Good Grief:

Helping Jewish Children Live with Death

Jennifer Anne Gubitz

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Advisor: Rabbi Carole B. Balin, PhD

In Memoriam

The January air bit the tip of my nose as we stood under the green tent, which shielded us for a moment from that winter's day. A bulldozer was parked several feet from the rectangular hole in the ground, deep and empty. I watched as they lowered the coffin into the dark soil, the crank squeaking every few turns. People lined up to toss dirt into the grave. My grandfather sat quietly in a folding chair flanked by his three children, my mother among them. Back at the house, there were hardboiled eggs and an incredible spread of foods I knew only from Bar Mitzvah luncheons. Some people washed their hands before entering the red house. I sensed it would be inappropriate for me to do my typical run, prep and flip down the long hallway leading to the guest room, tumbling onto the bed in which my mom slept as a child. There was no one to take me to the bathroom, it seemed. That had been Bubbe's main job.

Martin Luther King Day, January 1990. The day we buried my very favorite Bubbe. I was eight years old. My mom stayed with Bubbe, her mother, in the last few weeks of her life and remained there for a few more after her death. Perhaps, they had explained the situation to me. I have a snapshot memory of my dad sitting my brother and me down on the couch to tell us the news. For months after, I begged my parents to let me sleep in their bed; they initially compromised by giving me permission to fall asleep there until my dad would move me to my own room. But, ultimately, I won with a more permanent spot on the floor next to my mom's side of the bed. There I slept for many months, assured that if I slept next to my mom, she wouldn't die like her mom did. This was but one way my grief and deep sense of loss manifested itself in daily life.

It was no easier years later, when we awoke to a phone call from my mom's brother. At the ripe age of eleven and in the habit of listening in on phone calls, "Judy's dead," I heard him tell my mom. "She killed herself."

The scene replays in my mind, not so different from the first death. This time sweat trickled down my back, as the August heat swelled and again we stood under the green tent, which shielded us for a moment from the summer day. A bulldozer was parked several feet from the rectangular hole in the ground, deep and empty, in the far corner of the cemetery. I watched as they lowered the coffin into the dark soil, the crank squeaking every few turns. People lined up to toss dirt into the grave. My grandfather again sat quietly in a folding chair flanked by his two surviving children, my mother among them. Back at the house, with that incredible spread of foods, no one knew what to say.

The year before this tragic death, I had learned in religious school that death-by-suicide relegated the deceased to a grave beyond the confines of a Jewish cemetery. She was ultimately buried in the cemetery, but on the outskirts, I noticed. My mom assured me, however, that my aunt would not be alone in the cemetery, that she was buried near a family friend. I thought her burial plot located at so far a distance from my grandmother's was a punishment, and that she would know. The truth was no one had purchased a plot for her; her death was unexpected.

What happened to me nearly twenty years ago should not happen to other children. The confusion, the loneliness, and the forever disappearance of my Bubbe left an indelible impression on my childhood. The tragic death of my aunt induced years and years of unanswerable questions, gaping guilt, raging anger, and deep, deep sadness. How, I wonder, might my own experience of life-altering grief be a *tikkun*, a repair, for others?

This thesis.

While I would not trade the lives or the lost time with my beloved Bubbe, my Aunt, or my Bubbe and Zaydes who have died in recent years, I feel gratitude for the ability to transform this loss into an opportunity to help Jewish children. What better wellspring to draw from but the lives of those who loved you and lived for you, for your siblings and parents, so that you could do exactly the work which fulfills you most. May their memories and the memories of all whom we have loved and lost sustain us as we bring healing to the world.

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Acknowledgments

Five years pass by in but the blink of an eye and marathons are the distance between the person I was entering rabbinical school and the rabbi I have become. Such growth does not occur without help; seeds must be watered, tended and cared for.

Therefore, I extend deep gratitude to the cherished mentors who nurtured my development, drawing outward the stories I held deep inside: Merle Feld; Rabbi Larry Hoffman, PhD; Rabbi Ron Klotz; Rabbi Daniel Lehrman; Rabbi Sandford Kopnick; Rabbi Bernard Mehlman, PhD; Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, DMin; Dan Nichols; Rabbi Richard Safran; and Chaplain Leslie Stokes.

Especially, this thesis would not be possible without the careful thinking, incredibly articulate editing, and patient kindness of Rabbi Carole Balin, who all the while reminded me that a thesis on a topic such as this demanded to be rooted in the full story of its provenance, and needed to offer something intentional and meaningful to fill the in gaps I found in Jewish Death Education. That she was simultaneously curating a museum exhibit that opened in the final weeks of this process is not lost on me.

Thank you to Yoram Bitton, Head of Library Services on the HUC-JIR New York Campus, who was instrumental in preparing translations, teaching me the nuances of Tannaitic Hebrew, and guiding me through various texts related to this topic.

For endless entertainment during long days in the library amid an intense rabbinic placement process and a case of the shingles, I thank my friends and classmates at HUC-JIR in New York. I feel blessed to have colleagues such as you who are a constant source of support and laughter and who will, undoubtedly, become powerful leaders who transform the Jewish world.

And finally, gratitude and love to my family and friends who are like family who have always supported and loved me, enabling me to reach this season.

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Chapter 1

From *Kiddush* to *Kaddish*:

Fighting Our Fears to Teach Our Children

The section dedicated to *Kaddish* in a Reform Shabbat service is an isolated moment of solemnity in an otherwise upbeat service.

"We pause now to remember those whom death has taken from us…" the Rabbi says, voice softening, pace slowing after the conclusion of the Teutonic march-like setting of *Aleinu*. The Rabbi recites a poem, found in the Reform Movement's *Gates of Prayer* prayer book, and used for decades in many congregations throughout North America, which reads:

> Birth is a beginning
> and death a destination
> And life is a journey:
> From childhood to maturity
> and youth to age…
> From defeat to defeat to defeat
> until looking backwards or ahead
> We see that victory lies not
> at some high point along the way
> but in having made the journey
> step by step
> a sacred pilgrimage.
> Birth is a beginning
> and death a destination
> And life is a journey;
> A sacred journey to life everlasting.

"If you are mourning the loss of a loved one in recent days, we invite you to stand up and share with us their name and relationship to you." Congregants begin to rise, one by one, sharing names of loved ones with the community.

"We add to those names those who have died in years past," the rabbi continues, "and members of our armed forces who serve our country overseas, those of the Israeli defense forces, and still others - men, women and children killed by famine, plague, and

war. We rise as a community and recite together the ancient words of *Kaddish Yatom,* the Mourner's Kaddish…"

"*Yit'gadal, Yit'kadash, Shemei Rabah…*" the congregation intones together.

After *Kaddish,* the Rabbi invites children under the age of *b'nei mitzvah* to the *bimah* to recite *Kiddush* and *Motzi,* and the service is concluded with a song. Congregants wish one another "Shabbat Shalom" and head off to the *oneg*. Perhaps, at the *Oneg,* congregants will make their way to those who mentioned deceased relatives in an effort to comfort them.

This scene occurs every week in congregations throughout North America. Though the format differs, Jews, young, old, alone or accompanied by family, come to synagogue to say these ancient words of *Kaddish,* praising God for life. This reading and many others like it, in the new Reform prayer book, try to poeticize and sanitize death by praising the life that was.

Though they share the 3-letter Hebrew root kof-daled-shin (K, D, Sh,) we teach children the blessing for wine (KiDduSH) long before we teach them the blessing to commemorate death (KaDdiSH). Perhaps they discern the necessity of remaining silent during the Kaddish, intuiting the change of energy in the room. More likely, children may not even be present for the *Kaddish,* having left when the rabbi began the sermon, and are out playing in the lobby, returning only when its time for *Kiddush.*

Birth, as Rabbi Alvin Fine wrote, is a beginning. And death *is* most certainly a destination, an unavoidable consequence of living. Yet, for a host of reasons, it is not common to speak of death. While our prayer service has a moment for it, and we do spring into action when someone in our community suffers a loss, we understandably prefer to focus on more positive things. Death is for old people, we might think. If it's unavoidable, what is there to talk about, we might wonder? How much the more so when it comes to our children. We prefer to send them to the temple lobby during the sermon and hope they'll remain there until the *Kiddush*. Explaining the *Kaddish* is not a conversation we wish to have.

But then death arrives, as it inevitably does, and grief strikes our hearts as well as our children's. And the conversation we hoped we'd never have to have with our children must occur.

Over the last five years, the core of Reform Jews suffered multiple tragic deaths that left communities of teens, parents, congregants and clergy reeling. In one case, the sudden death of the beloved teenage son of a Reform rabbi and cantor led to outpourings of grief on social media like Facebook. Though NFTY responded immediately by organizing an online response with resources for grieving teens,[1] many continue— nearly three years after his death —to post on his Facebook wall. The wall is covered with short sentiments ranging from "We miss you!" and "Hope things are going well up there!" to lengthy and detailed descriptions of a youth group event or experience. In many ways Facebook and

[1] See appendix

other social media function as a modern-day memorial book, like the *Memorbücher* (memory books) that originated as far back as the First Crusade and were created to commemorate the long lists of the dead. Indeed, the millennial[2] generation's response to death is a very public act. Might it even function as a mechanism for expressing some sort of theology of the afterlife?

Though impossible to measure, it would seem that these particularly public sentiments of grief and mourning fulfill a fundamental human need. They comfort. They console. They allow people, especially young people, to mourn outwardly, unabashedly, and also publicly. Is it the open nature of our modern society or of teens in general that results in Facebook's appeal to the grief-stricken? And what about their Facebook posts? Do teens really believe that the dead are reading their Facebook wall from some far away, heavenly place?

It seems that, though some "magical thinking" might underlie the posts, most teens who experience the death of loved ones respond publicly because they have nowhere else to turn. They are unequipped to face the reality of what they are experiencing and feeling. As young people, this may be the first time they have faced the death of a loved one. Perhaps they have not been exposed to or educated about Jewish rituals for mourning. It may be that they have not been encouraged to formulate beliefs about death and the afterlife. Rather, in the face of tragedy, they are left in the lurch, grabbing for the meaning or an understanding of a truth far beyond anyone's comprehension. Typical of

[2] The label refers to those born after 1980 – the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. Pew Research Center.

the millennial generation, though not necessarily consciously, teens today seek to create community in the public arena. Is this the ideal way for our kids to grieve? In what ways can we better equip them to cope with the death of loved one?

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> Rav Nachman showed himself [in a dream after his death]. Rava asked him "Was death painful?" Rav Nachman replied. "It was a painless separation…But were the Blessed Holy One to say to me, 'You may return to that world where you were before,' I would not wish to do it, for the fear of death is too great." (BT, *Mo'ed Katan* 28a)

Maurice Lamm, in The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, writes: "we are deathly afraid of death."[3] Known clinically as thanatophobia, the fear of death is pervasive. We may fear death because we fear the physical pain endured in the dying process; we may fear death for the emotional pain it causes us and our loved ones. Thanatophobia may be the result of religious dogma that teaches adherents that reward or punishment will occur in death. In other words, we may fear death because of its moral consequences that could produce suffering; or because we "fear of the possibility that nothingness follows life."[4] Perhaps, as well, we simply have less experience with death and dying in our modern milieu and we fear the unknown.

Ironically, in our emotionally-open and scientifically-informed age, conversations about death are relegated to whispers. As Dr. Herman Feifel, father of the thanatology

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[3] Lamm, Maurice. *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning.* Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David, 2000, p. xii.

[4] Deines, John T. "Thanatophobia: A Historical Perspective." *Bereavement Counseling: A Multidisciplinary Handbook.* Ed. Mark B. Schoenberg. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980, p. 37.

movement, puts it:

> Today we live increasingly in a "death free" milieu, but in an earlier, predominantly rural America death was commonly present in homes. It was personally experienced by young and old alike…[and] was necessarily experienced by all as a natural, inevitable, and ever possible aspect of the human condition. Children were not "protected"…a recognition and acceptance of death became an integral part of their informal education…[5]

Today, death generally takes place at a remove from our homes; today, many people die in hospitals or nursing homes. These environments are generally not child-friendly and also further institutionalize the process of death and dying. Cultural influences also push the process of death and dying to the margins.

> …much in our American culture conspires to remove death from our minds and even our feelings. In television, the movies, and other expressions of our mores, emphasis is on the preservation of youth and the denial of aging. Death, though threatening and difficult to handle, is made remote… Estranged by our civilization from the basic realities of life (of which death is a part), we have lost contact with the daily struggle for life of animals in field and forest. We have less and less contact with nature, with the death of livestock, and with the slaughtering of animals for food. Death has become for us foreboding, frightening, repugnant, and mysterious.[6]

In addition, a (fortunate) drastic reduction in infant mortality, along with radically profound improvements in medical research that extend the lives of those who suffer

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[5] Feifel, Herman. "The Meaning of Death in American Society: Implications for Education." *Death education: Preparation for living* (pp.114-128). Ed. B. Green & D. Irish. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman. 1971.

[6] Krupp, George R., and Bernard Kligfeld. "The Bereavement Reaction a Cross-Cultural Evaluation." *Journal of Religion and Health* 1.3 (1962): p. 226.

from prolonged illness and disease, perpetuates "the notion that death is something that only happens to the aged."[7]

In the end, the topic is largely avoided because experiencing the death of a loved one is, according to sociologists Joseph Weber and David Fournier, "one of the most stressful events that individuals will experience during their lifetime and may be accompanied by serious emotional as well as physical symptoms."[8]

Death is taboo in our society - a topic to be avoided at all costs. It is, we may recognize, unavoidably "destined to remain among the certainties of life,"[9] but we still don't want to talk about it until we must.

For adults, it may come as a surprise to learn that we share the same emotions about death as our children.[10] As Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, "Sorrow makes us all children again."[11] As a result, we don't want to talk about death, especially with our kids, because we, too, have issues thinking about it. It causes immense discomfort. It scares us. In some ways, as Simone de Beauvoir notes, by talking about death or mourning a loss, "we are taking part in the dress rehearsal of our own burial."[12] How frightening. And yet, if we continue to remain tight-lipped about these topics, when death does occur, not only

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[7] Weber, Joseph A., and David G. Fournier. "Family Support and a Child's Adjustment to Death." *Family Relations* 34 (1985), p. 44.
[8] Weber, 44.
[9] Grollman, Earl A. *Explaining Death to Children*,Boston: Beacon, 1967, p. ix.
[10] Grollman, ix.
[11] Grollman, Earl A., and Gisela Héau. *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*. Boston: Beacon, 1976, p. x.
[12] Beauvoir, Simone De. *A Very Easy Death* New York: Putnam, 1966.

will children have little experience or knowledge of it, their parents may very likely be the one in mourning and subsequently unable to support their child. Teaching children about death and to cope with loss while adults themselves mourn seems like an impossibility. Even under ordinary circumstances, exploring issues of death and bereavement can be anxiety-provoking as it kicks up our own fears and may create resistance to Jewish Death Education.

There is something to be said about de Beauvoir's observation. Perhaps a dress rehearsal is exactly what we need to cope with loss. Death and grief in its aftermath will happen regardless of how we prepare for it. It will be painful, to be sure, but perhaps, we can do ourselves, and most importantly our children, a favor. The initial struggle is worth the otherwise unintended consequences. Specialists tell us that repressing our feelings about death or avoiding the topic altogether can have adverse affects on children; they "often become confused and may show their grief inappropriately."[13] But if we prepare our children and ourselves for loss and grief, as well as offering Judaism's wisdom about death, dying, and the afterlife, when the unavoidable occurs, we will be better equipped to integrate what we know with how we feel. One can never prepare for the shock of a tragic death, and even the deaths we are expecting and preparing for cause tremendous grief. Lamm writes:

> …the crises will come. If thinking on the subject is to be deferred, if there is to be no education *before* the crisis, what chance is there that we shall know how to handle the crisis when it arrives?[14]

[13] Weber, 43.
[14] Lamm, xii.

As adults, we owe it to our children to prepare them as much as possible by teaching them about death, dying and the afterlife before, to the extent we can control, they are faced with these difficult circumstances.

This thesis will present an exploration of the history of death education; provide an inventory of existing death education materials for Jewish youth; trace the *halachic* (Jewish legal) understanding of children and mourning and its connection to modern day child developmental concepts of death; and fold all three pieces into a liberal Jewish death education curriculum.

Life *is* a journey, and death *is* a destination. We cannot avoid death and we cannot avoid the grief we will experience when faced with death. But perhaps, we can offer our youth an opportunity to experience the journey of life in its fullest, giving them the tools to accomplish, as Charlie Brown said best, "Good Grief."

Chapter 2:

From *Kiddush* to *Kaddish* to *K'dusha*:

A Survey of Death Education and Related Jewish Curricula

> Death can be a teacher about the fragility of life and its beauty, about the deep importance of loved ones and of treasured values, about the ways in which life gives us extraordinary gifts, that even loss sometimes brings blessing in its wake. Death is a teacher about God's presence in the world, about human goodness and compassion and love. Death is a teacher about courage and hope and faith, about believing in that which we cannot see, about moving through the valley of the shadow until light is visible again.[15]

As Rabbi Amy Eilberg writes, death has so much to teach us about life. While the fear of death has prevented many from really discussing important issues related to dying, in the last 60 years, these previously squelched conversations have been opened and we are beginning to allow ourselves to once more learn from that which we fear the most.

This chapter will trace the ways in which the conversation has been advanced through the development of the death education (thanatology) movement and related curricula. As well, it will survey the landscape of existing Jewish death educational resources for youth in order to frame and address the current needs in Jewish education on the subject.

History of Thanatology

As an air force psychologist stationed in the Island of Tinian,[16] Dr. Herman Feifel witnessed the *Enola Gay* take off to bomb the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Profoundly affected by the massive number of deaths that resulted, and by the personal loss of his

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[15] Eilberg, Rabbi Amy. "Walking in the Valley of the Shadow: The Spiritual and Ethical Dimensions of Care at the End of Life." *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional & Contemporary Sources*. Ed. Dayle A. Friedman. 2nd ed. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2005.

[16] "Herman Feifel, 87; Pioneer in Study of Death." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 24 Jan. 2003. Web. <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jan/24/local/me-feifel24>.

mother a few years later, Dr. Feifel pioneered the academic study of death education, known clinically as thanatology.[17] Of course, death was not a new subject, but Feifel observed the clinicalization of death that resulted in a shift from a historically "death-accepting to a death-avoiding society."[18] Death was all but taboo, Feifel noted, with regard to both the topic and bereaved persons in general.[19] Especially when it came to children, while "most modern parents are convinced that they should be honest in discussing the biological processes of birth…when it comes to life's end, they may fall strangely silent."[20] After two World Wars, the Holocaust, and the atomic warfare, however, as well as scientific advances leading to longer life expectancy, the taboo needed to be lifted. In 1959, Dr. Feifel started this process by publishing "The Meaning of Death," a "pioneering force in modern studies on attitudes to dying" that enabled "frank discussions of death and . . . the establishment of the hospice movement."[21] The book itself, and Feifel's additional research, faced many obstacles. Publishing houses saw "no potential market for it,"[22] while hospitals upheld rules prohibiting discussions of

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[17] Russian microbiologist and Nobel Laureate Ilya Mechnikov coined the term in 1901 from the Greek roots *thanatos* and *ology*, meaning the study of death-related behavior. Thanatos was the Greek god of death.

[18] "Growing Old in a New Age." *Center on Aging.* University of Hawaii. Web. <http://www.growingold.hawaii.edu/prog11.htm>

[19] Feifel, Herman. "The Thanatological Movement: Respise, Adspice, Prospice." *The Thanatology Community and the Needs of the Movement.* Ed. Elizabeth J. Clark and Austin H. Kutscher. New York: Haworth, 1992, p. 6.

[20] Grollman, *Talking About Death*, ix.

[21] "[Deathwatch] Herman Feifel, Death Study Pioneer, 87." 24 Jan. 2003. Web. <http://slick.org/deathwatch/mailarchive/msg00974.html>.

[22] Feifel, Herman. "The Thanatological Movement: Respise, Adspice, Prospice." *The Thanatology Community and the Needs of the Movement.* Ed. Elizabeth J. Clark and Austin H. Kutscher. New York: Haworth, 1992, p. 8.

death with patients. Feifel perceived that death was "a dark symbol not to be stirred – not even touched – an obscenity to be avoided."[23]

After Feifel's groundbreaking work, the 1960s and 70s saw a flourish of activity on the thanatology scene. Colleges and universities began to teach about death, dying, and bereavement; there were many significant publications by scholars spanning multi-disciplinary fields (among them Richard Kalish, Robert Kastenbaum, Earl Grollman, Daniel Leviton, and Edwin Shneidman); Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' "On Death and Dying," which emphasized DABDA[24], the five stages of grief, universalized the bereavement process; academic journals such as OMEGA, Death Studies, and the Journal of Thanatology appeared; Cicely Saunders began the hospice movement; and numerous professional organizations with a focus on thanatology convened.[25]

The field grew to encompass everything related to dying, death, and grief, such as funeral practices, AIDS, children, counseling, hospice, survivor support,[26] the bereavement process, religious and cultural responses to death, debates about euthanasia and suicide,[27] as well as the dying process, body disposal, and deep discussions focused on "the ultimate questions of the meaning of life, death and human destiny".[28]

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[23] Feifel, "The Thanatological Movement," 9.
[24] Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance
[25] Feifel, "The Thanatological Movement," 10.
[26] "The Center For Thanatology Research & Education Inc." *The Center for Thanatology Research & Education, Inc.* Web. <http://www.thanatology.org/home.html>.
[27] Warren, W. "Death Education: An Outline and Some Critical Observations." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 29.1 (1981), p. 30.
[28] Warren, 31.

As the field grew, so did the relevant literature. In 1977, in *The Scope of Death Education,* Daniel Leviton "identified the goals of death education and defined death education as a development process in which death-related knowledge and the implications resulting from that knowledge are transmitted."[29] And in 1981, William Warren argued in "Death Education: An Outline and Some Critical Observations" (cited above) that the main purpose of death education "was to defuse death of the 'socially disruptive consequences that might flow from the acceptance of personal mortality."[30] The ultimate goal of Death Education became to open lines of communication between the living and the dying in order to promote "comfortable interactions with the dying, *reducing anxiety,* developing notions of *appropriate, good,* and *healthy death,* and removing taboos so that one can discourse *rationally* and *without anxiety*." [emphasis in original][31]

Jewish Death Education

With the mainstream death education field as a model, what would it look like to build a module of death education that is distinctively Jewish and a compulsory part of every Jewish child's religious education? If Jewish death education could, like Dr. Feifel hoped, increase "happiness…[and] help people understand their own feelings and attitudes toward death and dying so that death will be less fearful and living more enjoyable,"[32] then it would be worthwhile to introduce this effort into the Jewish realm.

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[29] "The Past, Present, and Future of Death Education." Jones and Bartlett, LLC. Ch. 17. 197.
[30] "The Past, Present, and Future of Death Education,"198.
[31] Leviton, L. "The Scope of Death Education." Death Education. I.1 (1977): 41-56.
[32] Feifel, Herman. "The Meaning of Death in American Society: Implications for

Creating Jewish death education for today does not require starting from scratch. Some resources already exist in the various Jewish movements. What is lacking is a comprehensive liberal Jewish curriculum geared towards children and their parents.

A Survey of Existing Curricula

In general, curricula on death education for children is sparse, and that which is offered deals largely with how to talk to children after a death has occurred. Among the organizations that have extant Jewish Death Education curricula or materials are: the Union for Reform Judaism, the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, and the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism. Among those surveyed, but yielding no results: the Orthodox Union, the RAVSAK Day School network, and Torah U'Mesorah: the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools. Clearly, these limited curricula are not sufficient for today's needs.

On the Union for Reform Judaism website, one finds a number of resources for parents whose family faces a death. There are book suggestions for parents[33] to read with their children, a podcast by Dr. Wendy Mogul,[34] an article by Jewish Family Concerns Specialist Rabbi Edythe Held Mencher LCSW, which attempts to "help . . . children cope,"[35] and a sample program for youth. In addition, there are a number of short

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Education." *Death education: Preparation for living* (pp.114-128). Ed. B. Green & D. Irish. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman. 1971.

[33] http://urj.org/life/family/bereavement/?syspage=article&item_id=61220

[34] http://urj.org/learning/forparents/podcasts/mogel/

[35] http://urj.org//life/family/bereavement//?syspage=article&item_id=3497

synagogue lessons;[36] three (excellent) curriculum guides by Masters of Education students at the LA campus of HUC-JIR;[37] and the URJ Chai curriculum, a movement-wide attempt to standardize Reform Jewish education, which contains several lessons related to death and bereavement.

For students in grades one through seven, the URJ Chai curriculum offers 21 lesson plans covering three areas (i.e. Torah, Avodah, G'milut Chasadim). Death Education is formally introduced in fifth grade as "Students learn what actions Jews take to show honor to the dead, the role of the *chevrah kadisha* in the Jewish community, and the reason for ethical wills."[38] Students also approach[39] the subject of death through an exploration of the *Kaddish* prayer. In seventh grade,[40] students consider how Jewish birth and death rituals reflect Jewish perspectives on life.

While the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation maintains a list of book suggestions, there are no movement-wide curricula. In her article "When Bad Things Happen to Good Children" posted on their website, Shoshanah Silberman,"[41] discusses her observation

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[36] See appendix
[37] Burg, Miriam Cotzin. "Death and Dying in the Jewish Tradition: A Curriculum Guide for Parent Education." Thesis. Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 2000. Davids, Mindy. "A Jewish Approach to Death and Dying." Thesis. Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1990. Schaffer, Adam. "Jewish Values in Death and Mourning: A Curriculum Guide for Adult Study." Thesis. Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 2003.
[38] http://chai.urj.org/about/contents/
[39] CHAI Level 5, Avodah Strand, Lesson 7 The *Kaddish* Prayer: Remembering and Affirming God
[40] CHAI Level 7, Avodah Strand, Lesson 3 Birth and Death: Teach Us to Number Our Days
[41] See Appendix

"that children were often peripheral to a *Shiva*, as adults were so absorbed in their own grief. Therefore [she] made it a policy to explain that [her] purpose was to visit the child."[42] The article delves into the needs of a bereaved child, offering recommendations of what to say and what not to say to them.

On the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) website, "Explaining Death to Children" came up under the heading "Jewish Funeral Practice." In "A Time to Grieve, A Time to Teach,"[43] Dr. (Rabbi) Joshua Elkin briefly traces an increase in death education in the last thirty years. While noting a tremendous output particularly in the realm of Jewish life cycle education, Elkin suggests, "more fundamental work with children is possible and necessary." According to the USJC movement publisher, however, the only books on bereavement are for adults.

According to a representative from the Orthodox Union, there are no death education curricula or materials for youth. It is possible that the issue is covered directly through text study, or experientially in the framework of *halachic* observance of mourning, or perhaps in private *yeshivot.* Though Torah U'Mesorah, a network of Orthodox day schools and yeshivot yielded no materials either.

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[42] Silberman, Shoshanah. "When Bad Things Happen to Good Children." *Jrf.org/edtalker,* Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Department of Education, p. 3.
[43] Elkin, Dr. Josh. "A Time to Grieve, A Time to Teach." <http://www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/Lifecycle/JewishFuneralPractice/ExplainingDeathtoChildren.aspx >.

In an article written in 1990 entitled "The End of Life in Reform Judaism," educator Alan Gorr comments on the dearth of information particularly in the Reform Movement. "The fact remains," he argues, "that Reform Jewish education has not really met its obligation concerning death." To emphasize the point, he continues:

> . . . one student pointed out that he and his classmates knew more about the story of death in the concentration camps than about a natural death, with which he could expect to come into contact within the normal course of his life.[44]

Gorr found among the teachers he surveyed that that the area of deepest concern was to "make the fact of death a source of meaning for those of us who remain among the living"[45] None, however, felt that teaching a doctrine of death focused on the dying process or the afterlife was productive or necessary. Instead, Gorr noted, while other "religious persuasions discuss death as an issue in and of itself, Jews will often speak at length about how the event is managed."

Liberal Jews need to have conversations that move beyond the logistics of death to a deep engagement with the intellectual and emotional aspects of death, dying and the afterlife. The responsibility lies with clergy and educators to move their communities from *kiddush* to *kaddish*. In this way, we might all obtain *k'dusha*, holiness.

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[44] Gorr, Alan. "What to Do With Death: The End of Life in Reform Jewish Education." *Religious Education* 85.4 (1990), p. 548

[45] Gorr, 551.

Chapter 3

Learning From Our Sages:

Developmental Concepts of Death in

Sociology and the Shulchan Aruch

While existing Jewish death educational resources for youth are sparse, we have precedent in the ancient texts of the Jewish people. This chapter will trace the evolution of the relationship between Jewish children and the halakhic obligation to observe the laws of *avelut* (mourning); and will draw comparisons between these *halakhic* law codes and modern child developmental concepts of death. The nexus between the two will serve as the basis for a curriculum in the following chapter.

The librarian at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, Yoram Bitton,[46] responded quite "matter-of-factly" to my inquiry about *halakhah* related to children and mourning. His response: "*Ayn avelut hakatan*" [there is no mourning for a child]. Furthermore, he continued, there is almost no reference to *katan* [child] in general in Jewish law. And that's a big statement to make.

"What do you mean there's no mourning for a child?" I asked. Memories of my own childhood grief weighed heavily on me at that moment. Trying to mask a mix of judgment and confusion, "Of course, children mourn," I urged. Maybe he didn't understand my question, I thought.

"In Israel," he continued, "When there is a family funeral, the children go to school. They don't go to the funeral."

"Come on! You've got to be kidding!" I argued. "They go to school while everyone else is at the funeral?"

"Let me show you the texts…" Dr. Bitton coaxed.

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[46] Dr. Yoram Bitton is writing his PhD dissertation on Tractate Semachot, which deals specifically with mourning rituals

***Ayn Avelut Hakatan* – There is No Mourning for a Child**

As late as the seventeenth century, Rabbinic commentators relied on earlier sources stating that children were not subject to mourning rituals, as for example in Siftei Ko'hen or Shakh, authored by Shabbatai ben Meir ha-Kohen. Of course, when the Shakh commentary on the Shulhan Arukh declares *ayn avelut hakatan,* he is not suggesting that children do not grieve. Rather, as one might expect in a legal text, he is relaying information about a child's relationship to Jewish law in the case of mourning rituals. The Torah considers children (*katan*) as lacking the ability and knowledge needed to fulfill an obligation.[47] Subsequently the Talmud and *halakhah* exempt children from the obligation to fulfill the commandments (*mitzvot*), including those that honor the deceased through mourning rituals. Children are required to continue their regular studies rather than interrupt them with formal mourning practice. As the Shulhan Arukh suggests *Ayn lo l'vat'lam m'limudim,*[48] do not let them neglect their studies. This is still the case today in Israel, as children attend school during funerals of family members.[49]

Besides mourning, children are exempt from other *mitzvot*. In fact, children are not obligated to any laws of Jewish observance until they reach the age of Jewish majority, typically 13 years of age for a boy and 12 for a girl. While a child may not be obligated to Jewish law, and specifically for this paper to the laws of mourning, we know from our

[47] Matzner-Bekerman, Shoshana. *The Jewish Child: Halakhic Perspectives*. New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1984, p. 14.
[48] See, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, Ch. 384:5
[49] Ovadia Yosef responsa

life experience that children do feel loss. Grief, it turns out, cares not for age or *halakhic* obligation.

Childhood was not universally acknowledged as a developmental stage until the 17th century. In general, children are infrequently mentioned in Rabbinic literature and the rabbis, Dr. Bitton noted, had little interest in children or their development. And yet, the Rabbinic discussion on children and mourning reveals a compelling understanding of youth (*katan*), education (*hinuch*), mourning ritual (*avelut*) and the nexus between the three. Rooted in the Shulhan Arukh—what many consider the definitive code of Jewish law—subsequent commentaries pay attention to the logistics of children and mourning. These texts, however, do not focus in any way on how children mourn emotionally and psychologically. At first glance, the Rabbis seemed little concerned with children and their needs, but with some probing, we may discover that the Rabbis had an understanding about grief and its impact on children, were concerned about educating youth about death, and were willing to allow for flexible parameters to that end. What the Rabbis teach about the nexus between *katan*, *hinuch*, and *avelut* can be quite useful in our day.

Texts on Mourning

Shulhan Arukh

The core of discussion about children and mourning is laid out in the Shulhan Arukh, a 16th century Sephardic code of law authored by Rabbi Joseph ben Ephraim Caro, known colloquially as Joseph Caro. Accepted as the most authoritative code of law of Sephardic *minhag* and highly regarded in Ashkenazic circles as well, the Shulhan Arukh is a compilation of *halakhic* rulings and commentaries. Joseph Caro drew primarily from Rabbi Jacob ben Asher's 13th century legal text, the Arba'ah Turim (Tur), upon which Caro wrote a commentary, known as the Beit Yosef. Twenty years later, Caro condensed its discourse into a compilation of final rulings, the Shulhan Arukh, which contains law on prayer, Shabbat, kashrut, family and fiscal laws. The second section of the Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, pays special attention to *hilchot avelut*, the laws of mourning.

קטן שמת לו מת מקרעין לו

Katan sh'met lo met ma'kri'in lo

For a child who experiences death, rend his clothing for him.

The verb *ma'kri'in* comes from the noun, *keriah*, which means tearing and refers to rending of garments by mourners prior to a funeral. Referenced in many texts prior to the Shulhan Arukh,[50] *keriah* is considered "the most striking Jewish expression of grief" and provides "an opportunity for psychological relief…allow[ing] the mourner to give vent to his pent-up anguish."[51] The biblical injunction in Leviticus 21 regarding who is a mourner obligates seven relatives to perform *keriah*:

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[50] Semachot 9:6 "As for minors, their clothes are rent by others."
[51] Lamm, 38.

> **1** And God said unto Moses: Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them: There shall none defile himself for the dead among his people; **2** except for his kin, that is near unto him, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother; **3** and for his sister a virgin, that is near unto him, that hath had no husband, for her may he defile himself.

Even if the child is a son, daughter, brother, or sister (we can assume they are not a spouse, husband or wife) this is among the many mourning obligations from which children under the age of thirteen are exempt; however, the rabbis acknowledge, *katan sh'met lo met*, that children do *experience* death and institute a measure of observance for the child.

We see here a rabbinic sensitivity to the needs of children when someone in their world dies. When an adult is observing the laws of mourning, to which they are halakhically obligated, they *kor'in*, rend their own clothing. But for a child, the verb *ma'kri'in* is in *a causative* tense. The grammar helps us understand that an adult must do this ritual for the child, guiding him in that aspect of mourning ritual. Later commentators posit possible reasons for this.

Siftei Kohen

The Siftei Kohen, was written by the 17th century Lithuanian Talmudist and halachist Shabbatai ben Meir ha-Kohen, also known as the Shakh.

Why might an adult need to rend a child's garment for him? The Shakh responds as follows:

מקרעין לו. מפני עגמת נפש.
ועיין בטור מ"ש בשם הרי"ץ גאות וע"ל סימן של"ו.

Ma'kri'in lo mipnei agmat nefesh
V'ayen ba-Tur mah she-katav be-shem ha-Rit"z Ge'ut ve-'ayen le-halan siman 336
Rend for him because of grief of the soul.
And look deeply in the Tur where it is written in the name of the Ritz Giat and also look on chapter 336.

The Shakh suggests that a child, too, needs an outward sign of his/her grief (*agmat nefesh*). Though it does not delineate for which deceased relative a child's garment is to be torn, the act unites him "with the family at the terrible time of tears and tragedy."[52] For further clarification, the Shakh directs the reader back to two other sources: Jacob ben Asher's Arba'ah Turim (Tur) and the Ritz Giat.

Arba'ah Turim

The Arba'ah Turim, known as the Tur, was a13th century legal text written by the medieval German rabbinic authority Rabbi Jacob ben Asher. Joseph Caro formatted the Shulhan Arukh after the Tur. Initially, the Tur suggests that rending a child's garment is not only a physical expression of grief, but serves to draw communal attention to the death, using the child as a sign to tell the community a death has occurred.

קטן שמת לו מת מקרעין לו מפני עגמת נפש פירוש כדי להרבות בהספד
כתב הרי"ץ גיאת ואם הגיע לחינוך קורעין לו כדרך שמחנכין אותו לשאר מצות

Katan sh'met lo met, ma'kri'in lo mipnei agmat nefesh perush kede l'har'bot b'hesped.
Katav ha-Rit"z Ge'ut v'im hi'gia l'hinuch kor'in lo k'derekh sh'm'han'khin oto l'sha'ar mitzvot.

[52] Lamm, 39.

> For a child who experiences death, rend for him because of grief of the soul, which means to increase the eulogy. The Ritz Giat wrote that if he arrives at the age of education, he rends (for the death), as a way to educate him in the ways of mitzvoth.

Like the Shulhan Arukh, the Tur suggests that rending a child's garment is due to *Agmat Nefesh*, soul-wrenching grief,[53] but also for the purpose of *l'harbot b'hesped* [increased eulogy], to increase the quantity of mourners and funeral rites. While today, the word *hesped* refers specifically to a eulogy, the Jastrow Dictionary suggests that it was initially a broader term that included the funeral, mourning process, eulogy, and other aspects of mourning rituals. In the history of the development of *hesped*, there was a Talmudic debate regarding the purpose of *hesped.* Did a eulogy exist to "honor the deceased, or [as] a tribute to the bereaved family"[54]? Talmud Sanhedrin[55] concluded that the eulogy exists to pay tribute to the deceased.

L'harbot b'hesped, then, seems to imply that rending a child's garment is to increase awareness that a loss in the community has occurred, such that the child serves as a sign to members of the community that a death has occurred, for which they ought to pay tribute. In addition, the Be'er Ha'Golah, a 17th century commentary by Rabbi Moses ben Rabbi Naftali Hertz Rivkes, affirms this argument. He directs us to Talmud Mo'ed Katan, Chapter 3, 26b, which cites Rashi, suggesting that *ma'kri'in lo…l'harbot b'hesped* is "in order that those who see him should weep and lament over the loss, but

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[53] Jastrow
[54] Encylocpedia Judiaca, Hesped,
[55] Sanh. 46b-47a

not because the minor is obligated to mourn.[56]" Essentially, the more tears the more *kavod l'met,*[57] more respect for the deceased.

To the contemporary reader, it may seem problematic to think about *using* a child like a billboard, a mere sign to encourage others to mourn. The Tur, however, directs us to the Ritz Giat who leads the discussion in a more palatable direction.

Ritz Giat

The Ritz Giat, Rabbi Isaac ben Judah ibn Ghiyyat, was a biblical commentator, payyetan, and philosopher in Muslim Spain circa 1039-1089. As the head of the Lucena rabbinic academy, his best-known pupil was Moses ibn Ezra. The Ritz Giat contributes to the conversation about children and mourning, suggesting that the purpose of rending a child's garment is not only for *agmat nefesh,* to serve as a physical expression of grief, but for the purpose of *hinuch,* education.

קטן שהגיע לחינוך קורעין לו כדרך שמחנכין אותו לשאר מצות

Katan sh'hi'gia l'hinuch kor'in lo k'derekh sh'm'han'khin oto li'shar mitzvot

For a child who arrives at the age of education, he rends (for the death), as a way to educate him in the ways of mitzvot.

Grammar is significant here. While in modern Hebrew, both verbs are passive – and an adult must rend for the child, tannaitic Hebrew allows for a different interpretation. The Ritz Giat suggests that when a child is of the appropriate age, *kor'in lo,* he rends (for the

[56] Schottenstein 26b4
[57] Turei Zahav

death). We witness, then, an interesting expansion on the idea of *ma'kri'in lo*, rend for him. According to the Ritz Giat, children should rend their own garment on behalf of the death, provided they are mature enough to understand the ritual significance of *keriah.* The Ritz Giat conditions the act on the child's capacity to learn, for the time when he is a *gil hinuch* [educable age], capable of understanding the concept of the mitzvah he is doing. It is, in other words, a teaching moment for the sole purpose of practicing the ritual for when in the near future he will be required to do so upon reaching religious maturation. This argument is supported by the Derisha commentary noted below.

Be'er Ha'tiv

The **Be'er Ha'tiv,** written by 19th century Polish Talmudist Rabbi Zechariah Mendel ben Aryeh Leib, recapitulates what can be read in earlier texts, but brings two additional commentaries relevant to the discussion.

מקרעין. בטור כתב מפני עג"נ פי' כדי להרבות בהספד,
וכתב הר"ץ גיאות וקטן שהגיע לחינוך קורעין לו כדרך שמחנכין אותו בשאר מצות.
ופי הב"י דהיינו אפי היכא דלית ביה משום עגמת נפש.
וכתב בדרישה מכאן ראיה קצת דקטן שהגיע לחינוך צריך לנהוג כל דיני אבילות.

Ma'kri'in. B'Tur katav mipnei agmat nefesh perush kede l'harbot b'hesped, V'katav ha-Rit"z Ge'ut v'katan sh'hi'gia l'hinuch kor'in lo k'derekh sh'm'han'khin oto bi'shar mitzvoth. U'piresh ha'Beit Yosef d'hay'no a'filu hai'kha d'let bay m'shum agmat nefesh.
V'katav b'Drisha mi'ka'an rei'ayah k'tzat d'katan sh'hi'gia l'hinuch zarich lin'hog kol dinei avelut.
Rend for him.
In the Tur it is written: because of grief of the soul, which means to increase the eulogy. The Ritz Giat wrote that if a child arrives at the age of education, he rends (for the death), as a way to educate him in the ways of mitzvoth. It is explained in the Beit Yosef that this can happen even if there is no grief of the soul.

He references Caro's Beit Yosef, suggesting that a child's garments should be rent "*m'shum agmat nefesh*" even if there is no grief of the soul. This seems to be a reference to a death that is perhaps a distant relative or family friend. Thus, even if the child is not even emotionally in mourning, they can be guided toward an understanding of the gravity of death. This dictum is useful in thinking about ways our ancient texts can be relevant to us in modern times as it broadens parameters for mourning.

Derisha

The Be'er Ha'tiv directs us to another text, the **Derisha**. The Derisha comes from a commentary, *Beit Yisrael,* by Joshua ben Alexander HaCohen Falk, a late 16th century Polish Halahkist and Talmudist.

כתב הי"ג ואם הגיע לחינוך כו' פירוש אפי היכא דליכא ביה משום עגמת נפש.
ומכאן יש ראיה קצת שקטן שהיגע לחינוך צריך לנהוג כל דיני אבילות.

Katav ha-Rit"z Ge'ut v'im hi'gia l'hinuch khule perush afilu hay'cha d'layka be m'shum agmat nefesh. U'mi'kan yesh re'ayah k'tzat sh'katan sh'hi'gia l'hinuch zarich lin'hog kol dinei avelut

It is written in the Ritz Giat that if a child arrives at the age of education, etc, my interpretation is even where there is no grief of the soul. From here we have some approval that if a child arrives at the age of education, it is acceptable to do all the laws of mourning.

He urges, "if a child arrives at the age of education [even without grief[58]], it is acceptable to do all the laws of *avelut*." This statement boldly urges that a child, who is perhaps emotionally and intellectually mature, regardless of age, should participate in all the laws of mourning. While the Derisha does not outright say that a child is *obligated* to mitzvot, if he is developmentally able, he can at least participate in the laws of avelut. The Derisha

[58] He is commenting on the Ritz Giat's argument.

allows, not just for *ma'kri'in lo*, but for the child to be fully included in the mourning practices.

The Shulhan Arukh and subsequent commentaries all agree that children are not halakhically bound to the laws of mourning. They do, however, suggest that children should be educated about mourning customs by doing them as soon as they can understand what they mean. These texts help us to think critically about how we might guide children when a death occurs. First, what does it mean for '*katan sh'met lo met*' a child to experience death? How do they display *agmat nefesh*, their grief? When is a child '*hi'gia l'hinuch'* of educable age? And finally, what are the most effective ways – *k'derekh sh'm'han'khin oto* – to educate him about death, dying, mourning, bereavement?

A brief exploration of child development may shed some light on the previous questions.

***Katan sh'met lo met* – A Child's Developmental Experience with Death**

Children, it turns out, experience death all the time, so much so that it is ubiquitous in children's play. Dr. Joo Ok Lee summarizes:

> Death is everywhere in children's lives whether adults are aware of it or not. Children frequently talk about it in daily routines. They use death related terms when they play computer games or videogames (e.g., He is out of power. He is dying) as well as indoor/outdoor games (e.g., if you cross the line or step on the line, you are dead, if you got three from a die, you are dead). Children also experience death of their favorite fairy tales and mass media. Children's popular fairy tales often describe death in a story line. For example, "…the protagonist may die from the bite of a poison apple, be devoured by a hungry wolf, or be left in a forest to die because there is not enough food for the family.[59]

While children may not comprehend death as adults do, lacking the ability to understand nuances and abstraction, they do grasp more than what we might expect. And though parents may worry that their children are not emotionally mature enough to learn about death and dying, studies on the subject suggest otherwise.[60]

Take, for instance, the widely-accepted study by Hungarian psychologist Maria Nagy that shows children develop their ideas about death in a stage-like progression.[61] Her conclusion that "children pass through several stages before arriving at an adult concept

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[59] Lee, Joo Ok. "Death, Don't Want to Talk about It!" Proc. of Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), p. 3.
[60] Speece, Mark W., and Sandor B. Brent. "Children's Understanding of Death: A Review of Three Components of a Death Concept." *Child Development* 55.5 (1984), p. 1671.
[61] Kastenbaum, Robert, and Lynn Fox. "Do Imaginary Companions Die? An Exploratory Study." *Omega* 56.2 (2007-2008), p. 124.

of death"[62] is congruent with the research and theories of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, who studied cognitive development for youth.

While every child is different, Nagy observed three distinct developmental stages during which children grasped various aspects of death and dying. Generally, she observed that they "moved from the idea that death is not final to death is final but avoidable, to death is final and inevitable"[63]

Stage I: Children between the ages of three and five view death not as permanent condition but as a departure or change of circumstances, similar to falling asleep or going away on a trip.[64] The situation is only temporary: one can wake up from sleep and return from a trip. They don't yet understand that death is irreversible and assume that things can spring back to life through "medical intervention, after eating, after drinking water, by magic, through wishful thinking, and by praying."[65] Some might equate death with being sick.[66]

Stage II: Children between the ages of 5 or 6 and 9 view death as final, though assume the condition can be escaped. They tend to personify death, likening it to skeletons or

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[62] Kastenbaum, 125.

[63] Corr, Charles A., and David E. Balk. *Children's Encounters with Death, Bereavement, and Coping*. New York: Springer Pub., 2010, p. 27.

[64] Death Education: A Concern for the Living, A. Barbara Gibson, Polly C. Roberts, and Thomas J. Buttery, Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, IN, 1982.

[65] Speece, 1673.

[66] Speece, 1673.

spirits, which can also be avoided.[67] To them, certain people can avoid death; it is not a universal occurrence. Nagy reports:

> that young children think death can be avoided by being clever or lucky. People thought to be excluded from dying include teachers, the child's immediate family, children in general, and the individual children themselves.[68]

Stage III: At 9 or 10, children begin to understand that death is personal, universal, inevitable and final.[69] They understand the idea of cessation or non-functionality, that all functions of life cease, including dreaming and thinking; and the universality and inevitability of death, that all living things die, including themselves.[70]

These developmental stages, however, are only landmarks for how a child might engage with learning about and understanding death concepts. Age, personality, maturity, family circumstance, general life experience, and many other factors play a role. Children who have experienced death, even of an animal or insect, may grasp the concept better, as do those whose parents are open about the subject. Research shows that when parents squelch conversation about death and dying, withhold information or give evasive answers to difficult questions "they foster confusion and increased anxiety in children".[71]

***Sh'higia L'hinuch* – Approaching the Age of Education**

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[67] Gibson, *Death Education: A Concern for the Living.*
[68] Speece, 1676.
[69] Gibson, *Death Education: A Concern for the Living.*
[70] Speece, 1672.
[71] Hunter, Sally B., and Delores E. Smith. "Predictors of Children's Understand of Death: Age, Cognitive Ability, Death Experience and Maternal Communicative Competence." *Omega* 57.2 (2008): p. 149.

The Rabbis called a child who was considered capable of understanding the depth and significance of a mitzvah *gil hinuch* [educable age]. Children typically reached this age just before they were officially obligated to observe *halakhah* at age 13. Nagy's research points to *gil hinuch* for understanding death, occurring by the age of 9 or 10. Coincidentally, this also occurs in the time leading up to preparation for bar or bat mitzvah, becoming a son or daughter of the commandments, much like the children of Talmudic times.

Might we postulate that the sages were cognizant of child development? Where they mindful of the fact that children needed to be taught how to fulfill mitzvot, but only at age-appropriate stages? Perhaps they followed closely a paradigm for child development in Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:

> 24. He used to say: At five years old a person should study the Scriptures, at ten years for the Mishnah, at thirteen for the commandments, at fifteen for the Talmud, at eighteen for the bridechamber, at twenty for one's life pursuit, at thirty for authority, at forty for discernment, at fifty for counsel, at sixty to be an elder, at seventy for gray hairs, at eighty for special strength (Psalm 90:10), at ninety for decrepitude, and at a hundred a man is as one who has already died and has ceased from the affairs of this world.

In addition to being developmentally capable of understanding death, the timing for this education is also important. The Derisha taught that children should learn about the rituals connected to death and dying, *m'shum agmat nefesh*, in the absence of grief. Might this be the most practical time to teach them, when their intellect is free of

heartbreak?

Commonly, families face death, dying, and bereavement in a reactive mode – when a loss occurs and they must move quickly into action. Dr. Daniel Leviton speaks, however, of "primary prevention" as the first aspect of a three-pronged approach to teaching about death, a proactive endeavor to teach about death before (though difficult to control) one experiences it.[72] As I will show in the curriculum that follows, Jewish death education lessons should be directed to children before they are weighed down by grief. It gives them the opportunity to participate fully, as the Derisha noted, in the entire process of *avelut* – attending a funeral, comforting a mourner, and attending *shiva*. Thus, fifth or sixth grade is a suitable time to institute such a curriculum. A proactive approach to Jewish death education can help remove the taboo around death and enable Jewish youth to engage in the topic before they are consumed by *agmat nefesh*, adrift with grief and confused by unanswerable questions.

[72] Leviton, D. "The Scope of Death Education." *Death Education* 1.1 (1977): 41-56.

Chapter 4

A Jewish Death Education Curriculum:

Helping Our Children Live With Death

> Death is the fire that consumes our life. Without it, there would be no space for new growth. The world would be choked; life would be rendered without poignancy and yearning. But its almost blasphemous to suggest a theological justification to some in the coils of loss. On an individual level we cannot avoid the feeling of the spared tree in the forest: Dear God, we know that death must come, but not for me, not to the one I love, not now…A world with no end would be life with no urgency. That is as much as we are given in life to understand.
>
> -Rabbi David Wolpe

In our adult lives, we struggle to understand the deaths of our own loved ones, remembering the times when we were consumed by grief, choked by fear of impending loss, and confused why God would create a world of which death is a part. Perhaps we negotiated with God to spare us from these losses, hoping that God might protect us from feeling such pain, all the while knowing intellectually that death is inevitable, final and universally the fire that will one day consume our life. But as Rabbi Wolpe writes, "Without [death], there would be no space for new growth."

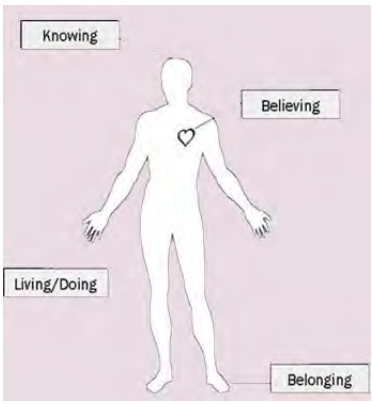
We have an opportunity to create a sacred and safe space for new growth in the Jewish community, by giving our youth the tools and education to face the inevitable experience of death and loss. From the groundbreaking Thantology movement to child developmental research to the tremendous wisdom of our Sages, it is clear that society benefits from open conversations about death, dying, bereavement, and the afterlife, and that at varying levels children are capable of learning about these topics that humans have confronted for centuries. By addressing these topics in our adult lives and helping our children integrate such learning into their lives, we can ensure that we will all live Jewish lives of meaning and purpose.

Amid the barren landscape of Jewish resources to teach children about death, the following curriculum will draw on Jewish death education resources geared towards adult populations by respectfully adapting them for students in the 5th or 6th grades, as pointed to by Maria Nagy's research.

Creating a distinctively Jewish death education curriculum is not only about conveying the major details, rituals, and logistics of the bereavement process; rather, such a curriculum is deeply connected to engendering and strengthening Jewish identity. Sociologist Dr. Steven M. Cohen points out that "sociologists of religious identity speak of the three B's: Belief, Behavior, and Belonging."[73] The characteristics of the rituals, liturgy, and timetable of the mourning process speak to the first two B's: belief and behavioral. It is the experience of learning in a Jewish community that cares for individual belief, personal and creative expression, and values every person as unique and important that creates a deep sense of belonging and identity.

In addition to building Jewish ideneity, this curriculum values the process of "Whole Person Learning," seeking to reach four target areas: Knowing, Doing, Believing/Valuing, and Belonging.

[73] Lomed Handbook for Powerful Learning Experiences, p. 44.



Each lesson offers: essential knowledge and skills useful for real life Jewish experience and practice; names authentic Jewish life experience or practice; identifies core beliefs and/or values for students to explore and articulate according to their own perspectives and understanding; and offers opportunities for caring and creating purposeful connections with others, God, and Am Yisrael.[74]

In "Lesson 1: Living and Dying," students will confront the emotions and fears they experience when they think about death and dying. Through reflective writing, text study, and the *havdalah* service, they will develop a vocabulary for talking about death. Through a biblical textual framework, they will explore personal memories of loss, articulate questions about death, and create a safe community where openness and vulnerability is modeled and valued.

[74] Lomed Handbook for Powerful Learning Experiences, p. 45.

The logistics of Jewish mourning will be explored in "Lesson 2: Rituals for Grieving, Customs for Honoring the Dead." This lesson focuses on the various rituals in Jewish life that help mourners express their grief and remember their loved ones. Special attention will be paid to the different stages of mourning, the ritual of *keriah*, the funeral service, and the *Kaddish*.

In "Lesson 3: Comforting Mourners, Remembering Loved Ones," students will learn about the Jewish value of *Nihum Aveilim*, comforting mourners. They will journey throughout the synagogue building to notice the ways a Jewish community symbolically commemorates the deceased, briefly talk about the *Yizkor* memorial service, and create condolence cards from the Temple Community for use by the Caring Committee.

"Lesson 4: What happens after we die?" will seek to answer the most difficult of questions. First, students will have the opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs about the afterlife. Through an art project and book, they will learn about the ways a body is physically cared for after death and examine Jewish texts on views of the afterlife. They will have an opportunity to sketch images described in the texts and merge them with their own personal beliefs about the afterlife.

Throughout each lesson, students will fill in a vocabulary sheet with various Hebrew terms relating to the Jewish mourning process. They will create a binder with the vocabulary, their artwork and reflective writing. As well, on the wall of the classroom, students will create a word wall – posting to it new vocabulary each week.

Parents and children will begin and end this curriculum together. On the first day, parents will have parallel learning and on the final day, together with their child, they will create a memory book of someone in their own life who they have lost.

While five lessons is not sufficient to answer all of the questions one may have about death, dying, bereavement, and the afterlife, offering Jewish children and parents the opportunity to grapple with life's deepest mystery will have lasting impact.

As Rabbis Fine and Wolpe teach us: Life is a journey, and death is a destination. And this is as much as we are given in life to understand. We cannot avoid death and we cannot avoid the grief we will experience when faced with death. But perhaps, we can offer our youth an opportunity to experience the journey of life in its fullest, giving them the tools to accomplish, as Charlie Brown said best, "Good Grief."

Lesson 1: Living and Dying

Lesson Overview

Conversations about death are very difficult to have. Everyone has different experiences, feelings, concerns, and fears about the topic. This lesson will explore the vocabulary and emotions connected to the Jewish experience of death. Creating a safe space where students feel comfortable sharing will be key in removing taboos about talking about death.

Goals:

To give students language and tools to be more comfortable talking about death, mourning, and the afterlife.
To develop a greater understanding of the emotions that one who is grieving might experience.
To create a safe space at Temple where students know they can turn when they are grieving.

Essential Question(s):

How do I feel when I hear about death and dying?
Why is death so difficult to talk about?
How does Jewish ritual help us manage our emotions?

Assessment (Evidence of Understanding)

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

Articulate personal emotions and fears about death and dying
Reflect on an experience of personal loss and empathize with classmates
Identify emotions experienced in biblical accounts of death

Important Vocabulary:

Agmat Nefesh (Grief)
Aveilut (Mourning)
Havdalah (Separation)

Materials:

Text Sheets
Havdalah Candle, Spices, and Wine
Index Cards

Time Table:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Creating Safe Space, Question Box
05-15: Group Brainstorm: Emotion
15-25: Personal Reflection: Loss Writing Exercise
25-35: Group Discussion: What questions or fears do you have about death?
35-40: *Chevruta*: Why is death so hard to talk about?
40-55: Text Study: Life and Death in the Torah
55-60: *Havdalah*

Method:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Creating Safe Space, Question Box

Blessing for Studying Torah: Sanctify the conversation with the blessing for studying Torah.

Creating Safe Space: A brief conversation about creating a safe space for open conversation will be useful to setting the mood for this unit of curricula.

> [For the next few lessons, we will be talking about really sensitive topics. Everyone will have different feelings and concerns and it may bring up various emotions that you weren't expecting to feel. Temple Ahava and this classroom is a community where everyone should be able to feel like they can share their thoughts, questions and feelings. Lets honor each other by being particularly thoughtful of how we interact.]

Question Box: As a means of opening up lines of communication, create a box for students to write questions they have about death and dying, but don't feel comfortable asking aloud.

05-15: Group Brainstorm: Emotion

First, as a group brainstorm as many words that describe emotions people (the students) feel, in general (does not have to be death related.) Second, brainstorm words that describe emotions people feel when someone has died. Words to write on the board in addition to their suggestions: Grief (*Agmat Nefesh*), Pain, Fear, Depression, Sorry, Mourning (*Aveilut*)

15-25: Personal Reflection: Loss Writing Exercise

In a writing exercise on the Lesson 1 handout, ask the students to reflect on any loss they've experienced. Was it the death of a person or a pet? Was it the loss of an object of particular import? How did it feel? (They can use the previous brainstorm to help them identify how they felt.)

25-35: Group Discussion: What questions or fears do you have about death?

Students can brainstorm on the worksheet and then the class can discuss these fears aloud. Teacher should have prepared list of possible fears and questions in case students do not feel comfortable sharing aloud.

35-40: Chevruta: Why is death so hard to talk about?

In *chevruta* pairs, students will come up with a few reasons why it is difficult to talk about death.

40-55: Text Study: Life and Death in the Torah

[When we Jews try to understand things, we look to the Torah for answers. The Torah has a lot to teach us about living and dying. Lets look at the Torah texts[75] to see some of the ways our ancestors responded to losing someone.]

Questions: How does the Bible suggest people become alive and then die? What were some ways people reacted to the deaths of the biblical characters? What surprised you about the reactions of the biblical characters?

55-60: Havdalah

[One of the most difficult things about death is accepting the emotions we feel– the deep sense of loss, of *Agmat Nefesh* (grief). It's a separation that is very painful. Every week we have a short service that helps us understand separation. In *Havdalah*, we separate the joy of Shabbat from the rest of the week. Knowing that the school week is beginning again after a restful Shabbat weekend, even a separation like that is difficult to endure. To help us transition back into the rest of our day, we will do a short *Havdalah* service. As we sing the prayers, lets think about what we've learned today and how we've felt in these really mature conversations. Even though you might still be thinking about them when you leave today and will want to discuss them at home with your parents, lets make the transition together.]

[75] Adapted from Rabbi Julia Weisz, Congregation Or Ami, Calabasas, CA

Lesson 1: Living and Dying

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu bemitzvotav, v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who sanctifies us and commands us to soak in the words of Torah.

When _____ died/When I lost_____, I felt…

Fears I have about death are…

Life and Death in the Torah

Genesis 2:7
Then Adonai God formed man of the dust of the earth. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

Genesis 3:19
You are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Psalm 104:29-30
You withdraw their breath; they perish, and return to their dust.
You send forth Your spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

Psalm 146:4
His breath departs; he returns to dust…

How do people come to life in the Torah?
How do they die?

Genesis 23:2
Sarah died in Kiriath-arba--now Hebron--in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

Leviticus 10:1-3
Now Aaron's sons Nadav and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before God alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. And fire came forth from God and consumed them; thus they died before God. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what Adonai meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, And gain glory before all the people." And Aaron was silent.

Numbers 20:28-29
Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments and put them on his son Eleazar, and Aaron died there on the summit of the mountain. When Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, the whole community knew that Aaron had breathed his last. All the house of Israel bewailed Aaron thirty days.

Job 1:21
Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground and worshiped. And he said, “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; Adonai gave, and Adonai has taken away; blessed be the name of Adonai.

How does each biblical character respond to death and loss?

Lesson 2: Rituals for Grieving, Customs for Honoring the Dead

Lesson Overview

Judaism has special rituals that help mourners express grief and remember the person who has died. This lesson covers the stages of Jewish mourning and focuses specifically on the ritual of *keriah*, the funeral service, and the *Kaddish*.

Goals:

To familiarize students with the Jewish rituals and traditions designed to guide people through the grieving process
To examine the different ritual objects involved in the mourning process
To learn about the Kaddish prayer and other funeral liturgy

Essential Questions

What are the rituals in Jewish tradition that help us deal with death and grief?
What are symbols that represent grief and mourning?
Why doesn't the Kaddish prayer for mourning ever mention death?
What happens at a funeral?

Assessment (Evidence of Understanding)

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

Systemize and understand the stages of mourning
Describe Jewish objects involved in the mourning process
a mourner through *keriah*
Express understanding of funeral liturgy

Important Vocabulary:

Aninut (period between death and burial)
Keriah (Garment Rending)
Shiva (7 day mourning period)
Sheloshim (30 day mourning period)
Yartzeit (yearly anniversary of death)
Kaddish (prayer that sanctifies God in memory of deceased)
Chevra Kadisha (community who cares for a dead body)
Tachrichim (Burial Shrouds)
L'vayat Ha'met (Honoring the Dead)
Hesped (Eulogy)

Materials:

Phases of the Jewish Year of Mourning
Box of items used for death rituals – vidui; candle; water pitcher; kittle and shrouds; tallit; psalms; kriyah ribbons, tshirts to practice keriah
MP3 of Esah Einai and El Malei Rachamim
MP3 of Dan Nichols "Beyond" Musical Interpretation of Kaddish (or songleader see attached chords)

Time Table:
00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box
05-20: Activity: Ordering Elements of Aveilut
20-40: Ritual Items
20-30: Keriah
30-40: Symbolism
40-60: Funeral Liturgy and Music

Method:
00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box

05-20: Activity: Ordering Elements of Aveilut
Students will be given index cards with each element of Aveilut. First, they will try to put them in order on their own. Next, the class will go through the words together, and place them in proper order.

Questions:
Why do you think there is a special order that Jews follow when someone dies? Why do you think Jews bury their dead as soon as possible? Why do you think a Jew says Kaddish for a full year when their parents die, but only one month for other loved ones? (It is helpful to have order when someone dies because life will feel really unsettled and the family will need stability; The rabbis who wrote them were trying to create order in their own lives.)

20-40: Ritual Items

20-30:Keriah
[One way that people express their grief is through the act of keriah, tearing a garment over their heart. Some people will tear the clothing they are wearing; others will tear a little black ribbon that the rabbi gives them. We have some ribbons and shirts here for you to tear. You have to use your imagination a bit, but take a moment and see how it makes you feel to tear them.

Question: Why do you think people who are mourners wear a torn garment? What does the tear symbolize?

30-40: Symbolism
Students will examine the different ritual items in the box. What is the purpose of a water pitcher (cleansing after departing a cemetery and before entering a house of mourning); a yartzeit candle (it burns for the week of shiva, and is used every year on the anniversary of death); a kittle/tallit/shroud (some Jewish people are buried in a kittle or a burial shroud. Describe the shroud. How does it feel? Why do you think it is so simply?); a book of psalms (people who help care for a person's body (chevra kadisha) after they have died will often read psalms in between the time of death and burial as a way of accompanying and respecting the body; psalms are also a part of funeral services)

40-60: Funeral Liturgy and Music

Invite the Cantor to Sing *El Malei Rachamim* and *Esah Einai*; Listen to Dan Nichols' *Kaddish* interpretation "Beyond" for the students to hear the liturgy sung/said at a funeral. Explain to students how a funeral gathers friends and family together to remember the life of their loved one. The liturgy consists of psalms and a eulogy (*hesped*) that talks about the person's life. Many people wear darker clothing and behave very solemnly.

Questions: What do these prayers sound like? Does the image of God in *El Malei Rachamim* seem like a comforting image? Why doesn't the *Kaddish* prayer for mourning ever mention death? Do you think it would be hard to praise God when you are in mourning?

Lesson 2: Order of Mourning Process[76]

Aninut

Period of mourning between death and burial of loved one.

Shiva

The seven-day period following the burial is called shiva (7). During this time, mourners remain at home and receive condolence cards from the community. They have a prayer service where Kaddish is said.

Sheloshim

The first thirty (sheloshim) days following the burial for mourning all losses, but one's parents. Mourner recites Kaddish for this period.

Yartzeit

The anniversary of the death, according to the Jewish calendar. On this date, each year after the death, a candle is lit in the memory of the deceased. Kaddish is recited.

Kaddish

This prayer is recited for a year when someone loses a parent.

Otherwise, it is only recited for thirty days.

Unveiling

Uncovering the tombstone on a grave takes place anytime after Shiva and before Yartzeit. Many people wait at least six months.

Keriah

Tearing of garment upon hearing of a death OR right before the funeral service.

Funeral

Jewish people try to bury their loved ones as soon as possible, usually within 24-48 hours.

[76] Adapted from Anne Brener, Mourning and Mitzvah, p. 7.

BEYOND

Lyrics adapted by Dan Nichols from Chatzi Kaddish, Music: Dan Nichols

From the CD, My Heart is in The East by Dan Nichols and Eighteen

G Em7
May Your wonder be celebrated, may Your name be consecrated
C G D
May Your brilliance never fade, from the magnificent world You made
G Em7
May Your ways prevail in our own days, in our own lives
C D G
And in the life of all Israel

C D Em C
And let us say, let us say, amen
C D G
And let us say, let us say, amen

G Em7
May Your name receive the same beauty that You bring
C G D
Though You are far beyond the sweetest song we could ever sing

C D Em C
And let us say, and let us say, a-men
C D Em C
And let us say, and let us say, a-men
C D Em C
And let us say, and let us say, a-men
C D G
And let us say, and let us say, a-men

MOURNER'S KADDISH

קדיש יתום

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא בְּעָלְמָא דִּי־בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Yit-ga-dal v'yit-ka-dash sh'mei ra-ba b'al-ma di-v'ra chir-u-tei,
v'yam-lich mal-chu-tei b'cha-yei-chon u-v'yo-mei-chon u-v'cha-yei
d'chol beit Yis-ra-el, ba-a-ga-la u-viz-man ka-riv, v'im-ru: A-mein.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא.

Y'hei sh'mei ra-ba m'va-rach l'a-lam u-l'al-mei al-ma-ya.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא, וְיִתְהַדַּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקוּדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא,

Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach v'yit-pa-ar, v'yit-ro-mam, v'yit-na-sei,
v'yit-ha-dar, v'yit-a-leh, v'yit-ha-lal sh'mei d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,

לְעֵלָּא מִן־כָּל־בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא, תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא
דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן:

L'ei-la min kol bir-cha-ta v'shi-ra-ta, tush-b'cha-ta v'neh-cheh-ma-ta
da-a-mi-ran b'al-ma, v'im-ru: A-mein.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן־שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Y'hei sh'la-ma ra-ba min sh'ma-ya v'cha-yim, a-lei-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'im-ru: A-mein.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'im-ru: A-mein.

Let the glory of God be extolled, and God's great name be hallowed in the world whose creation God willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom yet we glorify, honor, and exalt. And let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen.

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, let peace descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world, and let us say: Amen.

אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים, שׁוֹכֵן
בַּמְּרוֹמִים, הַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה
נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה
עִם קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים
כְּזֹהַר הָרָקִיעַ מַזְהִירִים,
אֶת נִשְׁמוֹת אָחֵינוּ
וְאַחְיוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנֶּהֶרְגוּ
וְשֶׁנִּשְׂחֲטוּ וְשֶׁנִּשְׂרְפוּ
בַּגֶּטָאוֹת וּבְמַחֲנוֹת
הַהַשְׁמָדָה, בַּעֲבוּר שְׁאָנוּ
נוֹדְרִים לְקַיֵּם אֶת זִכְרָם
לְדוֹר וָדוֹר וּלְנֶצַח נְצָחִים.
בַּעַל הָרַחֲמִים יַסְתִּירֵם
בְּסֵתֶר כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים,
וְיִצְרוֹר בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת־
נִשְׁמוֹתֵיהֶם. יְיָ הוּא
נַחֲלָתָם. וְיָנוּחוּ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל
מִשְׁכָּבָם, וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן.

Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence among the holy and the pure, to the souls of all our brethren—men, women and children of the House of Israel—who were slaughtered and burned in the ghettoes and concentration camps. May their memory endure, inspiring faith and loyalty in our lives. May their souls thus be bound up in the bond of life. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

(Silent remembrance)

generation ...to come,
they shall tell of His beneficence to people

כִּי עָשָׂה׃

casting lots for [illegible]

...Lord, be not far off;

23 A psalm of David.

כג מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד

The LORD is my shepherd;
I lack nothing.
2He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me to a-water in places of repose;-a
3He renews my life;
He guides me in right paths
as befits His name.
4Though I walk through b-a valley of deepest darkness,-b
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

5You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my drink is abundant.
6Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for many long years.

יְהוָה רֹעִי
לֹא אֶחְסָר׃
בִּנְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא יַרְבִּיצֵנִי
עַל־מֵי מְנֻחוֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי׃
נַפְשִׁי יְשׁוֹבֵב
יַנְחֵנִי בְמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק
לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ׃
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת
לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי
שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הֵמָּה יְנַחֲמֻנִי׃

תַּעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי | שֻׁלְחָן נֶגֶד צֹרְרָי
דִּשַּׁנְתָּ בַשֶּׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי
כּוֹסִי רְוָיָה׃
אַךְ | טוֹב וָחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי
כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּי
וְשַׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה
לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים׃

j-j Meaning of Heb. uncertain; others "All the fat ones of the earth shall eat and worship; / All they that go down to the dust shall kneel before Him, / Even he that cannot keep his soul alive."

a-a Others "still waters."
b-b Others "the valley of the shadow of death."

...save my life from the ...
my precious life[f] from the clutches of a dog.
21Deliver me from a lion's mouth;
from the horns of wild oxen rescue[g] me.
22Then will I proclaim Your fame to my brethren,
praise You in the congregation.

23You who fear the LORD, praise Him!
All you offspring of Jacob, honor Him!
Be in dread of Him, all you offspring of Israel!
24For He did not scorn, He did not spurn
the plea[h] of the lowly;
He did not hide His face from him;
when he cried out to Him, He listened.
25Because of You I offer praise-[i] in the great congregation;
I pay my vows in the presence of His worshipers.
26Let the lowly eat and be satisfied;
let all who seek the LORD praise Him.
Always be of good cheer!
27Let all the ends of the earth pay heed and turn
to the LORD,
and the peoples of all nations prostrate themselves before You;
28for kingship is the LORD's
and He rules the nations.

[f] Lit. "only one."
[g] Lit. "answer."
[h] Or "plight."
[i-i] Lit. "From You is my praise."

Lesson 3: Comforting Mourners; Remembering Loved Ones

Lesson Overview

Comforting mourners and remembering loved ones who have passed away are essential parts of Jewish living. This lesson focuses on the importance of a community who values taking care of the bereaved; and examines the ways a synagogue symbolically and liturgically memorializes the deceased.

Goals:

To learn about ways of comforting mourners
To explore how synagogues memorialize Jews
To focus on how Judaism cares deeply for every individual

Essential Questions

How do we comfort mourners?
What do you say to someone who has a dying family member or whose family member has died?
How do we remember people who have died?

Assessment (Evidence of Understanding)

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

Articulate why *Nihum Aveilim*, comforting mourners, is a mitzvah
Identify places in the Temple where people's lives are remembered
Express feelings of condolence and support for mourners

Vocabulary:

Zachor
Zichronam Livracha (May their memories be for a blessing)
Nihum Aveilim (Comforting Mourners)
Yizkor

Materials:

Blank Stationary/Writing Utensils

Time Table:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box
05-20: Group Discussion: How do we comfort people who are mourning?
20-30: Creating Condolence Cards for the Temple Caring Committee
30-45: Memory Scavenger Hunt
45-55: Report Back and Discussion
55-60: Yizkor

Method:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box

05-20: Group Discussion: How do we comfort people who are mourning?

[A few weeks ago, we talked about the different types of emotions we might feel if someone in our life died. Thinking about those different types of emotions, how do you think we might comfort someone who is mourning a death? What should we say to them? What should we not say to them? Is there anything we should do for them? Is it okay if we don't know what to say? On your worksheet, there is a list of things we might say to mourners. What do you think of them? How would you feel if someone said that to you? Put a check mark next to them if you think they are good things to say. (Some of them are not good things to say.)]

20-30: Creating Condolence Cards for the Temple Caring Committee

[Lets make a few cards each on behalf of our congregation to send to people who have lost a loved one. Use some of the phrases on the worksheet. If you're not sure, feel free to ask for help. We will send these to people from our Temple Caring Committee. *Nihum Aveilum*, comforting mourners, is a really wonderful mitzvah. It also shows how much a community cares for one another.]

30-45: Memory Scavenger Hunt

Students will have ten minutes to tour the Temple to find as many different memorials honoring the dead as they can find. Key words to look out for are: "In memory of…", "Honoring…", "Remembering…", "Zachor…"

45-55: Report Back and Discussion

Questions: What sorts of memorials did you find in the Temple? Why do you think we have so many ways of memorializing people who have died? What do you think that teaches us about the importance of every person's life?

55-60: *Yizkor*

[Every major holiday, we have a special service called Yizkor, a memorial service to remember people we love who have died. Not only do we remember people in our lives who have died, we tell stories about people in Jewish history who have died.]

Questions: Why do we have a service that might make people sad during otherwise joyous holidays? Why do you think it's important to take time to remember people? Why do we also take time to remember people from Jewish history, since we did not know them?

Sharing Your Condolences

Put a check mark next to the phrases you think are appropriate and kind to say to someone who is in mourning. Some of the answers may not be black and white:

- ❑ Our thoughts/prayers are with you…
- ❑ [deceased person] will be in our hearts forever…
- ❑ With deep sympathy…
- ❑ Please accept our condolences…
- ❑ [deceased person] will always be in our memories…
- ❑ We are/I am so sorry for your loss…
- ❑ I will miss [deceased person]…
- ❑ Time will heal all wounds…
- ❑ Zichrona/o Livracha (May her/his memory be for a blessing.)
- ❑ It was his time…
- ❑ I know exactly how you feel…
- ❑ Know that we are here for you …
- ❑ It's time for you to move on …
- ❑ Everything happens for a reason …
- ❑ I remember how [deceased person] was …
- ❑ I remember when my relative died. I felt so…
- ❑ What is it like to be without him/her?
- ❑ What do you miss about him/her?
- ❑ Our Temple community is thinking of you.
- ❑ We wish you comfort in your memories.
- ❑ May the one heals broken hearts, heal the hearts of you and your loved ones.
- ❑ May you be comforted from Heaven
- ❑ May God console you together with everyone who mourns for the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem

Sharing Your Condolences[77] TEACHERS GUIDE

Put a check mark next to the phrases you think are appropriate and kind to say to someone who is in mourning:

- ❑ Our thoughts/prayers are with you (YES)
- ❑ [deceased person] will be in our hearts forever (SOMETIMES- if it's true)
- ❑ With deep sympathy (YES)
- ❑ Please accept our condolences (YES)
- ❑ [deceased person] will always be in our memories (SOMETIMES- if you really will remember them)
- ❑ We are/I am so sorry for your loss (YES)
- ❑ I will miss [deceased person] (SOMETIMES- if you knew the deceased person)
- ❑ Time will heal all wounds (NO- this is insensitive because someone may take a long time to heal)
- ❑ Zichrona/o Livracha (May her/his memory be for a blessing.)
- ❑ It was his time (NO- the mourner may not think this)
- ❑ I know exactly how you feel (NO- you can never know exactly how someone feels)
- ❑ Know that we are here for you (YES)
- ❑ It's time for you to move on (NO- the mourner probably needs time before they can move on)
- ❑ Everything happens for a reason (NO- not comforting and the mourner may not believe this)
- ❑ I remember how [deceased person] was … (YES)
- ❑ I remember when my relative died. I felt so… (SOMETIMES- if you think it will help with empathy, but removes the focus from the mourner)
- ❑ What is it like to be without him/her? (YES)
- ❑ What do you miss about him/her? (YES)
- ❑ Our Temple community is thinking of you. (YES)
- ❑ We wish you comfort in your memories. (SOMETIMES – if you think they have good memories)
- ❑ May the one heals broken hearts, heal the hearts of you and your loved ones. (YES)
- ❑ May you be comforted from Heaven (Common Sephardic saying) (YES)
- ❑ May God console you together with everyone who mourns for the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem (YES, but maybe not in a liberal setting)

[77] Adapted from Rabbi Julia Weisz, Congregation Or Ami, Calabasas, CA

Lesson 4: What Happens When We Die?

Lesson Overview

This lesson focuses on what happens to people after they die, bother physically and spiritually. Students will learn the basics about a Jewish burial and customs at the cemetery; they will also study varying Jewish views of the afterlife. They will discuss their own views on what happens to people when they die and search for answers within Judaism.

Goals

To learn about the ways a deceased person is prepared for burial.
To engage in study about Jewish views of the afterlife
To reflect on personal views of the afterlife

Essential Questions

Where do we go when we die?
What happens to our souls? What happens to our bodies?
Do I have to believe in what Judaism teaches about the afterlife?

Assessment (Evidence of Understanding)

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

Describe the rituals associated with the burial process
Imagine different images described in text about the afterlife
Negotiate traditional Jewish views with personal views of the afterlife

Important Vocabulary:

Neshama (Soul)
Kever (Grave)
Chevra Kadisha (Burial Society)
Beit K'varot (Cemetery)
*Shomrim (*Guardians*)*
Tehiyyat Ha-Metim (Resurrection of the Dead)
Olam Ha-Ba (The World to Come)
Sheol (Underworld)

Materials:

Index Cards
Afterlife Text Sheets
Where Do People Go When They Die – Mindy Avra Portnoy, 2003

Time Table:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box
05-10: Personal Beliefs: What do you think happens when we die?
10-25: Physical Aspects of Burial Process
25-35: Read: Where Do People Go When They Die
45-50: Text Study: Jewish Views on the Afterlife
50-60: Art Project: Sketching Images of the Afterlife

Method:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah, Question Box

05-10: Personal Beliefs: What do you think happens when we die?

Students will write down their views of the afterlife on index cards. The cards will be collected and we will address them at the end of class.

10-25: Physical Aspects of Burial Process

Chevra Kadisha

[When people die, there is a special group called the Chevreh Kadisha that takes special care of the body. They do a ritual washing, recite psalms, and help ensure that the person's body is treated with the utmost of respect and dignity. Often, someone will stay and be a Shomer (or Shomrim for many people) for the body – reciting psalms and prayers to protect it until the funeral and cemetery internment.]

Question: Caring for a deceased person's body is one of the highest mitzvahs you can do. Why do you think that is? (They cannot thank you for it.)

Coffin/Attire

Questions:

What kind of coffin do you think a person is buried in? [Modest, often made of pine and very thin.] What kind of clothing? (We learned about these clothes a few weeks ago.) [Shroud, Tallit, or Kittle] Why do Jews bury people in such modest attire and coffins?

Burial

[At the cemetery, which is after the funeral, more prayers are said and then everyone takes a turn (if they choose) shoveling dirt into the grave.

Tombstone

Anytime after shiva ends, but before the first year of mourning concludes, people have an unveiling – where the tombstone for the deceased person is placed and made public. Different tombstones say different things, but there are some traditional aspects that most Tombstones have. We will look at some of the different options and create an etching of a tombstone of a special person in Jewish history.

25-35: Read: Where Do People Go When They Die – Mindy Avra Portnoy, 2003

35-50: Text Study: Jewish Views on the Afterlife

[There are varying Jewish beliefs on what happens to us after we die. We will look at many different sources and see which ideas fit best with our own personal beliefs. **Texts include**: Biblical Views of Sheol and Resurrection; Rambam on Resurrection; Rabbinic View of Olam Ha-Ba; Mystics on Gan Eden]

Questions:
What do you believe happens to a person's soul after death?
Do you think their souls go somewhere?
Do you think they look down on us?
Do you think they are rewarded or punished?
Do you believe in reincarnation or resurrection?

50-60: Art Project: Sketching Images of the Afterlife

Students will briefly sketch images of the after life as described in the text study merged with personal belief. [According to the texts, can you describe or draw what *Sheol*, *Gan Eden* or *Olam Ha-Ba* might look like?]
While students are drawing, their index cards from the beginning of class will be addressed.

Jewish Views of the Afterlife

SHEOL (Underworld)

Daniel 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence.

Job 10:21-22 Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.

GAN EDEN (Garden of Eden)

The **Maggid of Mezhirich** said: A man's kind deeds are utilized by God as seed for the planting of trees in Gan Eden; thus each human creates his/her own Paradise. The reverse is true when he commits transgressions.

Zalman M. Schacter-Shalomi
Classical Jewish belief is very clear: there is this world, *Olam Ha-Zeh*, and there is the World to Come, *Olam Ha-Ba*. At birth the soul enters the body and at death leaves it and continues to survive. This belief is referred to in Jewish sources as *hash-arat ha-nefesh*-literally "the survival of the soul." There is judgment and reward and punishment in the afterlife. According to the *Ethics of the Fathers*, we are to give our report or reckoning, our *din va-heshbon*, before God for a lifetime lived, and expect that we would be judged by God after death. Additionally, there is *Gan Eden* – paradise, and *Gehinnom* – purgatory.

OLAM HA-BA (The World to Come)

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim 1:12 "The actions themselves of the person constitute the reward in Olam Haba. After the soul departs from the body it rises to take pleasure and satisfaction with the light, energy, and worlds of *Kedusha* (Holiness) that have been added and multiplied by his good actions. This is what the Sages meant when they said that "All of Israel have a portion **TO** the World-to-Come [We translate it as **IN** the World-to-Come, but the literal translation is **TO** the World-to-Come] and not **IN** the World-to-Come. "**IN**" implies that Olam Haba is ready and waiting from the time of Creation, as if it where something with a *separate existence*, and if man warrants he will receive a portion of it for his reward [like a piece of candy waiting in G-d's pocket to be given to whoever deserves it]. In truth, Olam Haba is [made up of] the actions of the person, which he expanded and added and perfected into a place for himself [to dwell]....and so it is with the punishment of *Gehenam*, the *sin itself is his punishment* [it becomes the "space" that he will occupy during the time of his "reward"].

Ketubbot 111b Not like this world will be the World to Come. In this world one has the trouble to harvest grapes and press them; but in the World to Come a person will bring a single grape in a wagon or a ship, store it in the corner of his house, and draw from it enough wine to fill it a large flagon…There will not be a grape which will not yield thirty measures of wine.

TECHIYAT HA'METIM (Resurrection)

Isaiah 26:19 Oh, let Your dead revive! Let corpses arise! Awake and shout for joy, you who dwell in the dust! For Your dew is as the dew of light; You make the land of the shades come to life.

Rambam Principle XIII And we have already explained it And when the person will believe all these fundamentals and his faith will be clear in them he enters into the nation of Israel and it is a mitzvah to love him and to have mercy on him and to act to him according to all the ways in which God commanded us regarding loving your neighbor. And even if he did all of the sins in the Torah due to desire of the emotions, and from his physical aspect's conquering him, he will be punished for his sins, but he still has a share in the world to come and is among the sinners of Israel. However if he rejects one of these fundamentals he leaves the nation and is a denier of the fundamentals and is called a heretic, a denier, etc., and it is a mitzva to hate him and to destroy him (financially - not physically to kill him. And not to steal either). And regarding him it is said (Psalms 139) "Behold will not the enemy of God be my enemy?"

Ezekiel 37:1-13 The hand of God came upon me. He carried me out in a spirit of God, and set me down in the midst of the valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me: "O mortal, can these bones live again?' I replied: Adonai God, only You know. And He said to me: 'Prophesy over these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of God. Thus said God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again. And you shall know that I am God!

I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them; but there was no breath in them. Then God said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, O mortal! Say to the bread: Thus said God: Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breath into these slain, that they may live again. I prophesied as He commanded me. The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood upon their feet, a vast multitude.

Important Vocabulary (Teachers Guide)

LESSON 1: Living and Dying	
Agmat Nefesh	Grief
Avelut	Mourning
Havdalah	Separation
LESSON 2: Rituals for Grieving, Customs for Honoring the Dead	
Aninut	Period between death and burial
Keriah	Garment Rending
Shiva	7 day mourning period
Sheloshim	30 day mourning period
Yartzeit	Yearly anniversary of death
Kaddish	Prayer sanctifying God in memory of deceased
Chevra Kadisha	Community who cares for a dead body
Tachrichim	Burial Shrouds
L'vayat Ha'met	Honoring the Dead
Hesped	Eulogy
LESSON 3: Comforting Mourners, Remembering Loved Ones	
Zachor	Remember
Zichronam Livracha	"May their memories be for a blessing"
Nihum Aveilim	Comforting Mourners
Yizkor	Holiday Memorial Service
LESSON 4: What happens after we die?	
Neshama	Soul
Kever	Grave
Chevra Kadisha	Burial Society
Beit K'varot	Cemetery
Shomrim	Guardians
Tehiyyat Ha-Metim	Resurrection of the Dead
Olam Ha-Ba	The World to Come
Sheol	Underworld

Important Vocabulary (Student Worksheet)

LESSON 1: Living and Dying	
Agmat Nefesh	
Avelut	
Havdalah	
LESSON 2: Rituals for Grieving, Customs for Honoring the Dead	
Aninut	
Keriah	
Shiva	
Sheloshim	
Yartzeit	
Kaddish	
Chevra Kadisha	
Tachrichim	
L'vayat Ha'met	
Hesped	
LESSON 3: Comforting Mourners, Remembering Loved Ones	
Zachor	
Zichronam Livracha	
Nihum Aveilim	
Yizkor	
LESSON 4: What happens when we die?	
Neshama	
Kever	
Chevra Kadisha	
Beit K'varot	
Shomrim	
Tehiyyat Ha-Metim	
Olam Ha-Ba	
Sheol	

Adult Education: Teaching Our Children About Death

Lesson Overview

Talking about death and dying can be very upsetting. Death, however, is an unavoidable fact of life. We must deeply explore it – the rituals, the bereavement process, the logistics - so we can guide our children through it when it does (and it will) strike. Preparing our children in advance, to the extent we can control, will help them integrate what they know with how they feel. This lesson will provide for parents a snapshot of the curriculum their children are studying in religious school.

Goals:

To engage parents in naming their fears about death
To allow space for parents to voice their concerns, questions, and ideas about teaching their children about death
To provide information about death and dying curriculum so parents can learn along with their children

Essential Questions

How do I feel when I hear about death and dying?
Why is death so difficult to talk about?
What concerns do I have about teaching my children about death and dying?
What are the Jewish rituals that help us manage our emotions after a loved one dies?
How can I help my own child to have good grief?

Assessment (Evidence of Understanding)

Adults will be able to (AWBAT)

Articulate fears and emotions about death, dying, bereavement, afterlife
Express concerns, questions, and ideas about educating their children about death
Consider ways to engage their child in further learning

Important Vocabulary:

Hand out vocabulary sheet with words their children will be learning.

Time Table:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah
05-10: Cosby Show "Goldfish Funeral Clip"
10-20: Reflective Writing
20-35: Group Discussion
35-55: What Can Death Teach Us; How Can We Teach Death?
55-70: Overview of Curriculum
70-75: *Zachor*: Standing On the Shoulders

Method:

00-05: Blessing for Studying Torah

05-10: Watch Cosby Show "Cosby Fish Funeral" Clip

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIxfRuqNn9U

10-20: Reflective Writing

[We learn from Rabbi Bill Cosby that sometimes when facing a difficult conversation, all that's left to do is laugh. Laughter is an emotion that communicates so many things: it protects us, it helps us blow of steam. But we know that laughter isn't the only emotion felt when talking about difficult subjects like death and dying. Take about 10 minutes to write about a memory of a loved one who has since died, of their funeral, or of your experience dealing with grief as a child or an adult. You are of course welcome to write whatever you'd like and will not be required to share what you wrote.]

20-35 Group Discussion

Questions: Reflecting on your experiences, how were they handled?
What would you do differently for you child?
What do you hope they might learn about death and dying that you were not prepared for?
(This time can also be used for people who wish to share their memories. However, no one is required to do so.)

35-55 What Can Death Teach Us; How Can We Teach Death?

[See corresponding text sheet from Miriam Cotzin Burg Curriculum Guide with biblical accounts of death and quote from Rabbi Amy Eilberg.]

55-70 Overview of Curriculum

Educator will take opportunity to explain the curriculum to the parents. There will be time for questions, comments, and concerns.

70-75 *Zachor*: Standing On the Shoulders

[Many Jews name their children after loved ones who are no longer living. Who is your child named after? Share a story with the person sitting next to you about why you chose that name for your child. After parents have finished telling stories, conclude by saying "We stand on the shoulders of all who came before us, those we knew and those we never met, those for whom our children our named, those whom we loved and have lost. Teaching our children their stories and educating them in the ways Jews support each other when we experience a loss will have a lasting impact on their lives.]

Text Study

Overarching Question: How do these biblical characters help us to articulate our own relationship with mortality?

1. Text Aleph: Deuteronomy 32:44-52, 33:1, 34:5-12

(44) Moses came, together with Hosea son of Nun, and recited all the words of this poem in the hearing of the people. (45) And when Moses finished reciting all these words to Israel, (46) he said to them: take to heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Enjoin them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching. (47) For this is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure on the land that you are to possess upon crossing the Jordan. (48) That very day the Lord spoke to Moses: (49) Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites as their holding. (50) You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; (51) for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people. (52) You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it – the land that I am giving to the Israelite people. (1) This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, bade the Israelites farewell before he died.

[Moses blesses each of the tribes, one by one, and then ascends to Mount Nebo]

(5) So Moses the servant of the Lord died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the Lord. (6) He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. (8) And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days. The period of mourning for Moses came to an end. (9) Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses. (10) Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses – whom the Lord singled out, face to face, (11) for the various signs and portents that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharoah and all his courtiers and his whole country, (12) and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

Questions on Aleph:

A. **Moses whole life has been about leading the people Israel to the Promised Land. He is so close that he can see it, but God will not let him enter the Land. Is God being fair? What does this teach us about fairness and death?**

B. **By not being allowed to cross over into the Promised Land, Moses does not get to complete his life's work. What does this say to you about the human condition?**
C. **What is the last thing Moses does before ascending to Mount Nebo to die? What can we learn from this?**
D. **Who buries Moses? Is that important for us today?**
E. **The people mourn Moses for thirty days (as we now mourn for the period of *shloshim*). After the mourning is complete. What happens? Why is that signficant?**
F. **The last 3 verses of the Torah are a comment on Moses' life. To what modern funeral practice can this be compared? If you were writing those last 3 verses, what would you say of Moses?**

2. Text Bet: Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 15a; Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 30a

It is taught: "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there" (Deut. 34:5). Is it possible that Moses, while still alive, would have written, "So Moses . . . died"? The truth is, Scripture up to this passage was written by Moses; from this passage on, Scripture was written by Joshua son of Nun. Such is the opinion of R. Judah – some say, of R. Nehemia. But R. Simeon said to R. Judah: Is it possible that the Torah scroll is short of even a single letter? If it were short, how could Moses have commanded, "Take this book of Torah" (Deut. 31:26)? Rather, the meaning is that, up to this passage, the Holy One dictated, and Moses repeated the words and wrote them out, but from this passage one, the Holy One dictate, and Moses (without repeating the words) wrote them down with tears in his eyes.

Questions on Bet:
A. **What is the problem/issue in with the Torah that the Rabbis are trying to address?**
B. **How does Rabbi Judah solve it?**
C. **How does Rabbi Simeon solve it?**
D. **What do each of their responses say about how human beings deal with mortality? (Hint: In R. Simeon's resolution, what does Moses know and not know?)**

3. Text Gimel: Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:10 and 11:10; Tanhuma, *Va'etchanan*, 6; Yalkut, *Va'etchanan*, 821

When Moses realized that the decree (of death) had been sealed against him, he drew a small circle around himself, stood in it, and said, "Master of the Universe, I will not budge from here until You void that decree." At the same time, he donned sackcloth – indeed, wrapped himself in it – strewed ashes upon himself, and persised in prayer and supplications before the Holy One . . .

[Moses goes through a period of intense pleading/negotiating with God, the stars, planets, mountains, hills, sea, and the angel Metatron, until he witnesses God speaking to Joshua as the in his stead.]

In that instant, Moses cried out in anguish and said, "Rather a hundred deaths than a single pain of envy. Master of universes, until now I sought life. But now my soul is surrendered to You." After Moses became reonciled to his dying, the Holy One spoke up saying, " 'Who will rise up for Me in behalf of evildoers?' (Ps. 94:16). Who will rise up in Israel's behalf at the time of My anger? Who will stand up for them during My children's warfare (with enemies)? Who will entreat mercy in their behalf when they sin before me?" At that time, Metatron came and, prostrating himself before the Holy One, sought to comfort Him: Master of the Universe, Moses during his life was Yours, and when dead he will still be Yours . . . [sic] So it is with Me, the Holy One said to Metatron. I weep not only for Moses; I weep for him and for Israel as well. Many times when they provoked me and I was angry at them, it was he who stood in the breach before Me to turn back My anger.

[God tries to find an angel to go and take Moses' soul until God realizes that God will have to do it.]

But a divine voice came forth and said, "The time has come for you to depart from the world." Moses pleaded with the Holy One, "Master of the Universe, for my sake, remember the day when You revealed Yourself to me at the bush; for my sake, remember the time when I stood on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights. I beg You, do not hand me over to the angel of death." Again a divine voice came forth and said, "Fear not, I Myself will attend you and your burial."

[Moses pleads some more and then asks and is granted time to bless Israel.]

Then from the highest heaven of heavens, the Holy One came down to take the soul of Moses, and with Him the three ministering angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel. Michael laid out his bier, Gabriel spread a fine linen cloth at his head., while Zagzagel spread it at his feet. Michael stood at one side and Gabriel at the other. Then the Holy One said to Moses, "Moses, close your eyes," and he closed his eyes. "Put your arms over your breast," and he put his arms over his breast. "Bring you legs together," and he brought his legs together. Then the Holy One summoned Moses' soul, saying, "My daughter, I had fixed the time of your sojourn in the body of Moses at a hundred and twenty years. Now your time has come to depart. Depart. Delay not." She replied, "Master of the Universe, I know that you are God of all spirits and Lord of all souls. You created me and placed me in the body of Moses one hundred and twenty years ago. Is there a body in the world more pure than the body of Moses? I love him, and I do not wish to depart from him." The Holy One exclaimed, "Depart, and I will take you up to the highest heaven of heavens, and will set you under the throne of glory, next to the cherubim and seraphim. In that instant, the Holy One kissed Moses, and took his soul with that kiss. At that, the holy spirit wept and said, "There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" (Deut. 34:10).

Questions on Gimel:

A. **In the beginning of this passage, what is Moses' reaction to news of his impending death? How does this compare with R. Simeon's comment from the last passage? Are they opposites or can they coexist?**
B. **According to this passage, does Moses ever become reconciled with the reality of death? Can we?**
C. **At the moment when Moses says that he accepts God's decree of death, how does God respond? What does that say about human beings in God's eyes? How does Metatron try to comfort God? Are there ways in Jewish practice that we comfort God for the loss of a precious person?**
D. **When God finally comes and says that the time has come, Moses makes one final plea. What does he say to God? Is there a lesson there for us about how we should live our lives if we want God to be with us at our moments of death?**
E. **How do you understand the dialogue between God and Moses' soul?**
F. **In the end, how does God take Moses' soul? How does that image sit with you?**

Supplemental Sources

4. Text Dalet: Yalkut, *Hukkat*, 764

When Aaron's time to came to depart from this world, the Holy One said to Moses, "Go tell Aaron of his impending death." So Moses rose early in the morning and went to Aaron. As soon as he called out, "Aaron, my brother," Aaron came down and asked, "What made you come here so early today?" Moses replied, "During the night I meditated on a matter in Scripture which I found distressing, and so I rose early and came to you." "What was the matter?" Aaron asked. "I do not remember, but I know it was in the book of Genesis. Bring it and we'll read it." They took the book of Genesis, read each and every section in it, and said about each one of them, "The Holy One wrought well, created well." But when they came to the creation of Adam, Moses asked, "What is one to say of Adam, who brought death to the world, so that I, who prevailed over ministering angels, and you, who have held back death – are not even you and I to have a like end? After all, how many more years have we to live?" "Not many," Aaron answered. Moses continued talking until finally he mentioned to him the precise day when death was to come. At that moment, Aaron's bones felt the imminence of his own demise. So he asked, "Is it because of me that you found the matter in Scripture so distressing?" Moses answered, "Yes." At once Israel noticed that Aaron's height had diminished, even as Aaron said, "My heart doth writhe within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me" (Ps. 55:5). Moses asked, "Is dying acceptable to You?" Aaron: "Yes." Moses: "Then let us go up to the mount on the mount." At that, the three – Moses, Aaron and Eleazar – went up in the sight of all Israel.

5. Text Hay: 2 Samuel 12:15-23

(15) Nathan went home, and the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and it became critically ill. (16) David entreated God for the boy; David fasted, and he went in and spent the night lying on the ground. (17) The senior servants of his household tried to induce him to get up from the ground; but he refused, nor would he partake of food with them. (18) On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell David that the child was dead; for they said, "We spoke to him when the child was alive and he wouldn't listen to us; how can we tell him that the child is dead? He might do something terrible." (19) When David saw his servants talking in whispers, David understood that the child was dead; David asked his servants, "Is the child dead?" "Yes," they replied. (20) Thereupon David rose from the ground; he bathed and anointed himself, and he changed his clothes. He went into the House of the Lord and prostrated himself. Then he went home and asked for food, which they set before him, and he ate. (21) His courtiers asked him, "Why have you acted in this manner? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept' but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food!" (22) He replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? The Lord may have pity on me, and the child may live.' (23) But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me." (24) David consoled his wife Bathsheba; he went to her and lay with her. She bore a son and she named him Solomon. The Lord favored him, (25) and he sent a message through the prophet Nathan; and he was named Jedidiah at the instance of the Lord.

Questions on Dalet and Hay:

A. How does Aaron face his own death? What can we learn from him?
B. How does David face the death of his son? What can we learn from him?
C. How do these two compare with each other, and with Moses?

Appendix

"Teach us to Number our Days that We may Attain a Heart of Wisdom"

The Jewish Approach to Death

A Family Education Program for Fourth - Fifth Grade Families

How might a person feel when they suffer a loss?

---crying all the time or at unexpected times

---feeling numb

---hard to make decisions

---hard time believing this is true

---feeling angry

---feeling guilty

---mood changes

---a feeling that the deceased is still alive

---unable to eat or sleep

---constantly eating and sleeping

---frightening dreams

---feeling sad at holidays

---worrying about money

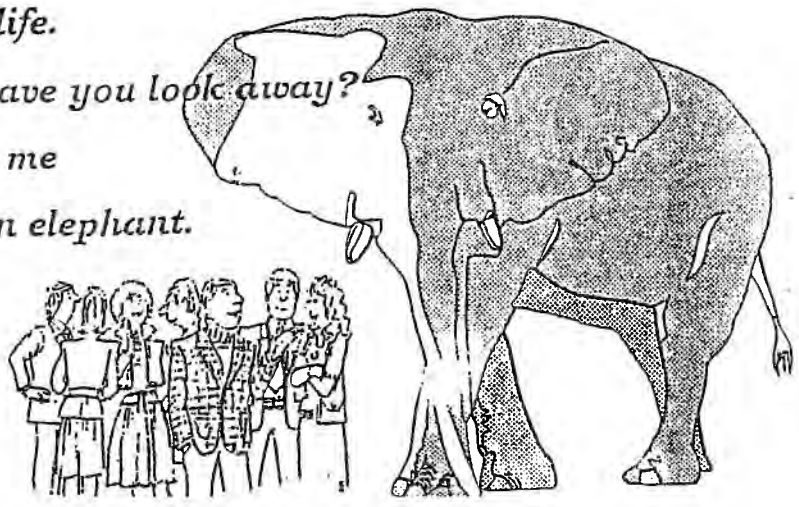
---exhaustion

---afraid of dying

prepared by Shoshana Zonderman

The Elephant in the Room

There's an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.
Yet we squeeze by with, "How are You?"
And, "I'm fine" . . .
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.
We talk about the weather.
We talk about work.
We talk about everything else — except the elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
It is constantly on our minds,
For you see, it is a very big elephant.
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.
Oh, please, say her name.
Oh, please, say "Barbara" again.
Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.
For if we talk about her death,
Perhaps we can talk about her life.
Can I say "Barbara" and not have you look away?
For if I cannot, you are leaving me
Alone . . . in a room . . . with an elephant.



Pebbles on a Stone

by Alan A. Kay (Torah Aura Productions)

My Father and Grandma were the last to leave Grandpa's gravesite. They were holding hands and stepping around muddy puddles.

"Why did God make it rain today," I heard my sister Sarah ask my mother when we first gathered at the gravesite. "The rain is making Grandma cry."

"Grandma is sad, Sarah," my mother said, "but not because of the rain. She's sad because she misses Grandpa."

"I do, too," Sarah said.

"I know. I know," my mother said. "We all do."

"Maybe it's raining because God is crying for Grandpa, too," I said looking up at my mother. My mother put her arm around my shoulder at the same time my father did. Only then did I realize I was standing between them with my mother holding an umbrella over our heads.

Sarah was standing on the other side of my father between him and Grandma. And there was Aunt Carol, my father's sister, and standing next to her was Great Aunt Goldie, Grandpa's sister. We all stood in a line facing the gravesite.

Everyone else stood behind us. There were Aunt Carol's husband Seymour, my cousins Wendy and David, a few family friends, and some other cousins. Uncle Seymour was holding an umbrella over Grandma's head, and my father's cousin Charles, Great Aunt Goldie's son, held one over her head.

"God didn't make it rain today," my father said looking down at me. "It just happens. Think of the rain as helping the grass grow over Grandpa's grave making it clean and smooth and full of life."

I couldn't understand how my father could speak so calmly, even one year after his father died. I couldn't understand how I could be so calm now. I cried so hard when Grandpa died. I still missed Grandpa, but now I am able to remember him without crying all the time. Sometimes I do cry, but no one sees me except Sarah. Then, she cries too, we talk about when Grandpa was alive, and then we laugh.

I looked over at Grandma. Raindrops mixed with tears on her cheeks. I looked down at my feet. They were wet and muddy. Then I looked at my father's shoes, then at Grandma's. Grandma's beautiful new shoes were also wet and muddy. That also made me sad.

Our rabbi wasn't with us. He had to visit a very sick congregant who had just become ill just that morning. My father told us not to worry, that we would find someone at the cemetery.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You'll see."

I thought there would be a rabbi just waiting for us at the cemetery. An old man dressed in along black coat and hat and wearing a white beard was sitting on a chair in the cemetery office when my father and I walk in. "You want prayer should be said?" he asked as he stood up. My father nodded. The old man followed us back to our car and got into the front seat with my father and me. I sat squeezed between them. My mother, Grandma, and Sarah were sitting in the back seat.

"We're going to drive to Grandpa's gravesite now," my father announced. "This man will lead us in prayers."

"What's his name?" Sarah asked.

"Shhh!" I said.

"No, it's okay," my father said.

"What's your name, please? The children want to know." my father said to the old man.

"Markovitz," the old man said without turning his head. And that's all he said. I tried to move closer to my father. There was something about the man that made me uncomfortable. Maybe it was his black hat pulled down over his forehead so I really couldn't see his eyes. Maybe it was his voice which sounded so raspy. Maybe it was his hands.

Mr. Markovitz/ hands rested on his long black coat which covered his knees and most of his legs. In his left hand, he grasped a small black book. He held it so tightly his skin didn't even wrinkle, but his veins looked big and blue. I remembered my Grandpa's hands grasping mine and the skin which looked so blue and wrinkled yet felt so smooth and soft. I wondered if Mr. Markovitz was also a grandpa.

My father drove close to the gravesite. It was the first time I had been there since the funeral. On the spot where Grandpa was buried was a stone covered by a white cloth.

"The unveiling is a dedication ceremony," my father told Sarah and me at breakfast that morning. "According to Jewish tradition, every grave must be marked. Your grandfather's grave is marked by a large stone that has his name carved into it, just like all the other stones we saw last year when Grandpa was buried."

"And sometime during the year after a person dies," my mother said, "the stone is placed at the head of the grave and then later, a dedication ceremony is held. That's the unveiling, when the cloth that covers the new monument is taken off, unveiled."

After my father had stopped the car, we got out slowly and walked even more slowly to the gravesite. No one said anything, as if everyone knew exactly what they had to do. I didn't know what I was supposed to do so, I followed my father. I turned to find Sarah and she was following Grandma.

Suddenly, Mr. Markovitz turned to face us, and we stopped right at the foot of the gravesite. Mr. Markovitz opened his little black book and began reading in Hebrew very fast and in a very low voice. I couldn't imagine how anyone could hear him or understand him, but no one said anything. But I want to hear what he was saying. Was he talking about Grandpa? If he was, I wanted to hear it. But I didn't say anything, because no one else did. I just listened to his voice which sounded like the rain on the umbrella over my head.

"What is he reading?" I whispered to my father.

"The Twenty-Third Psalm, 'The Lord is my Shepherd,'" my father answered. When Mr. Markovitz had finished, Uncle Seymour gave his umbrella to Aunt Carol and walked to the stone.

"We are here to dedicate this monument to Morris Silverman. May his soul rest in peace." Then I could tell the difference between the sniffles and the raindrops. That's because I was sniffing, too.

Uncle Seymour lifted the white cloth, and the rain fell on the smooth silver colored stone. It even looked bigger after it was uncovered. It wasn't difficult to read the English words carved into the stone, but Uncle Seymour read them aloud:

"Here lies Morris Silverman, son of Jacob and Esther; Beloved husband, Devoted father, Loving grandfather, Cherished brother."

Uncle Seymour folded the white cloth, held it under his raincoat and returned to stand behind Grandma. He put one hand on Aunt Carol's shoulder and one hand on Grandma's shoulder. She was holding a handkerchief to her eyes. Mr. Markovitz opened his little black book and began praying again.

"What is he saying now?" I asked.

"El malei rachamim, O God full of compassion," my father answered. "It is a prayer to God asking that the soul of the person rest in peace."

Then, suddenly, I heard familiar words from all the people around me. There were saying the Mourner's Kaddish, the words I had heard so often during the year. When it was over, my mother leaned over to kiss my father, and I stepped back. I turned to see Aunt Carol hugging Grandma and Aunt Goldie.

Grandma walked up to the stone and reached to touch the letters of Grandpa's name carved into it. Then she bent down and picked up a pebble and placed it on top of the stone. Then everyone else picked up a pebble and placed them on top of the stone, but I was the only other person who touched grandpa's name first. When I did, I realized it had stopped raining. I found a small round yellow stone that seemed to shine among the others.

"Why do we put pebbles on top of the stone?" Sarah asked my father.

"Just to remember this day we came to visit," he answered.

Mr. markovitz waited until my father and Grandma began to walk away from the gravesite. Then my father walked over to him, said a few words, shook his hand, and, after reaching into his pocket, put something into his hand. Mr. Markovitz nodded his head and walked back to our car.

We sat in the car as we had before. Only this time, something made me move closer to Mr. Markovitz. I felt more comfortable being close to him. Maybe it was because he had pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead with a wrinkled white handkerchief, and I could now see his eyes. Maybe it was because his raspy voice which had frightened me at first had been softened by the prayers and somehow sounded like my Grandpa's. Maybe it was his hands.

We sat in the car as we had before. Only this time, something made me move closer to Mr. Markovitz. I felt more comfortable being close to him. Maybe it was because he had pushed back his hat to wipe his forehead with a wrinkled white handkerchief, and I could now see his eyes. Maybe it was because his raspy voice which had frightened me at first had been softened by the prayers and somehow sounded like my Grandpa's. Maybe it was his hands.

My father drove Mr. Markovitz back to the cemetery office. Before he got out of the car, I touched his hand which held the little black book. It looked so blue and wrinkled, yet felt so smooth and soft.

Mr. Markovitz looked at me and shook his head. He didn't say anything, but no one else noticed, so I didn't think he was angry. He got out of the car slowly. My father shouted, "Thank you," and Mr. Markovitz slowly climbed the stairs back into the cemetery office.

"What is he going to do now?" I asked.

"Wait for another family who needs to have prayers said," my father answered.

"Is this his job?" Sarah asked.

"Mr. Markovitz!" I shouted.

"So, who is Mr. Markovitz?" Sarah asked.

"If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you," I snapped. I really didn't know for sure but I thought I did. I looked at my father's hands holding the steering wheel. When I'm older and married and have children, my father will be a grandfather. And he'll have hands like his father and like Mr. Markovitz, and my children will want to touch them.

"Dad?" I asked as my father began to drive the long road out of the cemetery.

"Yes?"

"Do you think Mr. Markovitz is a rabbi?"

"He may be," he answered, "but I don't know. Whatever job he had, he probably retired a long time ago and comes here on Sundays and maybe during the week to earn a little money."

"Why does he have to say prayers for us?" Can't you say the prayers? Can't we say the prayers together?"

"He doesn't say the prayers for us;" my father said, "he says the prayers with us. Jews try to pray together, as a community. That's why we go to synagogue on the Sabbath as a family to be with other families. Let's say Mr. Markovitz represents all those Jewish families who could not be here with us today."

"I think I understand," I said.

"I think I do, too," Sarah said.

"What happens when Mr. Markovitz dies?" I asked. "Who is going to say the prayers for him? Who is going to put pebbles on his stone?"

"Probably his own children," my father said.

I knew he was a grandfather, I thought to myself. I let my head fall back against the seat and fell asleep watching my father's hands turn the steering wheel to bring us home.

DISCUSSION

- List the Jewish customs and traditions involved in the unveiling ceremony.
- How does the boy feel about his grandpa?
- Who comes to the unveiling for grandpa? Why do you think these people came?
- Describe everything you know about Mr. Markovitz: what he looks like, what he does, how he relates to others.
- Why do you think Mr. Markovitz does this job?
- What do you think will happen when Mr. Markovitz dies?
- What are the messages of the prayers said at the unveiling?
- What is the meaning of the story's title?
- What does this story have to say about how we live out lives?
- What does this story have to say about the responsibilities and obligations of being a member of a family?

- Why do you think it is a Jewish tradition to have an unveiling ceremony to mark the end of the mourning period?
- Do you think this formal "ending" changes the experience of mourning or the level of grief for the mourners? What difference would it make if there were no such ceremony?
- Why do we spend time remembering the dead?
- How do we in our society and culture honor the dead?
- How should a person feel and act a year after the death of a loved one?
- In what ways do prayers and praying help us mourn?
- If your parents asked you to accompany them to an unveiling, what would you do and why?

Mourning Customs at Rockdale Temple

A. Before the funeral

1. A Rabbi goes to the home to learn about the deceased and to comfort the family.
2. The family goes to Weil Funeral Home to select a casket and to make other arrangements.

B. The funeral---may all be at graveside, or it may take place at Weil or the Temple before going to the cemetery.

1. Show respect
2. Burial as soon as everyone who needs to be there can be there
3. Sometimes family may view privately
4. ***Shomer*** (someone who stays with the body) or no ***shomer*** (usually not)
5. ***Tahara*** (ritual cleansing of the deceased's body) or other preparation or embalming (not usually done)
6. ***Tachrichin*** (shrouds) or clothing
7. Traditionally all wood casket
8. ***Kriah*** (cutting of a ribbon to symbolize the heart's breaking); in Cincinnati it is done before the funeral with just the family present
9. Eulogy (Rabbi and/or family members)
10. ***El Molei Rachamim*** is recited, asking God to watch over the deceased. We use their Hebrew name.
11. Flowers or no flowers
12. Music or no music

C. Interment Ceremony

1. ***Kaddish*** (a prayer that praises God)
2. The family and friends have the option to remain as casket is lowered and to shovel dirt into the grave.

D. Afterwards

1. The congregation will arrange ***minyan*** leaders for ***shiva*** (means 7). May be observed 2 to 7 days (traditionally 7 days).
2. The ***minyan*** needs ten Jewish people over the age of thirteen.
3. We read the deceased's name for thirty days in daily and Shabbat services.
4. The Rabbi will be present and assist in the unveiling ceremony, usually done eleven months later, or earlier if the weather might be bad.
5. The congregation reminds the family every year when the anniversary of the death occurs (***yahrzeit***). The family gererally makes a donation and attends synagogue to say ***kaddish*** during Shabbat services. Some families visit the cemetery.

Glossary of Terms about Death and Mourning

prepared by Shoshana Zonderman
revised by Bette Scarlet

aveliut	11 months of mourning of mourning for a parent
El Maleh Raḥamim	"Lord who is full of mercy"…the traditional prayer recited at the funeral and burial
halvayat ha-met	"accompanying the dead" …the *mitzvah* to attend a funeral
ḥevra kadisha	"sacred society"…Jewish burial society that ritually prepares the body for burial
kaddish	"sanctification"…Aramaic prayer in praise of God with no mention of death. In the Middle Ages, it became associated with prayers for the dead. Mourners recite it in a *minyan* (prayer quorum of ten) for11 months after the death of a parent
kibud ha-met	"respect for the deceased"…a major principle of Jewish burial customs
kriah	"tearing" of a garment or a black ribbon that is worn as a sign of mourning
matzevah	"monument" or headstone erected at a grave
niḥum aveilim	"comforting the mourners" is a *mitzvah* and a major principle of Jewish mourning customs
s'eudat havra'ah	"meal of consolation" is the first meal for mourners after the funeral that is usually prepared by friends
sh'loshim	first "thirty" days of mourning following burial
shiva	"seven" days of mourning after a funeral when it is customary to bring food to the mourners
shomer	"guard"…the person who accompanies the deceased until the funeral and recites psalms
tahara	"purification"…ritual cleansing and preparation of body prior to funeral
takhrikhim	"shrouds"…plain, white, pocketless linen shroud symbolizing simplicity and equality as well as purity and forgiveness in death
unveiling	a short ceremony at the grave after the headstone is erected, usually within the first year after the burial
yahrzeit (Yiddish)	"year's time"…anniversary of the date of death on the Hebrew calendar; *kaddish* is said and a donation is made to charity in memory of the deceased
yahrzeit candle	"year's time candle"…24 hour candle lit on the eve of the anniversary of the date of death. The candle symbolizes the soul: "The soul of a person is the lamp of God."

SHIVA

prepared by Bette Scarlet from "The Jewish Home" by Daniel Syme and The Beth Am Binder by Rabbi Andrew Paley

Shiva is the 7 day period of mourning beginning immediately after burial. During this time, the mourners remain at home and receive calls and visits from their friends, family and community. They come to pray, console and provide food for at least the first meal after the funeral. The activities of the mourners are restricted. It is not suggested that the mourners go to work or play during this time and it is customary to have services daily in the home.

Jewish law prescribes observance of ***Shiva*** for one's parents, siblings, child or spouse.

It is a custom to cover the mirrors in a house of mourning to deflect impulses of vanity. It is also customary that the mourners sit on low stools or benches as a sign of their bereavement.

Since ***Shiva*** is a period of mourning that is observed, the proper nomenclature is that "observes ***Shiva***" and not that "one sits ***Shiva***." While sitting is technically what the mourners are doing, they are more appropriately observing an important phase in the cycle of grief.

The laws of mourning are suspended on Shabbat, but despite this the Sabbath day counts as one of the seven days for ***Shiva.***

Jewish tradition encourages the ritual washing of hands before entering the house of ***Shiva*** after the funeral as an act of spiritual cleansing.

A seven day ***Shiva*** candle is lit immediately when one returns to the house of ***Shiva*** after the burial.

It is customary to cover all mirrors in a house of ***Shiva*** since mourners should not be concerned wit issues of vanity.

Nichum avelim is the *mitzvah* (commandment) of comforting the mourner. Many people are reluctant to visit a house of mourning. They worry about what they should say or do. But what you say or do is the least significant part of a condolence call. Your presence is the greatest gift you can give to the bereaved family. It is customary to wait to speak until after the mourner speaks. Then all you need say is "I'm sorry." That simple phrase, a touch, a hug will mean more to the mourner that you can ever know.

When visiting a house of ***Shiva***, it is customary to bring food (cake, a fruit basket, a meal). Making a donation in memory of the deceased is a most appropriate way of paying tribute.

The first 30 days (***Sheloshim***) following the burial constitute the full mourning period for everyone but one's parents. Following the period of ***Shiva***, the mourner's actions are less restricted, although social events are generally avoided. Shaving and cutting one's hair is likewise still prohibited. This period continues for 23 days following ***Shiva*** (7 + 23= 30, or ***Sheloshim***). The daily recitation of Kaddish takes place in the synagogue.

Yahrtzeit is the Yiddish word for "year's time" and refers to the annual Jewish commemoration of a loved one's death. The custom of marking the anniversary is mentioned in the Talmud by fasting on the day of important people's death. Most scholars recognize that Yahrtzeit customs arose in the 14 – 16th centuries. The anniversary of a death is fixed according to the Jewish calendar. It is generally a personal rather than communal observance and as such has one particular personal ritual- the unveiling.

The unveiling is a graveside religious ceremony marking the formal setting of the marker or headstone at the cemetery. It is a fairly recent American custom, which usually takes place at the one year anniversary of the death of the loved one. There are no prescribed rituals, but it is customary for family to gather to recite psalms, a short eulogy, actually removing the cover to the marker or stone, ***El Malei Rachamim*** and ***Kaddish*** are recited.

In Memory of ...Search the Temple

Find how many ways the dead are remembered and/or honored at Rockdale Temple.

Your family will have 10 minutes to tour the Temple.

List as many different memorials honoring the dead that you can find.

Key words to look for are: "in memory of," "honoring" and "remembering."

The Generations

Adapted from *The Wisdom of the Sands* by Antoine de St. Exupery

In a house which becomes a home,
one hands down and another takes up
the heritage of mind and hand,
laughter and tears, musings and deeds.

Love, like a carefully loaded ship,
crosses the gulf between generations.

Thus have ceremonies of passage:
when you wed,
when you are delivered of a child,
and when you die;
when you depart and when you return;
when you plant and when you harvest.

Bring up your children.
It is not the function of some official
to hand them their inheritance.
If others impart to your children
your knowledge and your ideas,
they will lose all of you
that is wordless and full of wonder.

Build memories in your children,
lest they drag out their lives joylessly
in a land which seems an empty camping place;
lest they allow treasure to rot away
because they have not been given the keys.

We live not by things,
but by the meaning of things.
It is needful to transmit the passwords
from generation to generation.

THE CHAIN OF JEWISH LIFE

prepared by Shoshana Zonderman

Introduction to the family learning exercise

Our Jewish tradition encourages us to **affirm life** even though we know that we will all eventually die. Death is seen as a natural part of the life cycle in Jewish tradition. One way to come to grips with the finality of death is to try and make the most of our lives. We can do this is by living out the highest values of our loved ones who have died. In this way, we help to bind their souls in "the bond of life" and to make their "memory a blessing." When we live our Jewish lives with an awareness that we are a **critical link in the ongoing chain** of Jewish life, we make their memory a blessing for us and for the Jewish people.

In this exercise, your family will construct a list of your **ten most important ideals or family values**. The values will then be written on chain links in their order of importance and attached to form your family's **chain of Jewish life.**

Part One: Some values in Jewish tradition

In order to begin thinking about your family's ideas about living a good life, read through the following quotes and share your reactions to them. The quotes are intended to stimulate **your own** ideas about the key values in **your** family. Your ideas may be different from those in the readings. As you read each selection, begin to make your list of ten important ways to affirm life through your values.

Reading #1 (from the Talmud)

A traveler once saw an old person planting a carob tree by the side of the road. The traveler asked how long it would take for the young tree to bear its fruit. The old person replied,"Oh, perhaps in seventy years."

"Do you expect to live to eat the fruit of that tree?" the traveler asked.

The old person replied, "No, but I didn't find the world desolate when I entered it, and as my ancestors planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who come after me."

What are your reactions to this story? What values does it refer to? Would you put them on your list of values?

Reading #2 (Micah 6:8)

God has told you what is good, and what the Lord requires of you:
only to do justice
and to love goodness
and to walk modestly with your God.

How do Micah's three biblical values compare with the ones on your list ?

Reading #3 (Rabbi Hillel)

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
And if I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, then when?

What is Hillel telling us about our responsibilities to others and to ourselves?

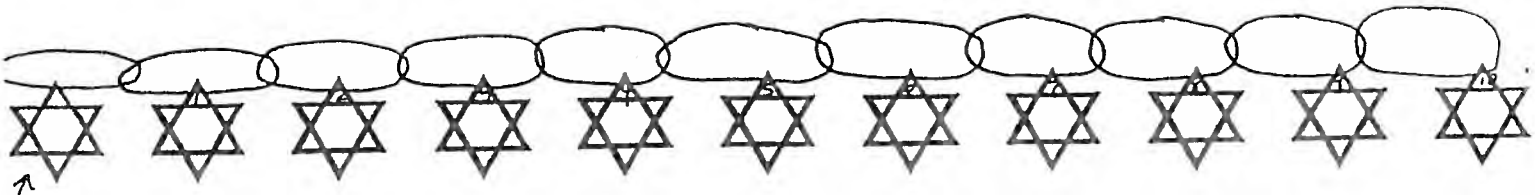
Reading #4 (a selection from "Choices" by poet Danny Siegel; the *etrog* is the citron used on the holiday of Sukkot with the lulav)

the Esrog — throw it away,
make it into jelly, a glaze for Shabbas dinner
(a Jewish version of Puritan cranberry sauce)
prick it with cloves and put it in the closet
so the clothes will smell fresh for the holidays.
When I die —
am I to become some thing tossed, some compost,
or will I be a sweetener,
or some kind of refreshing memory to the people who knew me
and will, some day, themselves,
and on the basis of their own stories,
become one of those?

How do you become a "sweetener" and a "refreshing memory" to people who knew you?

Part Two: Constructing the family chain of life

Discuss with other members of your family (or with a teacher if no other family members are present) your family's ten most important values or ideals in life. Write each value on a separate Jewish star shape. You might want to number each value on the top of the star. Write your family name(s) on a star.



family name

(values written on numbered stars)

MOURNER'S KADDISH

קדיש יתום

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא בְּעָלְמָא דִּי־בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Yit-ga-dal v'yit-ka-dash sh'mei ra-ba b'al-ma di-v'ra chir-u-tei,
v'yam-lich mal-chu-tei b'cha-yei-chon u-v'yo-mei-chon u-v'cha-yei
d'chol beit Yis-ra-el, ba-a-ga-la u-viz-man ka-riv, v'im-ru: A-mein.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא.

Y'hei sh'mei ra-ba m'va-rach l'a-lam u-l'al-mei al-ma-ya.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא, וְיִתְהַדַּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקוּדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא,

Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach v'yit-pa-ar, v'yit-ro-mam, v'yit-na-sei,
v'yit-ha-dar, v'yit-a-leh, v'yit-ha-lal sh'mei d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,

לְעֵלָּא מִן־כָּל־בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא, תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא
דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן:

L'ei-la min kol bir-cha-ta v'shi-ra-ta, tush-b'cha-ta v'neh-cheh-ma-ta
da-a-mi-ran b'al-ma, v'im-ru: A-mein.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן־שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Y'hei sh'la-ma ra-ba min sh'ma-ya v'cha-yim, a-lei-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'im-ru: A-mein.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'im-ru: A-mein.

Let the glory of God be extolled, and God's great name be hallowed in the world whose creation God willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom yet we glorify, honor, and exalt. And let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen.

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, let peace descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world, and let us say: Amen.

Teach Us to Number Our Days that We May Attain a Heart of Wisdom: The Jewish Approach to Death

prepared by Shoshana Zonderman

Some Suggested Reading:

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- Marriage
- Domestic Violence
- Sacred Aging
- Bereavement
- Parents
- Disabilities
- LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Inclusion

Personal Observance
Caring Community
Health & Wellness

Talking to Children about Death: Q&A

Describing death and helping children cope by Rabbi Edythe Held Mencher LCSW

Print Share Comment

1. When is it best to talk to children about death?
Every Jewish Prayer service includes the Kaddish* prayer. The Kaddish is a sensitive way to begin to teach children about death; it can be explained that it is a time we remember and honor those who have died. Making a shivah* visit and consoling the bereaved are considered central obligations of Jewish life; this is another opportunity to teach children about death. It is good for school aged children and adolescents to be aware that their parents and grandparents are fulfilling this obligation and where appropriate the child can accompany parents to visit a classmate or relative who has experienced a loss.

Sometimes we have no choice but to discuss death for the first time when a child experiences it firsthand. In general it is easier for both child and parent when the loss if of a distant relative, neighbor, pet or even a character in a television show, movie or book. It becomes much complex when the loss is of a deeply cherished person like a parent or sibling.

2. Why bring the subject up when no one close has died? Won't that just make my child anxious unnecessarily?
Inevitably every child will ultimately have to face the death of someone cherished. When those upon whom the child relies are also bereaved they have far less wherewithal to respond with calmness and patience. It is better to have a chance to discover these painful realities when the feelings are not so personal and powerful. Our tradition emphasizes life but does not shy away from acknowledging the mystery and sadness of death. Through acknowledging death we learn to cherish our time together, to be comforting to one another and to do all we can to safeguard life. On the other hand our tradition urges us not to be afraid of death but to have trust in the goodness of life and the sense that death is a time of peace, not a time of punishment or exile.

3. What if my child sees my tears, worry and anger when someone has died?
It is important and natural to acknowledge that we are sad and angry and hurt ourselves over the loss. We must assure the child that we are not angry with him/her even if we seem more impatient and short-tempered—we are upset with the situation and not him/her. It is helpful to enlist the help of relatives, friends, clergy, neighbors who are less directly involved and who can interpret the surviving relatives' behavior and emotions to the child. Jewish mourning customs including funeral and shivah acknowledge death as a time of loss and sadness for the survivors but there is also an expectation that in time the sorrow will ease and that human beings and spiritual traditions can help the bereaved to heal. In understanding and observing reactions to death, bereavement, and healing children have the values of love, attachment, capacity to bear difficult feelings and healing and recovery affirmed.

4. What should I actually tell my child about death?
Children need to be helped to understand that death is not like how it is portrayed in games or cartoons where the character pops back to life moments later. It is not like sleep. It is final and irrevocable. The dead person does not breathe, nor move. There is no more hurt and no more pain but there is also no more life. Death can be explained by reminding children of memories of dead birds or bugs—a stillness that is permanent. This is very difficult for a person who is describing the state of someone they also loved, so if this is occurring at the time of bereavement the help of others can be sought.

5. Why the need to speak of finality?
Our answers will vary based upon the age of the child and our own personal beliefs. The younger child might believe that a person can be dead and then un-dead. As hard as it is to confront the child with pain, it is a reality to which he or she will have to accommodate eventually. Telling a child a grandparent or parent has gone on a long trip may seem kind at the time but creates unrealistic hope and does not allow them to give vent to their true feelings. We often do this because it is so very painful for us to not to be able to protect young children and to manage their distress but they need our truthfulness to master the realities. Clearly such statements which confuse death and trips will in the long run confound separation problems because children will come to fear that those who go on long

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confound separation problems because children will come to fear that those who go on long trips will never return.

6. What about saying the person who was died has gone to heaven? Doesn't Judaism allow for the possibility of eternal life?
We will have a longer discussion of speaking to children of the after-life in the following sections but it is important to make a distinction between heaven and earth—the notion of an afterlife and the physical togetherness that is experienced before death. Even those of us who have doubts or disbelief in an after-life need to be sensitive and allow for hope. After all, we don't know for sure and such thoughts have been of comfort throughout time. On the other hand, promoting beliefs which we really don't hold will likely fail to help school aged children and adolescents. It is natural to wish for a reunion and Judaism offers many ideas about life after death but; it is important not to spin elaborate visions of heaven as a way of diverting the child's real expressions of grief—no matter what, the child has suffered a real loss for the rest of his or her life.

7. Why the need not to describe death as sleep? Doesn't Judaism speak of eternal rest?
Many children become anxious that they too will die and will fear going to sleep. Bedtime is difficult enough for children who may long for a lost parent who previously put them to bed without inadvertently adding to this a fear that they themselves may not awaken.

8. Why the need to be so graphic about death—the lack of breath, of feeling, of movement? Isn't that kind of gruesome and scary?
It is important for the child to be able to differentiate his or her state from that of the deceased. The dead person in a coffin is not being suffering nor needing air, the burial under ground or cremation is not painful and could not happen to a living person. The loved person does not come to the child, laugh with the child, or hold the child because he or she *cannot* do those things any longer, not because he or she has rejected the child. These are important clarifications that address many of the worries that children often have.

9. What comfort and explanation can I provide? How can our religion and congregation help?
In ways that are appropriate to the child's age we can express the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, that there is a season for every thing in life. There is a time for every living thing to grow and to die. We can give examples of this with leaves, animals and people.

Our tradition stresses that joy and pain, happiness and tears are parts of life. In every prayer service, at every Festival, at every wedding we remember those who died, reminding ourselves that even amidst celebration we are aware of the potential for loss and the contributions of those no longer with us. Similarly at a funeral service or a shivah, it is natural for there to be tremendous sadness and tears but we also stress the need and healthiness of turning back to life, to being able to love again and to find happiness again.

Whatever beliefs we may hold about eternal life, our tradition most stresses that our memories never die. The person we loved is dead, we are sad, we will always remember that person and the life and the love we have shared. In, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort* David Techner is quoted speaking about a child on an airplane who was looking for his grandpa in the clouds. Techner, who had himself been bereaved, asked the boy to close his eyes and tell him the best, most favorite story about his grandpa. The boy went on and on about a favorite memory. When he was done, Techner asked him if he had just seen his Grandpa. The boy smiled and said he did. Then Techner told him that he had a daughter who died who he had with him always in his mind and heart, even if he couldn't find her in the clouds.

10. How do very young children, school aged children and/or teens generally react to death? How much can they understand?
Every child is unique. Just as adults do not really follow the timetables set out in many books on bereavement, children also react in highly individual ways. Nevertheless, the child's age, temperament, the circumstances of the death and of being informed of it, and previous experiences with loss will all play a part in determining his or her reaction.

Children of all ages need more than anything else an opportunity to ask questions and express their fears. The very young child may return to play and superficially bright mood and may show little sensitivity or regard to the grief of those around him or her, demanding trips to the park or ice-cream as if nothing had occurred. Absence of recognizable grief is not a sign of hard-heartedness or lack of love—it is a sign of being a very young child. The young child's grief is harder to recognize and will emerge over time as the absence of the loved person is experienced and the finality is grasped as the child's emotional and intellectual growth continues.

a) A very young child is more likely to respond initially to the distress shown by others around him or her. The young child's primary need is for security, affection and caretaking. To the degree that other loved people continue to provide this the child may maintain his or her equilibrium. If the loss is of a parent or primary caretaker the child is likely to demand the return of the loved person, may not understand why they cannot return and may react with regression, withdrawal, clinging and tantrums. The most important message a young child needs to receive is that he or she continues to be safe and loved and the loved person

child needs to receive is that he or she continues to be safe and loved and the loved person would be there if he or she could have been.

b) A school aged child may show an increasing grasp of the finality of death, but nevertheless may have a magical sense that the painful realities can be undone. Children of all ages have a tendency to hold themselves responsible for the death of loved ones, believing had they only behaved better this might not have occurred. Commonly they have great fears about their own deaths. They may show some grief in a way adults recognize--tearfulness, sadness. Like younger children, they may return to play and peers and be able tolerate being around sadness for only so long. Children are blunt in their questions and reactions. They often are most angry and frightened over the upset in their routines. They are terribly worried about what will become of them.

Both very young children and school age children may express a wish to get a "new Mommy" or a "new Daddy" in a way that seems fickle and disturbing to adults. Yet, for children this is an appropriate response as they truly *do* require the provision of another loving caretaker if their development and sense of security is to proceed normally. Children require parents to love them and to make them secure---and if new sources of love aren't found withdrawal, apathy and failure to thrive may be the result. (Bowlby) Grandparents and other caring relatives may fill the gap, but their need must not be understood as shallowness of attachment or lack of loyalty. This is particularly difficult for surviving spouses and grandparents, who may not recognize the health inherent in the child's movement toward others which reflects the depth and positive nature of the original tie to the one they have lost.

c) Teens are the furthest along in their capacity to understand the finality of their loss—and it comes at a time when they so need their parents to survive. Although they may often be in conflict with their parents, they nevertheless have an enormous need to know their parents are there when they need them. They have trouble acknowledging their need and their peers may or may not be adequately able to empathize with their plight. They may feel guilty over what they may have said to the parent who has died, they may feel they have caused their illness, they often fear they too will die. They may have difficulty turning to the surviving parent, fearing being babyish, fearing their parent's over-dependence upon them in the absence of a spouse. They may show a range of reactions from moodiness to denial and attempt to proceed as if the death had not occurred. Teens and school age children may feel intense shame that the loss has rendered them different than their peers. They may feel more afraid to leave home, more afraid of losing the surviving parent.

11. What can adults and congregations do to help?
The most important words--I will listen. Nobody really understands death, but we can help each other. Parents and relatives who share the loss can remind the child I will be here. We will all feel better, even if it takes a long time. It is O.K. to feel better. Help the child to

express feelings by remembering together, sharing one's own emotions, observing religious rituals like being with friends, family and fellow congregants at the *shivah*, saying *kaddish*, lighting *yartzheit** candles.

Being involved as a family in a congregation where others provide support and ongoing care and hope can be very helpful. Clergy, religious school teachers and youth group leaders can provide sensitive support and opportunities to share feelings. They also can provide a return to normality away from in the intensity of the grief but allowing the child not to speak of the loss and to be distracted and engaged.

Parents, clergy and educators can look towards referring the child for professional help in the form of support group or psychotherapy when the child is showing symptoms and unable to communicate with parent or relatives, where the child's anxiety does not abate and when the child is unable to re-invest in life.

12. Definitions:

a) *Kaddish*- Prayer that is part of every service that people say to honor the memory of a loved one. Prayer does not mention death, rather praises God, reminding that we mourn now and have sadness, life is god and that love and joy can be our again.

b) *Shivah*- A period of typically seven days following a funeral to gather with friends and family to share memories.

c) *Yartzeit*- It is both the anniversary of the person's death and the candle that is lit at sundown the night before the anniversary of the death. Many families make a special effort to attend services to hear their loved one's names recited before the Kaddish.

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Health & Wellness

Talking to Children about Death-Sample Program

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Example of a discussion/support group for parents and children

This is a discussion and support group with a large didactic informational component. This enables the leader to model for the participants an experience of allowing the sharing to feeling while also providing encouragement and information. It is hoped that parents will learn effective ways of balancing helping their children to express feelings while also providing information and possibilities of religious faith.

If the group is comprised largely of professionals and parents not experiencing bereavement but wanting to educate themselves to more effectively help their children the group could be run more didactally with less time left to discussion, encouragement and sharing.

The anecdotes suggested are ones with particular meaning to the writer; should others use this as a model, their own favorite stories and anecdotes might be added to all sections of the program. The sessions have been divided to cover a wide range of material but they are by no means complete. It is also possible to shift the order of presentation of material.

It is suggested that the group be kept small enough to allow for seating in a circle. There ought to be enough time for sharing and even grieving together and for a period of refreshments and informal socializing at the end of each session.

A Time to Learn, to Mourn and to Mend

A General Introduction to the Series and a Discussion of the Concept of the Death of a Loved One as a Life Crisis

Introduction

1. Leaders introduce themselves and speak briefly about their own training and life experiences that have brought them to wish to offer this series.

2. Introduction to the concept underlying the series, that mourning is a process in which time, knowledge, and the supportive care of others are essential.

3. Acknowledgment that many of those present may also be themselves bereaved, even as they are attempting to meet the needs of a child who is in distress. In our group may be parents who have lost a spouse, grandparents who have lost a child, aunts and uncles who have lost a sibling. Life being as painfully democratic as it is, all who are present will in the future or in the past have lost someone they have loved and need to be of comfort to others who experienced loss.

4. Recognition that we may come to our sessions with different questions, with wisdom to offer one another and information to share. Setting of basic format and guidelines. This is an informational support group in which there will be some opportunity to share personal experience and considerable opportunity to gain understanding and support. It is an educational group and cannot substitute for psychotherapy, but the leaders can help participants to find additional support and are available to speak privately with participants. People have different styles of learning and of coping---all are invited to share something of their own experiences, but all are welcome to "pass" and may participate by listening if this is more comfortable and appropriate for them. Request that all that is discussed in the room will remain confidential so that participants will feel free to raise concerns and seek guidance.

5. Going around the room for introductions including a brief description of the circumstance or concerns which led them to join the series and what they are most hoping to gain from it. (Group will function most effectively if it is limited to twenty participants)

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Death of a Loved One as a Life Crisis

1. Introduce Anne Kliman's conception of the experience of the death of a loved one as a natural although painful part of the life cycle whose reality we cannot change. Through psychological "first aid" we can provide opportunities for growth and recovery, to find better and less painful ways to live with the loss.

2. Death as an event that results in a state of bereavement among the survivors, which in turn requires the work of mourning so that they may live in the least stressful, most gratifying way. (Kliman) There is no timetable for mourning, people take various amounts of time and need varying degrees of help to get through it

3. Different circumstances of death have different impact. When an old person dies the loss is not less but there is not a feeling of tragedy. When a child dies before parents and grandparents it is tragic, an outrage against nature. The death of a young parent is frightening, overwhelming of the survivors. Death by suicide is especially confounding (Kliman). Sudden, accidental and violent death is particularly difficult.

4. Reactions of shock, sense of betrayal, despair, fear of going crazy, fear of being unable to function, feelings of guilt, numbness, disbelief and denial, sadness, rage, irritability are all expectable reactions to a crisis, to having one's life and sense of security turned upside down. Children show distinctive reactions, often different from those of adults. We will discuss these in subsequent sessions.

5.The work of mourning involves remembering and reviewing happy and warm, sad and anger and disappointing memories of the person who died. Facing the full range of reactions to the one who has died keeps us from idealizing their memory and finding fault with all current and future relationships. This is particularly important for children.

6. People can grieve and mourn and move on to a new chapter in their lives without forgetting or dishonoring those they have loved. Life will never be the same as it would have been had the loved one lived, but it can include love, trust and hope again. Our sessions will be addressed to understanding the state of bereavement and the work of bereavement required when reestablishing a fulfilling life, focusing most especially upon the special situation of bereaved children.

Explaining Death to Children

This is conceived of as one or two sessions because of the likelihood of lots of questions, examples and discussions which in a situation involving bereaved adults cannot be fully anticipated or hurried. Allowing two sessions is helpful for the leader who can provide more support and explanation as needed. Additional anecdotal examples can be given if time is not used in discussions.

At the beginning of each of the two sessions provide a brief review of the previous session; i.e. .discussion of loss of a loved one as a life crisis, of bereavement and of the work of mourning.

Talking to Children about the Definition of Death

When it is it best to talk to children about death?

1.Sometimes we have no choice but to be discussing death for the first time when the child has lost a deeply cherished person like a parent. Some of us here have recently faced this situation. In general it is easier for both child and parent when the loss is of a pet, a neighbor or a distant relative—even of a character in a book, television show or movies.

2. Importance of seeking opportunities for such discussions: Inevitably every child will ultimately have to face the death of someone cherished. When those upon whom the child relies are also bereaved they have far less wherewithall to respond with calmness and patience. It is better to have a chance to discover

these painful realities in an emotionally titrated way.

3.When forethought or life has not afforded us the chance to discuss it earlier, it is important to acknowledge that we are sad and angry and hurt ourselves over the loss, but we are not angry at the child even if we seem more impatient and short-tempered—we are angry at what has happened. It is especially important to enlist the help of relatives, friends, clergy, neighbors who are less directly

involved who can interpret the surviving relatives' behavior and emotions to the child. Encourage discussion within the group of their own experiences and questions.

Defining and describing death

1. Death is not like a game, or like in the cartoons where the character pops up again moments later. It is not like sleep. It is final and irrevocable. The dead person does not breathe, nor move. There is no more hurt and no more pain but there is also no more life. Seek memories of encounters with dead bird or bug. This is very difficult for a person who is describing the state of someone they also loved, so if this is occurring at the time of bereavement the help of others can be sought.

2.Why the need to speak of finality? This clearly varies based upon the age of the child. The younger child believes people can be dead and then un-dead and hard as it is to confront the child with pain, it is a reality to which he or she will have to accommodate eventually.

Telling a child a grandparent or parent has gone on a long trip may seem kind at the time but holds out unrealistic hope and does not allow them to give vent to their true feelings.

We often do this because it is so very painful for us to not to be able to protect young children and to manage their distress but they need our truthfulness to master the realities. Clearly such statements which confuse death and trips will in the long run confound separation problems because children will come to fear that those who go on long trips will never return.

3.What about saying the person who has died has gone to heaven? We will have a longer discussion of speaking to children of the after-life, but it is important to make a distinction between heaven and being alive again on earth. We need to be sensitive and allow for hope even if we ourselves don't believe in an after-life. After all, we don't know for sure and such thoughts have been of comfort throughout time.

On the other hand, promoting beliefs which we really don't hold eventually fail to help the youngest members of a family. It is natural to wish for a reunion and Judaism offers many ideas about life after death which we will explore in sessions 3 and 4. It is important not to spin elaborate visions of heaven as a way of diverting the child's real expressions of grief—no matter what, the child has suffered a real loss for the rest of his or her life.

4.Why the need not to describe death as sleep? For a similar reason. Many children become anxious that they too will die and will fear going to sleep. Bedtime is difficult enough for children who may long for a lost parent who previously put them to bed without inadvertently adding to this a fear that they themselves may not awaken.

5.Why the need to be so graphic about death—the lack of breath, of feeling, of movement? It is important for the child to be able to differentiate his or her state from that of the dead. The dead person in a coffin is not being suffering nor needing air, the burial under ground or cremation is not painful and could not happen to a living person. The loved person does not come to the child, laugh with the child, hold the child because he or she cannot do those things any longer, not because he or she has rejected the child.

6.How much can children understand about death?Distinctions based upon age and developmental level. Even children who are old enough to speak of death may not fully understand its permanence. Importance to recognize that despite what we tell them, young children may persist in their belief that the dead person will return. Not understanding the finality, they often seem to be callous and unfeeling. They are likely to turn back to playing in a way that adults find unsettling. We will discuss these particular reactions children show to learning of a death a little later.

Talking to children about death as a natural part of life

1.There is a time for every living thing to grow and to die. Give examples of this with leaves, animals and people.

2.Joy and pain as parts of life, happiness and tears. It is natural for there to be tremendous sadness and tears when we lose people to death

Our memories do not die

1.The person we loved is dead, we are sad, we will always remember that

person and the life and the love we have shared

2.David Techner's story from A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort about the child on an airplane who was looking for his grandpa in the clouds. Techner, who had himself been bereaved, asked the boy to close his eyes and tell him the best, most favorite story about his grandpa. The boy went on and on about a favorite memory. When he was done, Techner asked him if he had just seen his Grandpa. The boy smiled and said he did. Then Techner told him that he had a daughter who died who he had with him always in his mind and heart, even if he couldn't find her in the clouds.

How do children generally react to learning of about a death?

Every child is unique. Just as adults do not really follow the timetables set out in many books on bereavement, children also react in highly individual ways.

Nevertheless, the child's age, temperament, the circumstances of the death and of being informed of it, and previous experiences with loss will all play a part in determining his or her reaction. Keep in mind the child's age and capacity to grasp what has happened.

1. A very young child is more likely to respond initially to the distress shown by others around him or her. The young child's primary need is for security, affection and caretaking. To the degree that other loved people continue to provide this the child may maintain his or her equilibrium.

If the loss is of a parent or primary caretaker the child is likely to demand the return of the loved person, may not understand why they cannot return and may react with regression, withdrawal, clinging and tantrums. The most important message a young child needs to receive is that he or she continues to be safe and loved and the loved person would be there if he or she could have been.

Children of all ages need more than anything else an opportunity to ask questions and express their fears. The very young child may return to play and superficially bright mood and may show little sensitivity or regard to the grief of those around him or her, demanding trips to the park or ice-cream as if nothing had occurred. Absence or recognizable grief is not a sign of hard-heartedness or lack of love—it is a sign of being a very young child. The young child's grief is harder to recognize and will emerge over time as the absence of the loved person is experienced and the finality is grasped as the child's emotional and intellectual growth continues.

2.A school aged child shows increasing grasp of the finality of death, but nevertheless may have a magical sense that the painful realities can be undone. Children of all ages have a tendency to hold themselves responsible for the death of loved ones, believing had they only behaved better this might not have occurred.

Commonly they have great fears about their own deaths. They may show some grief in a way adults recognize---tearfulness, sadness. Like younger children, they may return to play and peers and be able tolerate being around sadness for only so long. Children are blunt in their questions and reactions. They often are most angry and frightened over the upset in their routines. They are terribly worried about what will become of them. Describe the child's reactions in James Agee's A Death in the Family.

3.The Need for New Objects: Both very young children and school age children may express a wish to get a "new Mommy" or a "new Daddy" in a way that seems fickle and disturbing to adults. Yet, for children this is an appropriate response as they truly do require the provision of another love object if their development and sense of security is to proceed normally.

Children require parents to love them and to make them secure---and if new love objects aren't found withdrawal, apathy and failure to thrive may be the result. (Bowlby) Grandparents and other caring relatives may fill the gap, but

their need must not be understood as shallowness of attachment or lack of loyalty.

This is particularly difficult for surviving spouses and grandparents, who may not recognize the health inherent in the child's movement toward others which reflects the depth and positive nature of the original tie to the one they have lost. Story of the Nicky, the orphan adopted from abroad.

He had been cared for by an ailing mother until he was nearly two, and then inadequately cared for after her death and finally placed in a poorly staffed orphanage. He was adopted at age three and had difficulty attaching to his adoptive mother. Ultimately when he had come to accept her and she rocked him he said, " I cried so much when you went away, I missed you so much until you came back."

you came back.

In tears his adoptive mother could say, " I missed you so much till I could hold you in my arms too." In time they can sort out which mother is which, but the young child must have a continuance of love and will more readily transfer this love to a new object.

4.Teens are the furthest along in their capacity to understand the finality of their loss—and it comes at a time when they so need their parents to survive. Often in conflict with their parents, they nevertheless have an enormous need to know their parents are there when they need them.

They have trouble acknowledging their need and their peers may or may not be adequately able to empathize with their plight. They may feel guilty over what they may have said to the parent who has died, they may feel they have caused their illness, they often fear they too will die.

They may have difficulty turning to the surviving parent, fearing being babyish, fearing their parent's over-dependence upon them in the absence of a spouse. They may show a range of reactions from moodiness to denial and attempt to proceed as if the death had not occurred.

They, and school age children may feel intense shame that the loss has rendered them different than their peers. They may feel more afraid to leave home, more afraid of losing the surviving parent.

What can adults do to help?

1.The most important words--I will listen. Nobody really understands death, but we can help each other. I will be here. We will all feel better, even if it takes a long time. It is O.K. to feel better.

2.Help the child to express feelings by remembering together, sharing your own emotions, observing religious rituals.

3.Try to involve the family in a community where others provide support and

ongoing care and hope—in the next session we will discuss what Judaism offers.

4.Provide professional help in the form of support group or psychotherapy where the child is showing symptoms and unable to communicate with parent or relatives, where the child's anxiety does not abate, where child is unable to re-invest in life. Discuss concerns about how long is too long.

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Caring Community
Health & Wellness

Recommended Books

List of books for talking to your children about death

Print Share Comment

Lifetimes by Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

It Must Hurt a Lot: A Child's Book about Death by Doris Sanford

The Bug Cemetery by Frances Hill

Goodbye Mousie by Robie Harris

When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death by Laurei Krasny Brown and Marc Brown

Tough Boris by Mem Fox

When a Pet Dies by Fred Rogers

A Candle for Grandpa: A Guide to the Jewish Funeral for Children and Parents by David Techner and Juith Hirt-Manheimer

The Tenth Good Thing about Barney by Judith Viorst

Daddy's Chair by Sandy Lanton

Where Do People Go When They Die? by Mindy Avra Portnoy

When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Own Remembering Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond by Nechama Liss-Levinson, Ph.D.

My Grandson Lew by Charlotte Zolotow

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscgalia

Pearl's Marigolds for Grandpa by Jane Breskin Zalben

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DEALING WITH GRIEF AND MOURNING

"Ha-makom yinakhem et-khem betokh she-ar aveilei tziyon veyerushalayim. May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem"
- traditional words said upon greeting a mourner

“On the death of a friend, we should consider that the fates through confidence have devolved on us the task of a double living, that we have henceforth to fulfill the promise of our friend's life also, in our own, to the world.”
- Henry David Thoreau

Our NFTY community is here to support us in the best of times, and in the most challenging of times. As we continue our Living NFTY Initiative, we pause to learn about how we can help one another through times of grief and mourning. Take a moment to read through our resources on grief and mourning.

In modern America, you’re not supposed to cry, you have to be strong. But in traditional Jewish culture, crying is accepted and valued. It isn’t seen as a sign of pain- it’s a sign of healing and recovery.
-Phyllis Toback in *Invisible Thread*

HELPFUL WEBSITES

The websites listed below provide information about ways to deal with grief, how to offer comfort to friends in mourning, and where to find resources and support in your community. Many of the websites have excellent links to other online resources.

Jewish Organizations and Resources

MyJewishLearning.com: Death and Mourning

Judaism 101: Life, Death and Mourning

My friend has had a death in the family. What can I do to help?

Babaganewz: How to Comfort Mourners

A Time to Grieve, a Time to Teach: from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Traditional Prayers and Meditations

JewishHealing.com: Readings and Poetry

The National Center for Jewish Healing: Jewish Spiritual Resources

Secular Organizations and Resources

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief

The Compassionate Friends: Supporting Family After a Child Dies

The Dougy Center: Bill of Rights for Grieving Teens

The Dougy Center: Search for Local Grief Support

Griefnet.com: Online Community, Resources and Links

Griefworks BC: List of Grief Resources, Articles and Links

TeensHealth: Death and Grief

HospiceNet: Helping Teenagers Cope with Grief

A Prayer for Prayer

A Prayer for Prayer

O My God
My soul's companion
My heart's precious friend
I turn to You.

I need to close out the noise
To rise above the noise
The noise that interrupts -
The noise that separates -
The noise that isolates.
I need to hear You again.

In the silence of my innermost being,
In the fragments of my yearned-for wholeness,
I hear whispers of Your presence -
Echoes of the past when You were with me
When I felt Your nearness
When together we walked -
When You held me close, embraced me in Your love, laughed with me in my joy.
I yearn to hear You again.
In your oneness, I find healing.
In the promise of Your love, I am soothed.
In Your wholeness, I too can become whole again.

Please listen to my call-
help me find the words
help me find the strength within
help me shape my mouth, my voice, my heart
so that I can direct my spirit and find You in prayer
In words only my heart can speak
In songs only my soul can sing
Lifting my eyes and heart to You.
Adonai S'fatai Tiftach -open my lips, precious God,
so that I can speak with You again.

-Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman

It is Never Too Late

It Is Never Too Late

The last word has not been spoken
The last sentence has not been written
The final verdict is not in
It is never too late
To change my mind
My direction
To say “no” to the past
And "yes" to the future
To offer remorse
To ask and give forgiveness

It is never too late
To start over again
To feel again
To love again
To hope again

It is never too late
To overcome despair
To turn sorrow into resolve
And pain into purpose

It is never too late to alter my world
Not by magic incantations
Or manipulations of the cards
Or deciphering the stars

But by opening myself
To curative forces buried within
To hidden energies
The powers in my interior self.

In sickness and dying, it is never too late
Living, I teach
Dying, I teach
How I face pain and fear
Others observe me, children, adults,
Students of life and death
Learn from my bearing, my posture,
My philosophy

It is never too late-
Some word of mine,
Some touch, some caress may be remembered
Some gesture may play a role beyond the last
Movement of my head and hand.

Write an epitaph
That my loved ones be consoled

That my loved ones be consoled
It is never too late.

-Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

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