds us of those who are no longer with us .The following is a suggested meditation for Yizkor by Tsvi Rabinowicz: (Raphael 2009 pg.447):

As you recite *Yizkor* prayers let your senses and imagination serve as the vehicle of interconnection. For whom are you saying *Yizkor* today? Can you imagine that person's face before your eyes? See their smile; visualize how they might be carrying their body standing next to you. Do you recall the sound of their voice? Hear their words as you stand in prayer. Feel their presence right in this moment. In your mind, in your heart, allow a conversation between the two of you to unfold. What needs to be communicated this year? What's the message you need to hear today? What are the silent prayers of the heart? What remains unspoken? Speak, Listen. Take your time. There is no reason to hurry. This is a timeless moment. Let all the radiance of their love be with you right now. Yizkor teaches us to remember the dead. Long after people die their legacy lives on inside of us. Within the wellsprings of our infinite souls we find the window of connection between the living and the dead.

Some members of the group were not aware that Yiskor was a brief service which is recited on the three festival holidays (Sukkot, Pesach,and Shavuot). They only associated the term Yiskor with the more expanded Yiskor service that is recited during the day on Yom Kippur.

Session #3 January 9, 2010

Although the Shiva period immediately follows the funeral and the interment, I chose to discuss it in the third session. My plan was to work backwards from the time of healing to the rituals which occur soon after death. The reason for this order was to discuss the most emotional events after the group began to know and trust each other rather than at the beginning of the sessions when the group had not had a chance to feel comfortable with each other. This week there were only four people in attendance due to illness.

Sitting Shivah

The Bible records several instances of a seven day mourning ritual. In Gen. 50:10, when Jacob, Joseph's father died, Joseph "wailed with a very great and sore wailing and he made mourning for his father for seven days."(Raphael, 2009)

The real work of mourning and comforting begins during the shiva period. This is a period of prayer, reflection, and memory. The mourner is often numb and in a state of shock before the funeral and is not capable of individual grief work because of the focus on the funeral preparations and the honoring of the deceased. Shivah is a period of intense mourning. Shivah literally means 'seven" and refers to the period that begins immediately after the funeral. Both the day of the funeral and the mourning of the seventh day are counted as full mourning days. The rules of Shivah are suspended on Shabbat. On the Sabbath the mourners are permitted to leave the home to attend services at the synagogue. Mourning resumes after *Havdalah* (the concluding service of Shabbat) which is recited after sundown. *Shivah* days can be shortened by the major holidays of: *Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Shavuot,* and *Sukkot*. If these holidays fall during

the Shivah period, the Shivah is cancelled from that day on. The holidays are considered more important to the *community* than the shiva period which is affecting an individual family. The community can still visit the mourners and should bring food to the family for the festival.

Shivah has two divisions within itself. The first three days are days when the mourner may experience intense grief. The reality of the loss is beginning to be fully confronted. The mourner should be permitted to be socially detached and in a state of isolation. There is no need to engage the mourner in conversation. The visitor is not even required to offer words of condolence. The presence of the visitor is what is most important at this time.

During the second half of the Shiva period the mourner may be less socially detached and may begin to speak with visitors about the deceased. Psychologically the first three days of shivah are intense and the mourners may still be numb from psychological pain or in a state of denial. Family and friends should respect the mental state of the mourner and refrain from idle chatter with the bereaved. It is traditional to wait until the mourner initiates a conversation or greeting before speaking. The traditional period of shivah has in non-Orthodox observance been truncated to anywhere from one to three days. Occasionally it has been eliminated entirely. Why has the Shivah period been reduced to three days? There are a number of answers:

- There can be difficulty in opening the house to visitors or problems getting a minyan for prayer service.

- Some mourners feel an intense desire to return to work and "normalcy" as soon as possible. Out of town relatives may want to return home to observe some of the shivah in their own communities.
- Another reason for the shortening of shiva is that the mourners have already experienced something called anticipatory bereavement. This is sometimes the result of a long illness, years of dementia or a protracted death vigil due to advanced life support technology. When there is a long death vigil, the family begins the mourning process before the person actually dies. Long periods of time at the bedside of a loved one can cause mental detachment from the dying. There is the perception that the person has already died even though they are technically alive. If this is the case a shortened Shivah may be more healing for an exhausted family, since some of the grief work has already been done.

Traditional observances of Shivah:

Where do you hold the shivah? Consideration should be given to the surviving spouse particularly when the spouse is elderly and moving from one place to another could cause further anxiety. The next possibility is at the home of one of the children.

A person who is sitting shivah should not be left alone during this period. If the mourner would be all alone over night, someone should stay with the person during the night. Some Shiva customs have their origins in old superstitions which were popular in the Mishnaic period (200 CE) and the Middle Ages (1500 CE). These customs were later codified in the Shulhan Arukh, the code of Jewish Law. (Raphel, 2009)

- Washing hands after leaving the cemetery. Contact with the dead would make a person spiritually unclean. The superstition was that the spirits were afraid of water and the washing would remove their presence. The washing of the hands today is a spiritual cleansing with no blessing recited. A pitcher of water is placed outside the door and those who wish can avail themselves of this tradition.
- A Shivah Candle is lit in the home upon returning from the cemetery. It should burn for seven days. The candle represents the opposite of spiritual darkness, something that the mourner is experiencing. The lighting of the candle also prepares the mourner with a foreshadowing of the lighting of the Yahrzeit candle in the future. There is no blessing said and the candle should be placed in a prominent place in the home.
- Grooming of the body is prohibited. Today this means that the mourner should not be concerned with their appearance during the mourning period. The person may wash themselves for hygienic purposes but the taking of a luxurious bath would not be permitted. The mourner is in a state of social withdrawal during the shiva period and should not be concerned with their appearance.
- Covering the mirrors in the house. The origin of this practice is unclear but it is widely accepted that the mourner should not be concerned with checking his/ her appearance. There is an old tradition that the soul of the departed may linger in the house on its journey and would be visible in the reflection in the mirror.

- Mourners remain at home. The mourner is permitted to experience his/her grief as a total experience. The mourners are cared for by the community and should

have no need to leave the house except to attend Shabbat services at the synagogue. The observant Jew does not even have to leave the house to attend daily services to recite the Kaddish. The *minyan* comes to the house of mourning as a sign of the community's support of the grieving family.

- Pleasurable activities are limited. The mourner refrains from extraneous activities that are pleasurable. These include: attendance at social functions, (weddings, bar/bar mitzvah receptions, circumcisions or social gatherings). Sexual relations are not permitted. Among more observant Jews the wearing of leather shoes is forbidden, but cloth slippers are permitted. One may not study the Torah during Shivah. Torah study is considered a pleasurable activity. The mourner can read other texts of comfort such as Lamentations, the Book of Job or appropriate Psalms. Watching television, playing games and listening to music are discouraged as they are also regarded as pleasurable activities.
- Sitting on low stools. This is an ancient custom that emphasizes the lowly state o experienced by the mourner. Sephardic Jews sit directly on the floor. Shivah ends on the morning of the seventh day. It is traditional for the mourners to take a short walk together. This walk is symbolic of the beginning of the return to normal everyday life.

Psychologically this can be a time of conflicting emotions. On the one hand the mourner is relieved to be able to leave the house and breathe some fresh air while on the other hand there is the knowledge that the experience is over and that the tremendous amount of community support that they have received is ending. The end of the shivah period begins the next stage of healing called Sh'loshim.

Sh'loshim

Sh'loshim is the period of thirty days following the funeral. The Shivah is over and the mourner begins a slow journey back into the world and his/her normal life.

Most of the prohibitions which are part of the Shivah are no longer required. Mourners are permitted to return to their jobs. Any type of clothing is permitted. One can resume sexual relations and participate in Torah Study. Since the mourner is only a week into the mourning process the rabbi's restrict the mourners from having to attend functions that are joyous or celebratory occasions (Lamm 2000).

These functions would include: attending weddings, dances, and parties, playing or listening to music, going to the theater or to a movie. It is permissible to watch television programs that are informative, such as the news broadcasts but not television shows that are pure entertainment. These restrictions are psychologically sound. The mourner is faced with a dilemma when in the midst of merriment. Even though the mourner wishes to extend his/her congratulations to the persons who are celebrating a happy event, his/her heart is still filled with sadness. The mourner may feel as if they are an "outsider" and the experience may actually exacerbate their grief. The community should understand when a grieving person sends "regrets' to an invitation to celebrate a joyous occasion.

Session #4 January 16, 2010

The topic for this week's session was the period between the time of death and the interment called *Aninut* and the custom of *Tahara* The group was not familiar with the term *Aninut*. The didactic portion of the session would be devoted to these two topics which were unfamiliar to the group. The reason for the unfamiliarity with these customs is that they are more commonly practiced in the Orthodox community.
The third topic I discussed was the funeral service.

Aninut

Aninut is the time period from the moment of death until the end of the funeral.
This is a time when the following emotions may be experienced: shock, numbness, anger, denial, and disbelief. This may occur regardless of whether the death was sudden or expected. There is always the element of disbelief when the final moment comes. During this time the mourners are engaged in making the funeral arrangements with the funeral director, rabbi and other family members. At this time there are no prayer services, and no official calls. The Rabbi will meet with the family and may advise the mourners of some synagogue customs that are unique to the synagogue. These might be whether flowers on the casket or instrumental music at the funeral service are permitted. These are a matter of custom rather than Jewish Law. The Rabbi will encourage the family to

reflect on the life of the deceased so that a proper eulogy can be written. This is also the time to discuss if any other family members or clergy will participate in the funeral service. The mourners may have questions about "why did my love one suffer? How could this happen? ". These are questions for which definitive answers are not possible. These questions will be sorted out during the extended mourning period as the mourners go through their grieving process. It is important for the clergy to encourage the mourners to grieve and not to try to make sense out of the death of their loved one.

Tahara:

The next topic is about the preparation of the body before burial. In the Orthodox community the preparation of the body before burial involves a ritual called Tahara. In recent years the custom has been revived in some Conservative and Reform communities where *Chevra Kadishah* societies have been formed and trained in performing this final mitzvah for the deceased. I decided to incorporate this topic in my didactic portion not only to educate the group about this ritual, but to see their reaction to it.

Tahara -is the ritual purification of the body before burial. In the liberal Jewish Community the preparation of the body for burial is usually done by a Jewish funeral director. The funeral home retrieves the body from the place of death and shelters the remains until the funeral. Preparation of the body for burial is called sanitary care on the statement of charges from the funeral home and consists of washing the body. The body is dressed in whatever clothes are provided by the family and placed in a casket by the funeral home employees. In more traditional communities the *Chevrah Kaddisha*, (the Jewish Burial Society) performed this mitzvah for the community. In some liberal

Jewish communities there is renewed interest in this practice. The duties of the *Chevra Kaddisha* consist of four tasks:

- *Shmira*-- the guarding of the body before burial. The body is not left alone and a shomer (a guardian) is always present with the deceased. The *shomer* engages in the recitation of Psalms while sitting near the body or in an adjacent room.
- *rehitza*—washing of the body;
- tahara—the ritual purification of the body, which follows a prescribed format of prayers and a prescribed way of washing the body while maintaining modesty and respect for the deceased.
- dressing of the body in white linen shrouds (burial garments) and placing the body in a simple wooden casket. These shrouds are called *tachrichim*. This word is from the Hebrew word which means to bind or wrap.

The entire process is called "*tahara*". (Raphael415) The shrouds are sewn from white linen cloth by hand and consist of a shirt, pants, and a thin overcoat called a *kittel,* a head covering, and a veil for women, a belt and a large sheet. (Wolfson 83) A male is wrapped in his *tallit*. One of the corner fringes of the tzitzit is cut to indicate that the tallit will not be used again. If a female wore a *tallit* for prayer in life then it is permitted for her to be buried with her *tallit.* The shrouds have no pockets. This signifies that no matter how much material wealth the deceased may have acquired in life he/she will take none of his/her wealth in death. The *Tahara* is performed by three people in a room that is dimly lit by candlelight. The *shomer* (guardian) stays with the body before and after the *Tahara* is completed until the funeral. The *shomer* can be either male or female and

may sit in the room with the body or nearby. The function of the *shmira* (guarding of the body) from a religious perspective is that since the body is the container for the soul, the body is sacred and should not be left alone. In ages past, before funeral homes had refrigeration, the shomer kept animals or insects away from the body. The washing or *rehitza* removes any foreign matter, excrement, dirt, medical bandages or apparatus from the body. After this preliminary washing, the process of the tahara or ritual purification takes place. The tahara is a sacred cleansing of the body during which twenty four quarts of continuously flowing water are poured over the body. The tahara for females is done only by females. The tahara for males is done only by males. The modesty of the deceased is respected at all times. The body is always covered by a sheet and the water is poured through the cloth. The continuous flow of the water symbolizes that all earthly defilements are removed and all earthly suffering is washed away. The body is dried and dressed in burial shrouds. The shrouds do not have buttons or zippers. Traditional Jews believe that having these types of fasteners can impede the soul from leaving the body. The shrouds are fashioned like the sacred vestments of the high priests. They are closed with knots instead of buttons or snaps. In some communities the family may be asked if they wish to tie the final knot as a last act of kindness to their loved one. After the washing of the body a large white sheet is placed in the casket and the body is placed inside the casket. The body is then wrapped in the sheet and the *tallit* is placed over the body. A small packet of earth from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem may also be placed in the casket with the body. Since rabbinic tradition believed that the ultimate resurrection of the body will begin on the Mount of Olives some soil from the sacred mount is interred with the body that is buried in the Diaspora. (Raphael416). Although

many modern Jews have never heard of *tahara* it is considered one of the most sacred of the mitzvot. The sacredness of this mitzvot is because it is an act of kindness for which one cannot be repaid by the deceased. At the end of the *tahara* the persons who have performed the ritual break their silence or quiet recitation of psalms and prayers. They speak in a loud voice to the deceased and say:" (Name of the deceased,) all that we have done is in your honor. And if we have not done our task properly, we beg your forgiveness". The body is now prepared for the funeral. (Lamm 10).There is no public viewing of the body before or during the funeral. The funeral serves a definite psychological function. The funeral helps the family to accept that the person has died. The funeral is a way to honor the deceased in the community before burial. The funeral also provides communal support for the family. Before the funeral begins, the immediate family members perform the ritual act of *kriah*. The *kriah* is the tearing of a garment. In the past *kriah* took place when the person was informed of the death as a cathartic expression of sudden grief. Today the *kriah* is often a ribbon supplied by the funeral home consisting of a black button with a black ribbon extending down from the center. The ribbon is cut with a sharp razor-like blade and the following blessing is recited: *Ba-ruch a-tah ado-nai eh-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam da-yan ha-eh-met.* Blessed are you, *Adonai,* sovereign of the universe, the righteous judge. The tear in the cloth is a very real symbol of the pain and the psychological wounding that takes place when the fabric of family life is torn apart.

The eulogy is delivered to recall the life and personality of the deceased. The eulogy should emphasize all the good deeds and acts of kindness performed by the deceased.

The eulogy may elicit both tears and even some laughter. Experiencing these emotions is the beginning of the acceptance of the death and moving on from the denial and numbing stage of grief. At the conclusion of the eulogy the Eil Malay Rachamim prayer is chanted by the cantor or rabbi and the casket is removed to the hearse to take the deceased to the cemetery for burial. It is considered a *mitzvah* to accompany the deceased and the mourning family to the gravesite. When the casket is being carried to the grave it is traditional to pause on the way. This symbolizes our reluctance to bury the dead and our sorrow at their passing. The interment at the cemetery further reminds all present that the deceased is no longer in this world. The casket is lowered into the grave. The placing of a shovel full of earth on the casket first by the family and then by those in attendance is part of the Jewish funeral. The sound of the earth as it lands on the casket resonates deeply with those at the graveside. The death can no longer be denied. The expression of emotion that may be experienced at the gravesite is part of the beginning of the process of bereavement and should not be discouraged. The family recites the Kaddish at the grave for the first time. The Kaddish will become a prayer of comfort and remembrance in the ensuing days and years. The community shows its sympathy and support by making two lines through which the mourners will leave the cemetery plot and return to their cars. These lines on both sides symbolize that the community will be there to support the family both physically, spiritually and emotionally and even financially in the days ahead. After the funeral it is customary for family and friends to return to the home of the deceased to partake in a simple meal of condolence. The friends and relatives who attend may eat while the mourners must eat. It is the first sign that life must go on without the deceased.

Session #5: January 23, 2010

Session Five: Stages of Mourning

J. William Worden in his book Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy describes mourning as the process that occurs after the loss. Grief is the personal experience of the loss. Mourning is a process and has been viewed by mental health practitioners and theorists as stages, phases or tasks. (Wordenp.37) Worden emphasizes that grief and mourning are not pathology. They are part of human existence. Mourning is the adaptation to loss and involves the following four stages.

Task I: Accepting the reality of the loss

Even when a death is totally expected, one must still come face to face with the reality that the person is dead. The loved one is gone and will never return. The mourner must come to accept that reunion with the deceased is not possible in this life.

This first task is important for the other tasks to take place. It is during this stage that the mourner must move from denial to acceptance of the death. Sometimes denial takes many forms and can be extended for a long period of time. Examples of extended denial are: keeping everything in the deceased room as it was for an extended period of time (years not months). The loss can also be denied by minimizing the attachment that they had to the person. We weren't close or we had our differences are statements to prevent mourning from taking place.

Task II: Processing the pain of Grief:

Not everyone experiences the same level of pain. Society tells us how to feel. Statements like "you shouldn't feel this way, your mother wouldn't like it" or "life is for the living

and you will meet someone else." are erroneously spoken to mourners to cheer them up. In fact the mourner must go through the painful feelings in order to begin a new life. Many people feel that when they visit the bereaved their purpose is to distract a mourner from their grief. Society tries to short circuit this stage. Mourners themselves will often travel from place to place to distract themselves from experiencing their pain. Sooner or later those who avoid all conscious grieving break down with some form of depression. Sadness is psychological pain and dysphoria. Anxiety, anger, guilt, depression, and loneliness are all part of the pain of loss and are not in themselves a sign of mental illness.

Task III: Adjusting to the world without the deceased:

External Adjustments: This means everyday functioning. It is particularly stressful for widows. It emerges around 3-4 months after the loss. It means coming to terms with living alone, raising children, living in an empty house, and managing finances alone. It also involves the loss of a sexual partner and companion. We are not consciously aware of all the roles played by the deceased during their lifetime.

Internal adjustments: This means the psychological task of adjusting to one's own sense of self. Women often define their identity through their spouses. Both widowed men and women need to learn that they are a whole person within themselves and not half of a dyad. What would Jack do (?) has to become: Now, what do **I** do**?** Ones self esteem is also connected to the deceased. The internal adjustment is particularly difficult when the deceased partner filled in the perceived deficits of the mourner and provided frequent narcissistic reinforcement. Parents also provide their children with approval and feelings of self worth that are missing when the parent dies.

Task IV: Finding an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life.

In order to make a new life it is necessary for a withdrawal of emotional energy form the deceased. The emotional energy can then be reinvested in another relationship. We do not disconnect from the dead but try to develop continuing bonds with them. To do this we need to find ways to memorialize our loved ones. A mourner never completely forgets the dead person who was so highly valued in life and never totally withdraws his/her investment in his/her representation. We can never purge those who have been so close to us for so many years from our own history except by psychic acts damaging to our own identity. Volkan (1985) p. 326. Making the transition from mourning to memory can be the most difficult stage. Non completion of this stage can lead to non living. This is the final stage where mourners can get "stuck".

I read this reflection to the class after I gave the preceding presentation on the stages of mourning.

(Attig 1996) "We can continue to have what we have lost, that is, a continuing albeit transformed love for the deceased. We have not truly lost our years of living with the deceased or our memories. Nor have we lost their influrences, their inspirations, their values and the meanings embodied in their lives. We can actively incorporate these into new patterns of living that include the transformed but abiding relationships with those we have cared about and loved.

At the end of the sharing session I gave the participants these Prayers, Sacred Texts and Reflections to take with them:

Prayers, Sacred Texts and Reflections

Eil Ma'ley Rachamin

God of mercy and compassion

God of mercy and compassion,

From whom we come and to whom we return.

In whose hands are the souls of the living and the dead:

In whose eyes a thousand years are but as yesterday,

Grant, we pray, perfect rest in your sheltering presence to the soul of our departed _____, in your infinite mercy grant him/her the gift of life eternal.

May the memory of our departed be a source of solace and healing, abiding among us as a lasting benediction.

Selections from the Talmud:

Weep for the mourners, not for the departed; the departed is at peace while the mourners are left in their sorrow.

Life is a passing shadow-the shadow of a bird in flight. The bird flies away and there is neither bird nor shadow.

Do not act as if you expect to live eternally. Live as though this day were your last. Let each day be spent in repentance and good deeds. The righteous need no monuments; their good deeds are their memorials.

The soul which God gave you is pure; return it to God in the same state.

It is not in our power to explain the well-being of the wicked or the tribulations of the righteous. Just as we praise G-d in time of joy, we should acknowledge G-d in time of sorrow.

Reflections:

Death brings so many reactions and in such contrasting combinations. These emotions are a natural response to death of a loved one. Allow yourself to feel these normal emotions, so that you can move through the grief and go on with life.

But it is not enough to recognize your conflicting emotions; you must deal with them openly. That is why a Period of Mourning in Judaism is so important. It is a time to express and share your feelings. An emotion that is denied is not destroyed. It only prolongs the agony and delays the grief process. Courage is not the absence of fear and pain, but the affirmation of life despite the fear and pain (Grollman, p.152)

Why did it happen?

" Why did it happen? Everyone asks. If one's faith is deep and sincere, one replies simply: This is God's will. This is Divine wisdom. There is a higher judgment. Such a person possesses a faith which comforts and heals. For others, however, an important recognition must be made; there are things to which we have no answers at all, and it is possible to accept what has happened without knowing why. In that acceptance of the unanswerable is the beginning of wisdom." Zelda Popkin (Judaica Pressp 153)

Session # 6 January 30, 2010

This is the last session of meetings with the group. My intention in this session is to discuss the Jewish Views of the afterlife. I have found that it is a subject that is difficult for Jews to talk about because Judaism does not have one religious creed. It is a subject that should be addressed in a bereavement group that is taking place in a synagogue. When a person sustains a loss there is always an impact on one's spiritual life.

Session VI -- An Introduction to Jewish Views of the afterlife

What does Judaism have to say about resurrection and the afterlife? It is a question that is sometimes asked of us (often by non-Jews) and we do not have an answer. Classic Jewish belief is very clear. There is **this** world (the ***Olam ha Zeh*- the world that is)** and the ***Olam Ha-Ba*, the world to come**. At birth the soul enters the body and at death the soul leaves the body and continues to survive. (Wolfson 321) In traditional Judaism this is referred to as the *hash-arat ha-nefesh* , the survival of the soul. There is judgment, reward and punishment in the afterlife. We are required to give G-d an accounting for the lifetime we have been given. In the orthodox community these are articles of faith and are taken very seriously. In the last one hundred years, however, the development of a more rational thinking has challenged these traditional Jewish views of immortality and final judgment.

It is difficult to talk about death in general, and even harder to talk about one's own mortality. When someone close to us dies. we experience their death we also have to face the inevitability of our own. When we face our mortality we are forced to examine our own belief about the immortality of our own soul. If we believe that the soul is

eternal can we also believe that there is the possibility of being united in some way with our loved ones who have already died? Many of us have some intuitive feelings about the afterlife and whether or not it exists. It is difficult to talk about those feelings in conversation. We feel uncomfortable bringing it up. It is something that we may want to explore as part of our own developing theologies. (Raphael Simcha Paul P. xxv) The origins of death can be understood in three ways:

- Death is a punishment for the sin of disobedience (Garden of Eden Story)
- Death is part of God's original plan for creation
- Death is the inevitable trade off for the gift of human self-awareness.

What *does* Judaism have to say about what happens after we die? Rabbi Jack Riemer in an article entitled "*Afterlife:*" says: "(Lev. 18:3) In the ways of the land of Egypt you shall not go. This refers to the pyramids and all the objects that were contained in the sarcophagi. The Hebrew Bible speaks of only this life, not the afterlife." (Wolfson p 320). The Bible has no clear vision of heaven and does not talk about hell. There is mention of a murky place called *sheol* which in later centuries was synonymous with Gehenna. There is no mention in the Bible that the place called *sheol* involved any punishment. Rabbinic Judaism includes an absolute belief in resurrection, both of the body and the soul. Rabbinic Judaism also has a day of judgment when G-d will decide who will earn a portion in the world to come. We still have these prayers that address our final judgment by G-d in the High Holyday *Machzor*. In the *Una Tane Tokef* prayer even the angels must stand before God for judgment. We are told that G-d is merciful and an evil decree can be averted by *t'shuvah* (repentence*), tefilla* (prayer) and *tsedakah (*deeds of righteousness.) In

> modernity liberal Jews have embraced the idea of immortality as the belief that one lives in some way beyond the physical existence of the body. Although the body decomposes the soul remains immortal and returns to G-d who gave it. Medieval Philosopher Maimonides was one of the first to emphasize the immortality of the soul over the notion of the resurrection of the body. Modern rationalists argue that it is our spirit, our intellect and our soul that survives the body's decay. If one does not believe that the soul is immortal, liberal Jewish theology has another way to define immortality. We can take comfort that we live on through our descendants. We are a link in the chain of human experience. Our children, grandchildren and those that come after them are a direct link to our own lives. They will carry our names, our looks, our personalities, and tell our stories from generation to generation. We live on through our deeds, our achievements, our contributions and in our work. These can be not only our legacy but our immortality. (Wolfson, 2008)

We also live on through our common destiny with the Jewish people. Although we are mortal beings we are partners with God in the work of creation. The Rabbi's said:" Keep two pieces of paper with you. (1) I am nothing but dust and to dust I shall return. And (2) for my sake was the world created." Judaism walks a thin line between saying that this is the only life that exists and that the world to come is the only *real* world. Rather than choosing between them Judaism holds both views. If we affirm only this life we end up in despair because this life is too brief and too incomplete. To affirm only the life to come we must diminish the sacredness of this world. Yalom offers a different way of looking at one's own mortality. He believes that self awareness is a supreme gift. It makes us human. Animals and clods of earth have no self knowledge that they will

die. Mortality has haunted us from the beginning of time. He begins his book Staring at the Sun with the following: Four thousand years ago the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh reflected on the death of his friend Enkidu "Thou has become dark and cannot hear me. When I die shall I not be like Enkidu? Sorrow enters my heart. I am afraid of death." (Yalom 2009 p.1). God as formulated transculturally not only softens the pain of mortality through a vision of everlasting life but also palliates fearful isolation by offering an eternal presence and provides a clear blueprint for living a meaningful life. All religions are born out of man's refusal to accept his mortality. We can never completely subdue our death anxiety. Though the physicality of death destroys us, the idea of death saves us. (Yalom p1). Maurice Lamm on the other hand believes that" death is a night which lies between two days" . (Lamm,p234). There is no one answer. Each of us must confront our own mortality in our own way. The important thing is that we do not let our inescapable death anxiety prevent us from living. With all of man's sophistication and technical knowledge we are still no better off than we were millennia ago. We have still not solved the dilemma. If we believe in an ethical Go-d we have hope that what is beautiful will not perish and that we can say with great assurance the words of the *g'vurot* prayer: " He sustains the living with kindness and revives the dead with great mercy." *Baruch a-tah Adonai m'chayay mateem.* "Blessed are you O Lord who revives the dead" (Gillman, 2006)

Chapter IV

In the third chapter I presented the didactic portion of each of the six sessions. The didactic portion took anywhere from thirty to forty minutes of each session. The remainder of the session was devoted to the exploration of the topic by the participants. I had given the group a large amount of historical information on each topic. I wanted the group to know what the mourning customs were supposed to provide during the period of mourning and bereavement and I was interested in what their experience of the rituals were. I did not record the sessions but I did take some notes. When I am writing about a specific member of the group I will refer to that person by number as follows:

P-1 Grieving two parents who died within a month of each other.

P-2 Her husband died four and a half years ago from cancer

P-3 Her father died last year and 1 day old twins died 8 yrs ago

P-4 Her husband died two years ago from cancer

P-5 Her husband was killed nine months ago in a fiery car crash

P-6 Her husband died two years ago from cancer

I began the first session by asking the question: What was saying Kaddish like for you? The room was quiet for a few minutes and P -1 said that it was very powerful for her. She looked forward to saying it every week. I asked her if she could tell me a little more about what it was that she needed and found in the Kaddish prayer. She said that she was feeling sad a great deal of the time but had to repress those feelings while she was with her kids and when she was at work. When she thought about her parents she would get

"teary" and didn't want to cry at work. During the Kaddish prayer in the temple she felt that she could "let go' and cry. She said that she felt a great release in that moment. P-2 responded quite differently. She said that she didn't have the same feelings as P-1 during Kaddish. She said that she had difficulty with the words, even though they were transliterated into English equivalents of the Aramaic. I asked her if that was the only thing that prevented her from connecting to the prayer. She said no. She said that her husband was so involved in the temple that just being in the sanctuary that he loved so much was so overwhelming. She said that the Kaddish prayer was something she did out of respect to her husband but it did not have any emotional connection for her She said that she always felt his presence when she was in the temple building more so than anywhere else.

Both P-4 and P-5 shared similar views that the Kaddish was comforting to them but they really didn't understand the historical background of the prayer when they were saying it. It had already been over 2 years since the death of their husbands and they felt removed from that stage of mourning. I asked them how they felt when they recite it during Yahrzeit. They said that it brings back some sad feelings but they were not over-whelmed by those feelings as before. P-3 was the last to speak. She told us that when her twins died she did not have to say Kaddish for them because they did not live thirty days. It was a very difficult time for her because she had no rituals to help her through the loss. I suggested that when she was saying Kaddish for her parent that maybe she was unconsciously saying Kaddish for her twins. I asked if the group had any reaction to the concept of the Kaddish as a soul guiding vehicle for the soul of the deceased? They all said that they had never heard of 'soul guiding". Some of the group said that it was too

"far out" for them. P-3, on the other hand said that she thought it was a beautiful image that her prayers were helping her father's soul to ascend to a higher level. The Kaddish is one of the parts of a psychosocial system for dealing with bereavement which is found in Judaism. The Kaddish is a" connector" a narrow bridge which can link one generation to another. Because the Kaddish is said during the long stretch of time between the burial and the ensuing eleven months it provides the mourner with an extended period to work out unresolved conflicts with the deceased. (Dale) According to Freud, in his paper "Mourning and Melancholia" in which he begins a psychoanalytic discussion of bereavement, he tries to understand the most common of human suffering, the loss of a loved one. He concluded that the process of mourning is very painful because we have so much psychic energy (libido) invested in each memory and association with the lost person. Mourning can proceed only when the libido can be slowly withdrawn from the loved object and re-invested in other relationships. Just a few years later, Freud modified his view on morning and said that successful mourning often leaves the bereaved person with some remaining internal image of the deceased. This is the ability to call up images of the lost love and still have libidinal energy for new relationships. (Kahn 2002) Kaddish is an ongoing ritual that helps to complete this stage of mourning.

In the second session I discussed Yahrzeit and Yiskor. These are customs that are observed after the first year of mourning is over but still involve the recitation of Kaddish. During the group session I asked the group if they could remember how they felt at the end of the eleven months of saying Kaddish. P-4 said that it was a milestone for her because she had made it almost through a full year without her husband. She had accepted that fact that he was not coming back and she could think about memories of

him without crying. P-1 said that she still cries a lot and did not want the Kaddish period to end. I asked her what did it feel like not to stand up for the Kaddish after she had been doing it for almost a year. She said that she still felt sad and teary and it had been almost a year. She thought that she should be doing better. Some of the members of the group responded to her by telling her to be patient and to remember that she was dealing with a double loss and that it would take longer to recover, but in time her pain would begin to ease. I asked the group how they would spend their Yahrzeit and Yiskor days. P-5 said that she was very apprehensive as the first anniversary of her husband's death approached. I asked her if she thought of any rituals that she might do to help her through the day. She said that she would definitely light a Yahrzeit candle and would go to the temple that week and say Kaddish. P-4 and P-5 shared their experience of their first Yahrzeit as being a very sad day. They said that it was similar to going through holidays and birthdays and other family events without their life partners. P-4 said there is no way you can go around it. Don't take a trip or go shopping it won't help. The day will pass and you will be able to go on. P-2 added that she went though similar periods of anger and sadness but that after four years she was doing much better and had made a different life for herself.

As I observed this session I could see that as one moves through the first year of mourning that it is not a fast process. People assume that they should be over their grief in only a fraction of the time it takes to recover. It was once assumed that six weeks of grieving was 'normal". The duration of grieving will depend on the person's attachment to the deceased and how they died. The period of acute grieving usually subsides during the first year but it usually takes anywhere from three to four years before a widow might

consider dating again. In the loss of a child parts of the loss will remain with the person throughout their life (Rando 1991)

In Session Three we discussed the Shivah period. After hearing my didactic portion on the function of Shiva, I asked the group if they would share with me their own experiences. I reminded them that one of the purposes of my project was to find out if we as clergy can do more to make these religious practices more helpful and meaningful. I was quite surprised at the reaction of some members of the group when I asked them to describe in a few words what shivah was like for them. P-1 it was exhausting P-2 It was a complete blur P-3 I was in a state of shock P-4 I was grateful for so many visitors P-5 It was surreal, like I was in a dream. P-6 I found it very comforting to have people around. I then asked anyone to elaborate on their experience of shivah. P-1 said that she wished that people didn't make so much small talk during the shiva. She knew that some of the comments were meant to console but they did just the opposite. I asked if she could give an example. She said, "Yes, things like, time heals all wounds or I know just how you feel. At least you had your parents for over forty years, my mother died when I was in my teens. "She said that none of these statements of condolence were comforting. I asked her what she would have wanted visitors to say. She said that there were no words that would comfort her, a hug was better. P-2 responded that her experience of shivah was different because her husband had been sick for a while and although he never gave up, she knew he was dying. She was grateful that the community was there to set up coffee and take care of everything for her. She said that three days of shivah were enough for her. P-6 said that she could not believe that she was actually sitting shivah because the accident happened so fast and she was just numb. She wasn't even aware of

what people were really saying to her. She was aware of many people around her but she couldn't relate to anyone. She compared it to feeling like she was in a plastic bubble and was looking at people coming in and out of her house. She said that she kept looking for her husband in the crowd and then remembered he was dead. She said she was exhausted at the end of the three days.

As I processed what was going on in the session I felt that this was an area where the community needed some education on the function and value of shivah. I will elaborate on my suggestions for making shivah more meaningful in the healing process in the final chapter summation.

Ideally the psychological function of shivah is to support mourners so that they may embrace their sorrow and grieve. The mourner is taken care of by the community. This should mean preparing meals, making phone calls, doing errands and the like. It is not a means to distract mourners from their grief rather to allow them to entre more deeply and fully into the mourning process, relieved of daily routines. Due to lack of education regarding Jewish death traditions many Jews today do not know or understand the ritual practices associated with shivah. Because of the influence of cultural values, the spiritual aspects of sacred rituals have been lost. Particularly in the case of shivah, the spiritual gathering can become a social gathering, or a food fest filled with trivial banter and meaningless conversation. One of the suggestions to make the Shivah ritual more spiritually healing and more clinically effective in grief work is to consider a time of silent reflection during the hours of shiva. This is a time when the mourners, the extended family and the visitors are asked to refrain from conversation and direct their thoughts to the soul of the deceased and to send the soul love, light and peace on its

journey. (Raphael 2009) For those who are open to these soul guiding practices they might be a psychologically sound addition to incorporate into the ritual of Shivah.

In session four I discussed the ritual of Tahara. I asked the group for their response to the ritual of Tahara. I was very surprised that the entire group had a positive reaction. The only one of the group who had difficulty with the ritual was P-5. Her discomfort was readily understandable. Her husband's body was so badly burned that it was just placed in a body bag in the casket. Members of the group responded with "Oh that must have been really awful for you." I asked her if she believed that she could still guide her husband's soul even though his body was destroyed. She said that she had never heard of the concept of soul-guiding. I reiterated that it was a Jewish concept and that I would recommend some books to her on the subject. The rest of the group was very interested in the Tahara ritual. I asked them why they felt drawn to the ritual. They all agreed that it was the idea of having the body prepared by members of the community, rather than a funeral director that gave a spiritual dimension to this part of the funeral preparations. P-3 said that she always wondered how the funeral directors prepared the body. She said that by having a Chevra Kaddisha prepare the body she would have no fantasies about what was done to her loved one. She had no concerns about the professionalism of the funeral home; it just seemed more spiritual to have the body prepared by members of the community. The psychological value of Tahara for the mourner is that the mourner knows the society that performs this ritual act is aligning their consciousness with the needs of the deceased. The positive way that this relatively unknown ritual was received by this group indicates to me that it may be a ritual well worth revisiting.

The fifth session topic was the five stages of mourning. I asked the group to think about where they thought they might be in the grief process. The results were as follows:

P-1 was somewhere between stage 2 and 3. She was still going through the pain and adaptation to life without her parents.

P-2 felt that she had done her grief work and was "doing well". She had no interest in dating but was happy living with her sister and planning her daughter's wedding.

P-3 was somewhere between stage two and three. She said that she still feels a great deal of sadness, but she has begun to find more comfort in her memories than sadness. She is taking that as a good sign.

P-4 felt that most of her grieving work has been done and she has come to terms with her husband's death.

P-5 felt she was still in stages one and two. It has only been nine months. She said that she is very lonely and would like to find someone in the future. (I thought that her expressing her willingness to make an emotional investment in another was a very hopeful sign)

P-6 said that she was doing well and wanted to announce to the group that she has been dating a widower. She said that she still thinks of her husband and all the years they shared together, but she is ready to invest in a new relationship. The group spontaneously clapped.

There is a Jewish four fold model of grief work which corresponds to the phases of grief described by William Worden which combines both the religious and the psychological. The Stages are:

Phase One: Initial shock and Denial- Jewish Response

- Aninut
- Funeral
- Shiva
- Sh'loshim

Phase Two: Experiencing the Pain

- Shiva
- Sh'loshim
- Kaddish

Phase Three: Adapting to the Loss

- Kaddish
- Yahrzeit

Phase Four: Finding Enduring Connection

- Yahrzeit
- Yiskor (Dale 2001)

This model clearly shows that the Jewish ritual customs are compatible with the psychological stages of mourning. It was interesting to me that Kaddish appears as part of three of the four phases. In fact the Kaddish does appear in the final phase because it is a part of the Yiskor service. Kaddish binds the survivor to the deceased at all levels of bereavement. The addition of a spiritual dimension to the clinical grief work gives the mourner a way to connect with their ancestors, community and culture during their mourning period.

In the last session we discussed the various Jewish views of the after life. The group was surprised that some Jewish sects believe in the resurrection of the body. I asked the

group if they had thought about their own mortality after the death of their loved one. They all said that in that they had and in doing so they had become more in touch with their own mortality. P-2 said that right until the end her husband fought to live. He never talked about dying with her. When he finally did die she said she made peace with her own mortality by accepting it. She said that if her husband couldn't beat it than no one could. She wanted to live each day like it was her last and follow his example of never giving up. P-4 said that she believed that she would live on in her children and grandchildren and that she hoped her life would be a good ethical example for them. P-6 said that she was not all that concerned about the after life. She said that she just wanted to be a good person and enjoy her life and not suffer too much before she died. P-5 said that she believed that the soul is eternal and that she feels her husband's presence around her all the time. She said that maybe the group thinks I'm crazy but I think he wants me to know that he is alright. This is a good examples of a person who has almost reached the end of stage four. She can still keep the image of her husband while accepting his death. I ended the last session by asking everyone to be silent and just to concentrate on their breathing and to think about their loved ones presence around them. I ended the session with the following: "Adonai *natan va- Adonai l-chak, y'hi sheim Adonai m'vorach* .G-d has given and G-d has taken away, Blessed be the name of G-d." Job 1:21

Chapter V

The group portion of the project is now completed. The goal in this chapter is to gather the information and to present the most important results of the project to the reader. I will discuss the outcomes of the project that were expected and those that were not. In the original proposal the goal of the project was to find out if the prayers and customs surrounding Jewish mourning would provide comfort and healing to those in bereavement. From the clinical perspective, the project was to determine if these Jewish customs aided the mourners in their journey through four stages of grieving: **accepting the reality of the loss; processing the pain of grief; internal and external adjustments to life without the deceased; finding an enduring connection to the deceased while embarking on a new life.** (Worden 2009) I took a gamble in deciding which prayer or custom would be the first that we would explore. I decided on the Kaddish and it was a good choice. The group did not know very much about the Kaddish other that that it was a prayer one says for the dead. They learned more about the various forms of the Kaddish and the different functions the Kaddish has in Jewish liturgy. Although the Kaddish provided what one of the group called a spiritual lifeline during the darkest days of mourning, they were not quite sure what it was about the prayer that was so comforting. As we read it aloud in the Aramaic and then in the English translation, they concurred that even though they did not know what they were saying the meter of the Aramaic was soothing and the English translation was not. We determined that the real power was not in the words but in power of the Kaddish to link one generation of mourners to the next. For thousands of years Jews have recited this prayer, which is a

prayer of praise to G-d spoken at a time when G-d's presence may seem far away. The Kaddish keeps us connected to the spiritual even when we do not feel connected. The group's knowledge of the customs of Y*ahrzeit* and *Yiskor* was very weak. The timing of Yahrzeit and Yiskor provided a spiritual pathway to the second and third clinical tasks of mourning. As we discussed these customs of remembrance, a new way of looking at these customs emerged. Rather than seeing the Yahrzeit and Yiskor as days to be dreaded because of the flood of emotion that might be experienced, they would try to see the day as a time when they could spend more time in reflecting on the years they spent with their loved one. They could think of not only the good times they shared together but the times of trial and disappointment. This way of looking at Yiskor and Yahrzeit came from the group and was an outcome that I had not expected but something that I will take with me to share with other bereavement groups.

I was interested in hearing the reaction of the group to the Shivah period and how it may have impacted the grieving process. The shivah occurs when the mourners are in an intense period of grief. The group had mixed reviews about shivah. The group responded that after hearing my didactic session on what shivah is supposed to be, that their reality was somewhat different. The Shivah for most was a house full of people who offered condolences, spent some time with the mourning family and had coffee and cake. The group was conflicted as to whether the shiva was comforting. Some of the group thought that it was more to distract them from their mourning than anything else. Others found the shivah exhausting and were glad when it was over. On the positive side, all were very grateful for the presence of the community and visits from neighbors and friends. From a clinical standpoint I think that the shiva that only distracts a person from

their grief is counter productive. Shivah should give the mourner a chance to remain quiet and introspective or have the opportunity to speak about the deceased. Clinically this is the time when the period of denial gives way to the second stage of coping with the pain. If the Shivah only distracts the mourner, clinically it may prolong the initial stage of denial.

The underlying problem is that most visitors who come to a shiva house feel very uncomfortable and don't know what to say or do. This is one of the outcomes of session two that I felt was very important in my future ministry. We need to educate our congregants and our children about the importance of the mitzvah of attending a shiva home. We need to talk about the uncomfortable feelings we experience when we visit a house of mourning and accept these feelings as part of performing the mitzvah. We need to educate our congregants about the etiquette and respect shown to mourners by refraining from speaking to them first and accepting the role that silence plays in the Shivah experience.

There was one Jewish mourning custom that I wanted to share with the group that I was reasonably sure would be a custom with which they would not be familiar. This was the custom of *Tahara,* the ritual washing and purification of the body before burial.

I chose to speak about this custom because the more liberal sects of Judaism are becoming more interested in this practice. I was reasonably sure that this group would reject Tahara out of hand because in their experience all preparation of the body was done by the funeral director. The spiritual roots of Tahara are to continue to provide respectful care and treatment of the body before burial and to perform the ritual act of the purification of the body. Since most Reform and many Conservative congregations do

not have a *Chevra Kadeesha* (burial society) the preparation of the body is usually done by the funeral home. It is not performed as a sacred ritual act. I explained the actual procedure and the spiritual meaning of the Tahara in my didactic portion of session four. To my complete surprise, the group was very interested in the ritual. They asked why they did not have the option to choose this way of preparing the body for their loved one. The only answer that I could give them was that liberal Judaism has not chosen to embrace this practice. I did however tell them that there is a small movement within the liberal Jewish community to form burial societies that would provide this mitzvah to liberal communities. The clinical value of Tahara is the knowledge that one knows exactly how the body will be treated and by whom. The option is also given to immediate family members to personally perform one small final act of kindness to the deceased at the end of the Tahara ritual .This act is to tie one of the knots on the burial shroud. Since public viewing of the body is not part of the Jewish funeral, tying the last knot in the shroud can give the mourner(s) the opportunity to see their loved one so that there no denial of the death. This can help to prevent any magical thinking that some how their loved one is not actually in the closed coffin and prolong the denial phase of mourning. The reaction to the Tahara by this bereavement group might not be representative of a larger population of the congregation, but I felt that the unexpected positive reaction of this group suggests that there could be a need to at least explore the possibility of offering this custom to members of liberal congregations.

In the final session I spoke about the Jewish view of the afterlife. I decided to include this topic because it is a question that usually is not asked until one loses a close relative.

Judaism has much more to say about *this* life than the afterlife. In session six I gave an overview about the various views on the resurrection and afterlife from biblical sources to the present. The subject of one's mortality seemed much more relevant to the group now than it had before they experienced their parent's or spouse's death. The idea of coming to terms with one's own mortality had more of a sense of urgency than it did before. The entire group felt that their loved ones were at peace and their souls were with G-d.

The most interesting part of this discussion was the fact that all of the participants were able to feel an enduring sense of connection to their love one while, at the same time, beginning to live a life of their own. From a clinical perspective this indicates a movement towards stage four. I asked in what rituals they felt this connection to the deceased. Some of the group said that when they were in certain places they felt the spiritual presence of their loved one. Others felt a spiritual presence when they visited the grave of their loved one. They admitted talking to the deceased as if they were catching up on what was going on in the family. One of the group said that she was still in too much pain to visit the grave. Her loss was more recent and the group assured her that with the passage of time visits to the grave might be more comforting.

On a number of occasions I asked the group if they would like to write some of their own reflections on their mourning experiences or perhaps write a personal prayer. I did not receive any positive feedback on that. I did give the group a number of poems, psalm texts, Talmudic verses and reflections on bereavement and healing. These offerings were accepted and some of the group mentioned verses or psalms that they particularly liked to read.

The most gratifying part of the project was the way these women comforted each other. There was the unspoken feeling in the room that while each of them had been in their own dark place they had a kinship with each other that was pervasive. No one ever said "I know how you feel, or time will heal". On the contrary, they shared how terribly painful their lost had been and how hard it has been to bear.

In my study of Jewish mourning rituals, customs and prayers, I found these customs to be very helpful to the mourner from the moment of death to the end of the tasks of mourning. From a clinical standpoint, Kaddish, shiva and sh'loshim were most helpful in tasks one and two. The Yahrzeit and Yiskor were important in stage three when internal and external adjustments are being made by the survivor. The final task of grieving is where I am convinced that Jewish morning rituals have a great deal to offer to the mourner. Judaism has concrete ways that the survivor can keep the memory of the deceased activated and still live their own lives fully. The mourner can use their grief to make this world a better place by performing righteous acts, giving charity to the poor, maintaining religious and secular institutions, and engaging in the study of sacred texts in memory of their deceased. Clinically, a mourner who has a way of redirecting the libidinal energy invested in the deceased to acts performed for the living has a better chance of reaching stage four in grief work and not getting "stuck" along the way.

The one negative observation that stands out for me is the considerable lack of knowledge of basic Jewish mourning customs that my group displayed. My plan was to begin each session of the group with a didactic portion. My dilemma was that I did not know at what level to approach each subject and exactly which customs to include or not.

I did not want to talk about material that they all ready knew. I discovered that the group knew very little about even the most basic customs, such as Kaddish and shivah. The group was eager to learn about all the customs and said that their mourning experience might have been different if they understood more about what they were doing and why they were doing it. Of course there is no way to be sure if that would be the case, but the group thought that more knowledge would have had a positive effect over time.

In my personal ministry, when I am conducting a funeral I will definitely do more to make sure that the mourners understand the rituals and why they are doing them.

The group also expressed the desire for a follow-up from the clergy at eleven months after the death. I know that many clergy will call periodically to see how a congregant is doing. What I am suggesting is that the mourners be contacted by the clergy as the end of the first year of mourning approaches. This is a time of transition and the rituals of Yahrzeit and Yiskor can play an important part in this phase of mourning. A phone call at this time might also enable the clergy to identify those in the congregation who are experiencing complicated or difficult mourning. These congregants might need special pastoral counseling or therapy rather than routine pastoral care. In the area of pastoral care, the group was very grateful for the loving support which they received from the clergy at the temple. They were particularly grateful for the many details of the funeral that the clergy handled for them. One member of the group shared that at the moment of her husband's death she was so worried about all the plans she would have to make. She was grateful that the clergy staff took care of making some of those decisions.

The lack of knowledge of Jewish mourning customs should motivate us in our ministry to offer more classes on Jewish Mourning Customs and Rituals. Sometimes we are reluctant to do a series of adult education classes on this particular subject. I do not think that these classes will draw a crowd, but for those in attendance they could be very enlightening. Another way to incorporate this subject is to include it in a general introduction to Judaism class, or adult bar/ bat mitzvah class curriculum. We also tend to shy away from talking to our children about bereavement. I feel very strongly that Jewish Mourning Customs and Rituals should be part of religious school studies. It is important that our young people be aware of how their Jewish heritage is involved in all life cycle events not just the joyous ones.

As I reflect on the project, one of the most profound experiences for me was the opportunity to incorporate the theological and the clinical parts of grief work into the sessions of a bereavement support group. From a clinical standpoint I was able to observe how these rituals aided the mourner in completing the stages of grief.

In Jewish mourning rituals the mourner has both their individual relationship with G-d and the support of the Jewish Community. There is the opportunity for both private prayer and community support throughout the bereavement period. The inclusion of the presence of the Divine in all of these mourning customs gave them additional power to heal the hearts of the bereaved. In the group we were able to discuss how prayer and righteous keep alive the memory and spirit of the deceased while permitting the mourner to embrace life again. I was honored that the group was open to sharing with me the pain of their loss. I was awed by the group's willingness to open their hearts and discuss

their personal experience with Jewish mourning customs. I was amazed at the healing power of the group experience. As the theologian Martin Buber so wrote: " G-d is ever present, while we at times are absent. Whenever we enter into a genuine relationship with another we also discover G-d." (Buber On Judaism p.4) I was aware of that Presence in our group work together.

By the time we had finished the work of the project the group had become very comfortable with each other and saying goodbye was difficult. I hope that I will have the opportunity to lead another bereavement group in the future and incorporate what I have learned in the execution of this D. Min project.

Kein y'hi ra-tzon (May this be G-d's will.)

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