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**SOME ASPECTS OF NIHUM AVELIM IN THE TRADITION
AND IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY**

Peter Kasdan

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
in Hebrew Letters and Ordination.

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1966

Referee, Prof. Robert Katz

DIGEST OF THESIS

This thesis deals with the areas of Nihum Avelim and funeral practice, as found within the literature of Traditional Judaism, and as practiced by modern day Reform Judaism. The information was obtained in two ways. I explored the textbooks listed in the Bibliography, and sent out questionnaires to the Reform Rabbinat and to the Jewish Funeral Directors of America. Comparisons were made between Traditional Jewish practices and modern Reform practices in the areas of Nihum Avelim and funeral practices. Comparisons between the Rabbis and Funeral Directors, and between the members of both groups themselves were also made.

Some time was spent in the discussion of grief. The nature of grief was discussed both phenomenologically and theoretically. Some time was also spent in discussing the setting of death in our culture. Some comparisons were made between the setting of death in Traditional Judaism and the setting of death in our American culture.

The Rabbinical and Funeral Director's Questionnaires were summarized and evaluated. This was done on an overall basis, without regard to geographical location. When this was completed, a geographical comparison was made. The Rabbis and Funeral Directors were also compared on a local level. The Rabbis were asked for their opinions as to the receipt of, and use of, perquisites. Both groups made suggestions as to changes in Jewish funeral practices. The Rabbis also made suggestions as to the best methods of comforting the mourners. The Rabbis seem to feel that there are ten specific points to be followed when dealing with the bereaved individual. Both the Rabbis and Funeral Directors strongly urge the formulation of some unified guidelines within the area of Jewish funeral practices.

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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE
JAMES H. HARRIS, M.D.
1910-1911
The following is a list of the names of the students who have been admitted to the medical school of the University of the State of New York for the year 1910-1911. The names are arranged in alphabetical order of their last names.

INTRODUCTION

The following is a list of the names of the students who have been admitted to the medical school of the University of the State of New York for the year 1910-1911. The names are arranged in alphabetical order of their last names.

Not too many years ago, the American public was, for the first time, given the opportunity to take a close-up look at this country's "death industry". Such books as Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death 1 and Leroy Bowman's The American Funeral 2, gave the reader the supposed facts. Such phrases as "why you can't afford to die" and "barbaric new modes of burial" were not uncommon. The Congress of the United States started investigations into the funeral practices of this country. All of this served to give the American public a most distasteful image of the American way of death.

Fortunately, the American Jewish community--with its clergy and its Funeral Directors--was not directly portrayed within those books. For the Jew, due to his long and sacred tradition, seems to have kept alive most of those values which are directly a part of the death phenomena, and has preserved them for the most part in their original forms. These facts notwithstanding, the Jew has been accused--primarily by his own leadership--of succumbing to "barbaric, non-Jewish modes of burial and comfort of the mourners". Some of these accusations, and the prescriptions with which to rectify the situation, will be found within this paper.

Within this field of the death phenomena, one finds two very important relationships. The first is the relationship between the two professional groups directly involved in the disposal of the material man, and the preservation of the soul. Today, both of these professionals are directly involved in Nihum Avelim. The Rabbi deals with the soul of the deceased; the Funeral Director with the material remains of the deceased. Both groups deal directly with the mourners.

The other relationship we shall deal with is that between the Avel--the mourner; and the Menahem--the comforter. Nowhere else in the daily associations each one of us goes through, does the relationship between two people require so much tact--and warmth--and understanding. The mourner has been placed in a position from which he finds himself unable to escape through his own efforts. While the Rabbi and the Funeral Director play their most important roles in alleviating the confusion and the total breakdown of normal, everyday patterns of behavior due to the loss of a loved one, the friends and the relatives are the ones who day in and day out come into direct contact with the mourner. They are the link to the normal patterns of life; they are the ladder upon which the mourner may climb out of his pit, be it ever so slowly. The friends and the relatives are indispensable to the mourner in his time of need and of difficulty.

These relationships, and other pertinent information to the overall task, will be dealt with more fully within the specific chapters of this thesis. The following will briefly describe to the reader the general formation of this thesis.

GENERAL FORMATION OF THESIS:

The task will begin with an in depth look at Nihum Avelim and funeral practices as found in the Tradition. It will be accomplished by delving into Traditional Jewish sources--such as the Talmud, the Midrash and the Shulhan Aruk, as well as numerous other works. At the completion of this section, which is designed to give background information to our modern day Reform Jewish practices, we will then proceed to explore the nature of the grief experience. Following this chapter on the nature of grief,

we will take a look at the setting of death in our culture. This will be followed by a discussion of the funeral practices of the 1960's; and at this time we will take a closer look at the typical Jewish funeral as Reform Judaism sees it. Also to be discussed at this time will be the procedures and practices followed in Nihum Avelim, both before and after the funeral. An attempt to relate these modern day practices to those of Tradition will also be made at this time. Finally, the recent questionnaires which I have sent to a selected number of Reform Rabbis and Jewish Funeral Directors throughout these United States, will be discussed and evaluated. Their answers and their numerous suggestions will be discussed at this point. The thesis will conclude with a summation of the material, with much emphasis being placed on what trends, if any, can be seen in light of all the information discussed herein. Perhaps, if we are fortunate, we might be able to secure some information as to a guide for Reform Jews in their role as comforters; and a prescription as to how a Reform Jewish funeral should be conducted.

**chapter one...NIHUM AVELIM AND FUNERAL
PRACTICES OUT OF TRADITION**

100 Their faces were covered, and for all the world it

NIHUM AVELIM IN THE TRADITION:

In former days, the Hebrew people upon the death of their close friends and relatives, were accustomed to show great signs of their grief and of mourning. They wept, tore their clothing, smote their breasts, fasted and lay down upon the ground; they also went barefoot. The time of their mourning was usually, and most commonly, seven days; but sometimes this was lengthened or shortened according to the state of circumstances in which they found themselves, and because of the particular individual who had died. The mourning for King Saul lasted but seven days³, but the period for Moses and Aaron was prolonged to thirty days.⁴ The whole time of the mourning, the near relations of the deceased continued to sit in their own homes, eating their meals upon the ground. The food they took was thought to be unclean, and even they were judged as being impure. Their faces were covered, and for all the time of their mourning they could not apply themselves to any labor. They did not dress themselves, nor make their beds, nor uncover their heads, nor shave themselves.

Thus it seems that the mourner, as seen through the eyes of the Tradition, was a wholly different individual--his was an existence different from all other individuals--and in order to return to his normal mode of life, he was desperately in need of help. This help was supplied him in the form of the Menahem--the comforter. The Tradition was quite explicite in its guidelines for the comfort of the mourners. Perhaps the finest reason for Nihum Avelim is found in the words of Ecclesiastes: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."⁵ Everything else seems to follow from these words of wisdom.

In line with this reasoning, and with the apparent need to comfort the mourner in his own home, we find in the Book of Job that when his three friends heard of all the evil which had befallen their good friend, they came, each from his own place; "for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him."6

"It is a great and meritorious duty to comfort mourners. And we find that the Holy One, Blessed be His Name, comforted mourners, for it is written: 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac' (Genesis 25:11), and this is showing kindness to the living as well as to the dead. The comforters are not permitted to say anything until the mourner had first commenced to speak, as was the case with Job, for it is said: 'And none spoke a word with him' (Job 2:13), and thereafter it is written: 'After this opened Job his mouth' (Job 3:1), and then: 'Then answered Eliphaz' (Job 4:1). If the comforters see that the mourner wishes them to withdraw, they are not permitted to remain with him any longer."7

In the matter of practicing Nihum Avelim before the funeral, we find an injunction against visiting the mourner before the funeral, and of comforting him at that time, for Rabbi Shimeon ben Elazar used to say: "Do not comfort your neighbor in the hour that his dead is placed before him."8

During the funeral itself, however, it appears to be the comforters duty to accompany the deceased, and the mourners, to the cemetery. In the Shulhan Aruk we find that it is a mitzvah to accompany the dead: "If there is a death in a city--all the people of the city are forbidden to work--and all who see the dead, and do not accompany him until all

his needs are fulfilled--that one is worthy of being excommunicated."⁹ When the service at the cemetery is completed, then those who had accompanied the deceased to the grave form two lines and let the mourners pass between them. We find this in the Midrash as follows: "Our Rabbis taught: At first, the mourners would stand and all the people would pass by; but there were two families in Jerusalem who quarreled with one another. The one said: 'I shall pass by first'--and the other said: 'I shall pass by first'--thus the Rabbis ordained that the people should stand and the mourners would pass by."¹⁰

Another rule with regard to the comforting of the mourners is that which deals with the comforter remaining silent, so as not to upset the mourner. For instance, we find that Rav Papa said: "The merit of attending the house of mourning lies in the silence observed."¹¹ We also find that one should not say to the mourner: "What canst thou do; it is impossible to alter the decree of the Holy One, Blessed be His Name" for that is akin to blasphemy, inferring that were it possible for Him to change it, He would have done so. But one must accept the decree of the Name, Blessed be He, with love.¹² These few injunctions or situations in which we are told to remain silent while in the presence of the mourner seem to be summed up in the following quotes from the Book of Job, in which we read: "So they sat down with him upon the ground, seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great."¹³ And next we read: "How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?"¹⁴

One very important job of the comforters is that which has to do with the feeding and the care of the mourner. For on the first day of

mourning, the mourner is forbidden to eat the first meal of his own food. Therefore it is a religious duty for his neighbors to send him the first meal.¹⁵ We also find that "a mourner is forbidden to eat his own food at the first meal, but at the second meal he is permitted, even if it is on the first day. And it is a mitzvah for his neighbors that they should feed him from their food in order that he should not eat his food."¹⁶ Seudath Ha-braah--the meal of comfort--is mentioned quite often in the Shulhan Aruk and its various commentaries.

Also in the Shulhan Aruk one finds that "one who mourns for his father and his mother, is forbidden to cut his hair, until his friends rebuke him."¹⁷ This rebuke by the friends also applies to the cutting of the mourners' fingernails and his beard. Generally, it would appear that the comforters play quite an important role in both the care and the personal appearance of the mourner.

While up until this point, the information discussed has been concerned with specific injunctions, laws and rules of conduct by which the comforters are governed, there are also found in the traditional sources many more general aspects of the role of the comforter. For example, there are those passages which deal with the comfort of the mourners through the recitation of certain prayers. "Mar Zutra visited Rashi when the latter had suffered a bereavement, and in the grace after meals he began and uttered the benediction: "Who is good and does good, God of truth, True Judge.....He who closes up the breaches of Israel, will close up this breach in Israel, granting life."¹⁸ We also find that "...one says the benedictions of the mourners in the presence of ten (male persons) all the seven (days of mourning) and the mourners are not of the number..."¹⁹

There is also a custom which deals with keeping the honor of the poor Menahem from being diminished when he comes to visit at the house of mourning. We find that: "Our Rabbis taught: At first, the rich used to enter the house of mourning with baskets of silver and of gold, and the poor (used to come into the house) with wicker baskets of the bark of willow trees--and the poor used to be embarrassed. Thus the Rabbis ordained that everyone should enter with wicker baskets made of Arava Kelupa--willow trees, because of the honor of the poor. At first, the rich would drink wine in the house of mourning with white glasses and the poor (would drink) with colored glasses, and the poor were embarrassed. Thus the Rabbis ordained that everyone should drink with the colored glasses, because of the honor of the poor."20

In the Torah we find an interesting custom of comforting a mourner, in the story where Isaac takes Rebecca for his wife. "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebecca, and she became his wife; and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."21

Then there are the passages that speak of comforting in a personal way such as "...He hath sent me...to comfort all that mourn;"22 and "I dwelt as one that comforteth the mourners."23 And finally, there is the verse that says: "They said in the name of Bar Kafa--All who shed tears over a Kosher man, the Holy One, Blessed be He, inscribes them and places them in His treasure house."24 With all of this previous information in mind, let us now turn to the subject of the funeral practices as they are found in Tradition, for this too is an important part of the overall death experience as Tradition saw it.

FUNERAL PRACTICES IN THE TRADITION:

Perhaps the earliest source which deals with the subject of Jewish funeral practices is found in the fiftieth chapter of Genesis. Herein, we read of the death and the burial of Jacob. In summation, this is what occurred. Jacob's son Joseph summoned the physicians to embalm the body, which required a time lapse of forty days. During the forty days of preparation, the Egyptians mourned. Then Joseph seeks permission from Pharoah to remove his father's body to the land of Canaan, where Jacob had long ago selected his burial site. And finally, a large company of individuals accompany the body to the place of interment. It is interesting to note that even then, the period of Sheloshim was observed in the mourning over the Jewish dead, for we read: "And forty days were fulfilled for him, for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days."²⁵ Seemingly, the Egyptians took forty days to embalm the dead, and they mourned a total of seventy days. The extra thirty days would then seem to be the period of Sheloshim. This reference deals primarily with the process of embalming the dead, which is in opposition to Jewish custom, and it is the only reference to the embalming of the Jewish dead throughout the remainder of the traditional sources.

One of the primary areas of disagreement in Jewish funeral practices today is that which deals with the delay of the funeral. While this topic will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter, the basis for the arguments which are involved in this procedure will be dealt with at this point. In regard to this subject, one finds most of the information within the Shulhan Aruk, in the section Yoreh Deah.

We find that it "is forbidden to leave the dead overnight (delay the burial) except if that delay is to honor him by bringing him a casket (Aron) and a shroud (Takrikin), or wailing women, or in order that relatives may come, (for they might be a few days journey from the site of his burial place), or to notify distant cities."26 The reference to the wailing women is also found in the Mishnah, wherein it states:"Rabbi Judah says: Even the poorest in Israel should not hire less than two flutes and one wailing woman." 27

We also find that "everyone who hastens to bring out his bier, behold, this one is praiseworthy--but (one who does this) to his father or his mother, behold, this is indecent, except if it was Erev Shabbot or Erev Yom Tov, or that rain was sprinkling on his bier."28

At this point, let us take a look at those procedures in the preparation for, and the carrying out of, the funeral service as Jewish law prescribes. We begin with the first step which is the ceremony of Taharah, the ritual washing and purification of the dead. This is done by the Hevra Kaddisha--the Sacred Society--or in it's absence by religiously and physically competent Jewish persons. In Zechariah we find one of the many prayers recited during this ceremony. It states:"Take away the filth garments from him. And unto him he said: Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."29 Then the body is washed. Another verse is recited as they pour water over the head. It is: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean."30 In the Mishnah we find that the body is both cleansed and anointed, and that this procedure is forbidden on the Sabbath.31

The reasoning behind the service of Taharah is that "as he came, so shall he go".³² The body, through this ritual washing, is freed from all its impurities. It seems clear that there are only two possible reasons for the use of this service. The first is a matter of hygiene and health laws. Thus, when the body of the deceased is washed and all its impurities are removed, it is free from any germs which might have been present. These germs could very easily have spread disease and sickness through an entire town, and so they were removed. The second possible reason involves the concept of an after-life, which was part of the religious belief of the Jew. The body must enter its grave free from any earthly impurities, so that at its resurrection it would be in a purified state. After this washing has been completed and the body has been thoroughly dried, it is then dressed in a shroud. By law this shroud was a simple white linen garment, and it was not costly.³³ This seemed to imply that before God, all men are equal. Information regarding the complete Taharah ritual may be found in Hamadrikh.³⁴

The second procedure to be dealt with is that of Keriah--the rending of the mourners outer garments. This is a symbol of their anguish and their grief. "All who are present at the departure of the soul are required to rend their garments."³⁵ It is also the duty of those who are not obligated to observe mourning to discharge the rending of the garments by rending them slightly, at the side or the hem of the garment."³⁶ One who has lost his next of kin, for whom he needs to observe mourning, needs to perform the ceremony of rending his garments. This is done while the person is standing; if it is

performed while the person is sitting, the obligation is not fulfilled, and it must be done again while he is standing. It is best to rend the garment before the coffin is closed (when one's sorrow is still intense).³⁷ "It is the prevailing custom to tear the rent on the right side of the garment for all other next of kin; but on the left side for a mother and father. Nevertheless, if this were overlooked, it does not invalidate the fulfillment of the duty."³⁸ We also find that "it is forbidden to rend the garments for the one who commits suicide."³⁹ There are numerous other laws on the subject of Keriah, but they deal with special cases and are not necessary in this context.

We also find prescriptions which deal with the Takrikin and the use of the Talit. As mentioned previously, the shrouds should be made of fine white linen which is not too expensive. We find that "they should only bury the dead in a Talit that has fringes on it."⁴⁰

According to Jewish law, a burial consists of interring the dead body in the earth itself; however, in many places, the custom is to place the dead in a coffin which is made of boards, and to bury him in this manner. Both cases fulfill the law.⁴¹ The dead one is placed in the grave on his back, with his face upward, and then the grave is filled with earth.⁴² In this manner the funeral comes to a close.

AFTER THE FUNERAL:

Upon the completion of the interment, the mourners return to their homes to begin the observance of the Shivah. The Shivah comes from the number seven, and is the first period of mourning. Following the Shivah is the period of the Sheloshim--the thirty days of mourning. And following this is the period of the twelve months--the Shnayim Asar Hadash.

One is obligated to observe the ceremonies of mourning for eight types of relatives--i.e. father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, wife and husband.⁴³ The mourning begins when the dead person has been buried and the grave is completely filled with earth.⁴⁴ During the Shivah, cohabitation or intercourse are absolutely forbidden.⁴⁵ During the first three days of the Shivah no mourner is allowed to do any work, even if he is a poor person who is supported by charity.⁴⁶ The mourner may not bathe his body, nor anoint his body for pleasurable purposes.⁴⁷ He may not sit on a chair or on a bench; he should sit on a low bench or stool. He does not have to sit--he may walk or stand. But when the comforters come, he must then sit down on the stool or low bench.⁴⁸ Other laws concerning the Shivah deal with special instances such as the Sabbath and the festivals.

When the Shivah is finished, the mourner begins the observance of the remainder of the Sheloshim. Throughout this period he is forbidden to cut his hair or his beard. If he is mourning for a parent, he may not cut his hair until he is rebuked by his friends.⁴⁹ During the twelve months that one mourns for one of his parents, he cannot enter into a house in which a wedding feast is going on.⁵⁰

These three periods of mourning all have special laws to deal with special or unusual cases. However, in this context, those special laws were not necessary to the overall picture of mourning. One needs only remember that there are three phases to the period of mourning, and that each phase has its own specific purpose. The time that has elapsed between the day of burial and the end of mourning give the mourner sufficient time to recover from his loss, and to resume his normal mode of existence once again.

SUMMATION:

Looking back upon the Traditional customs and laws which deal with both Nihum Avelim and the funeral practices, one discovers that the mourner was treated as an individual apart from the rest of the total community. His friends and relatives while comforting him, were warned that silence is the proper mode of comfort, unless the bereaved felt otherwise. During the funeral it was the Jewish community who not only participated in it, but who also made all prior arrangements. During the periods of mourning the friends and the relatives once again play the important role, for they not only comfort, but they also rebuke the mourner when his physical appearance becomes offensive.

The mourner must always feel as if he is different. He must live a totally different type of life until the mourning period is over, unless his friends rebuke him during that period. Wherever he turns, the feeling of loss and of being a mourner is constantly brought home to him. His life is different; his clothes are different; his place in the synagogue is different; his physical appearance is different; his relations with his friends and relatives is different. The closer the relation of the deceased to him, the more stringent the ritual becomes. "It is a mitzvah to fast on the day that one's father or mother dies."⁵¹ According to the laws of mourning, the gravest loss one can experience is the loss of a parent.

During the funeral service, when the eulogy over the deceased is reached, the loss of a loved one is brought home by reminding the mourner of his loss in terms that might seem cruel to many people. "It is a mitzvah to eulogize the dead one properly, and it is a duty

of the one who makes the eulogy to raise his voice, to say about him words that break the heart, in order to increase weeping so that his praise will be remembered--but it is forbidden to exaggerate his praise more than is necessary."52 Thus the mourner must be told the truth--there is no way for him to escape the facts of reality. He is not given the chance to forget his pain and his grief for even an instant.

We also find that according to Jewish custom, the time period from the moment of death until the end of the mourning is filled with concepts of sanctity and purity in relation to the deceased. Every step in the ritual that prepares the body for burial is carried out to insure the sanctity of the human body. At no time is the sanctity of the deceased forgotten.

chapter two...THE NATURE OF GRIEF

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL DISCUSSION OF GRIEF:

The overall purpose of this chapter is to explore, in brief, just what an individual goes through when he is in a bereaved state, due to loss of a relative or friend. If we are to fully understand the reasons for the prescriptions made in Tradition, and the manner in which they are put into practice today, we must be aware of the dynamics which the bereaved individual experiences at this time.

"Grief is stark reality--for death is inevitable. Grief is deeper than the temporary depression and sadness which immediately follow the shock of death--it has marked psychological and physical symptoms, and the loss demands a total readjustment to environment."⁵³ While this definition of grief is short and to the point, it does give us enough information as to what grief really is. Using it then as a point of departure, let us now explore some further definitions of the term.

We begin with a statement by C. Charles Bachmann:

"Grief is an emotion. It involves the feeling life of a person. It is a tearing kind of emotion, because it shuts off the person from the fulfillment of hope, dreams and aspirations. Its frustration is felt deeply inside the being--hard to reach, define, or explain to anyone else. It is psychic pain; it hurts. It is deeply embedded in the feeling life, sometimes inaccessible. Like love, hate and fear--the three primary emotions--grief is bound closely in a kniship, and at times embraces all three. In the immediate loss, the sufferer may experience all these emotions as he recounts and remembers previous occasions when these feelings reigned. The memories remain, but the loss adds frustration and pain. Grief can be expressed, repressed or suppressed, for these are ways of dealing with emotions."⁵⁴

While Dr. Bachmann describes the term grief phenomenologically as an emotion, it is also necessary to explore just what psychic forces are part of what we call grief. Such emotions as that felt by a young woman,

who has lost her mate, and must now rear her youngsters by herself; or that of an older person who, while attending a funeral of even a stranger, cries bitterly for herself, because of the inevitability of that event which will surely come upon her shortly, and for which she must prepare herself; or the sadness and fear that comes to a person when he begins speaking of someone who is no longer there; or going to sleep at night without saying "good night" to the mate who has died; or the wishful thinking that events were different, when one truly knows that they are not and never will be again. "Grief is a whole cluster of adjustments, apprehensions and uncertainties that strike life in its forward progress and make it difficult to reorganize and redirect the energies of life."⁵⁵

Grief is something more than sorrow. Doctors, in speaking about grief, refer to the entire process that involves the individual in adjusting to changed circumstances. They refer to the deep fears that the mourner experiences; to his loneliness; to those obstacles that he must face in his attempt to find a new way of life. "Grief is essentially a deprivation experience. We lose--or have taken from us--something that we cherished and do not want to give up."⁵⁶ The deprivation experience that is spoken of here is in its most acute form--death. "Not only do we lose what we love and cherish, but we also feel that some important part of our own being has been taken away in the act."⁵⁷

Grief is an emotion which merits our respect and reverence--it is almost a sacred feeling which we hate to see distorted by other more human emotions. However, in speaking of grief as an experience, we must realize that different human beings will react in many different ways. Their varied reactions will fully depend on the relationship

they had with the deceased, and upon the manner in which they handle the overall situation.⁵⁸ In reference to these varied individual reactions during the period of bereavement, Erich Lindemann in his "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief", gives us a summary of these reactions, as follows:

"The activity throughout the day of the severely bereaved person shows remarkable changes. There is no retardation of action and speech; quite to the contrary there is a push of speech, especially when talking about the deceased. There is restlessness, inability to sit still, moving about in an aimless fashion, continually searching for something to do. There is however, at the same time, a painful lack of capacity to initiate and maintain organized patterns of activity. What is done is done with lack of zest, as though one were going through the motions. The bereaved clings to the daily routine of prescribed activities; but these activities do not proceed in the automatic, self-sustaining fashion which characterize normal work but have to be carried on with effort, as though each fragment of the activity became a special task. The bereaved is surprised to find how large a part of his customary activity was done in some meaningful relationship to the deceased and has now lost its significance. Especially the habits of social interaction--meeting friends, making conversation, sharing enterprises with others--seem to have been lost. The loss leads to a strong dependency on anyone who will stimulate the bereaved to activity and serve as the initiating agent."⁵⁹

There are other reactions to the loss of a loved one; some are what we may term normal reactions to loss; some are distorted reactions to loss. "Along with the loneliness and sadness that accompany bereavement are feelings of rage, for the grieving person is always an angry person. Love is mingled with hate, a phenomenon known as ambivalence. The actual mixture of love and hate, and the anger that goes with it, varies quantitatively from case to case and determines the character of the mourning process."⁶⁰ A widow will often complain about her recently deceased husband, and say: "Why did he do this to me?" This resentment leads to feelings of guilt, and expected punishments.

This is the reason that in the early stages of mourning, there is often great superstitious dread.⁶¹ Often, the ambivalent feelings have a real basis in reality. Such is the case when the deceased individual had been the victim of the neglect of the mourner during his life. When this occurs, these feelings become more intensified. Also possible is that the deceased might, during his lifetime, have played a symbolic role in the mourners life, while the mourner at that time was not aware of it. "Thus a husband may have represented a father figure, with the result that the hostility towards the father experienced early in childhood may now reassert itself and give rise to guilt out of all proportion to any immediately observable cause."⁶²

On the other hand, the mourner often tries to fight off repugnant thoughts concerning the deceased, and in so doing, the mourner might very easily become obsessed with the deceased persons good qualities. "Idealization and retrospective falsification take place, with results that may be incongruously out of keeping with the actuality....He may carry the process a step further and adopt peculiarities of speech and gesture that were characteristic of the deceased, or even develop physical complaints like those which once afflicted the dead person."⁶³ All of this is merely the attempt by the mourner to deny the death and loss of the deceased loved one by identifying oneself with that person.

Linn and Schwarz state the following possibilities of grief:

"The mourner's anger towards the deceased may result in bitter self-reproaches and more intense sadness. On the other hand, the anger may be turned upon others. A scapegoat is sought. It may be someone within the family, a business partner, the attending physician, or the religious leader. Whoever it is, he is likely to suffer discomfort, but such outwardly expressed rage is actually a constructive attempt by the mourner to cope with his guilt-generating hostility."⁶⁴

Erich Lindemann states that there are five points that seem to be pathognomonic for grief. They are somatic distress; preoccupation with the ^{image} of the deceased; guilt; hostile reactions; and loss of patterns of conduct. To this he adds a possible sixth point, namely the appearance of traits of the deceased in the behavior of the bereaved, especially those symptoms which were shown during the last illness, or during the time of some recent tragedy.⁶⁵ Lindemann now states:

"A bereaved person is observed or finds himself walking in the manner of his deceased father. He looks in the mirror and believes that his face appears just like that of the deceased. He may show a change of interests in the direction of the former activities of the deceased and may start enterprises entirely different from his former pursuits. A wife who lost her husband, an insurance agent, found herself writing to many insurance companies offering her services with somewhat exaggerated schemes. It seemed a regular observation in these patients that the painful preoccupation with the image of the deceased described above was transformed into preoccupation with symptoms of personality traits of the lost person, but now displaced to their own bodies and activities by identification."⁶⁶

As mentioned above, there are also what we may term distorted mourning reactions. Many factors can be entirely responsible for giving rise to such distorted reactions. An untimely loss, or a sudden tragedy, can often freeze the mourning process in its primary state of shock.⁶⁷ A case in point would be any similar tragedy and shock like that which a whole nation experienced at the sudden death of President John F. Kennedy. The reactions that followed, especially that displayed by Jack Ruby when he shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin, may be said to have been reactions which were overly distorted. The reported laughing of students in many Southern classrooms may also be put into this same category. And who knows how many other distorted reactions came from this one tragic occurrence?

Another type of distorted reaction during mourning occurs when a person who has suffered a loss finds himself unable to feel or to show any signs of grief.⁶⁸ There is also the possibility of permanent withdrawal from friends and relatives, which in it's temporary state is part of the normal grief reaction. "In some cases, social withdrawal is clearly related to an attempt to control angry feelings which rage within the mourner. It may happen too that guilty feelings touch off a pattern of indirectly self-destructive behavior. For example, one may indulge in acts of such ill-considered generosity as to pauperize himself."⁶⁹ In addition to sudden or untimely death:

"..the age of the bereaved person can be a factor in causing an abnormal mourning reaction and producing ambivalence. Children of four or five often react to the death of a parent with a show of apparent callousness or indifference, and thus postpone the true mourning reaction till they are better able to cope with their loss. But when they do give way to grief in a setting of loneliness and inadequate support from parent substitutes, they may become vulnerable to mental illness with suicidal impulses that appear later in life..."⁷⁰

Dr. Edgar Jackson discusses the time limits on grief. He believes that the distressing physical symptoms of grief such as weakness and other forms of general discomfort should pass from the person who experiences normal grief reactions in a few days. The inclination to weep constantly, and the uneasiness when in the presence of others and the desire to be alone, should pass after several days. Within four or five weeks, all of these signs should be gone, even though the underlying sorrow will still be present. There will be present a desire for solitude, and this mood reappears at different intervals during one's recovery from the loss. ⁷¹ Any other symptoms which remain for too long would appear then to be abnormal reactions.

Thus we may state that in a normal mourning process, the reactions and procedures of the bereaved will decrease continually. As time passes, the world and the mourners place in that world, become less and less painful. What self esteem he may have lost due to the death of a near one is now slowly recovered. Soon he can relate to other people with no trouble, and he may return to his work and be effective in it. When the mourning process finally ends, only little reminders of the past grief and the lost loved one remain. At the time of the anniversary of that person's death, one may experience minor grief, but as the years go by, this too seems to subside. Thus:

"If he has carried the work of mourning out to its conclusion, the bereaved may emerge from it a stronger person than ever. The degree to which the mourner remains unable to accept the irrevocable reality is a measure of the incompleteness or abnormality of the mourning process. It is only by eliminating from conscious awareness much of the reality which surrounds him that the mourner can maintain a belief in the continued earthly existence of the deceased. And to do this is to fall into a psychological state which is incompatible with mental health."⁷²

A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF GRIEF:

For a more theoretical* approach to the nature of the grief experience, we now turn to the thought of Sigmund Freud, as he discusses this in

*It is necessary to remind the reader at this point that this paper by Dr. Freud entitled "Mourning and Melancholia" discusses not only the phenomenon of grief, but also that of melancholia, which is similar to grief, but with one major difference. In grief there is no fall in self esteem. He describes melancholia as follows: "The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment." If the following discussion seems strange to one familiar with Freud's original paper, it is only that the discussion of melancholia is non-essential to this paper.

his famous paper entitled, "Mourning and Melancholia".⁷³ His first statement is that "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on."⁷⁴ It is these influences then, which bring about the development of the grief. He continues: "It is also well worth notice that, although grief involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a morbid condition and hand the mourner over to medical treatment. We rest assured that after a lapse of time it will be overcome, and we look upon any interference with it as inadvisable or even harmful."⁷⁵ Thus we note with interest that the phenomenon of grief, while being abnormal in so far as it is contrast to our every day patterns of life, is quite normal when taken as part of the life cycle of human beings. Freud has elsewhere defined the phenomenon of grief and the pain that accompanies it in terms of the economics of the mind, and here he does remind us that we may "call the temper of grief 'painful'."⁷⁶ Freud states the following as a description of those feelings which accompany the mourner:

"Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of a loved person, contains the...feeling of pain, loss of interest in the outside world--in so far as it does not recall the dead one--loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love, which would mean a replacing of the one mourned, the...turning from every active effort that is not connected with thoughts of the dead. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription in the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to its mourning, which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological."⁷⁷

Up until this point, Freud has been concerned with only defining mourning for us, and pointing out its peculiar characteristics to us. While this is most important, the following discussion on the work of mourning may prove even more helpful. He states:

"The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises-- it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him. This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its behest cannot be at once obeyed. The task is now carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind. Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished. Why this process of carrying out the behest of reality bit by bit, which is in the nature of a compromise, should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of mental economics. It is worth noting that this pain seems natural to us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."78

Freud, after a lengthy discussion of melancholia, now concludes that in normal grief the loss of the loved-object is finally surmounted, and that this process absorbs all of the energies of the ego while it lasts. He then posits the question "Why then does it not set up the economic condition for a phase of triumph after it has run its course or at least produce some slight indication of such a state?"79 To this question comes the following answer:

"I find it impossible to answer this objection off-hand. It reminds us again that we do not even know by what economic measures the work of mourning is carried through; possibly however, a conjecture may help us here. Reality passes its verdict--that the object no longer exists--upon each single

one of the memories and hopes through which the libido was attached to the lost object, and the ego, confronted as it were with the decision whether it will share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of its narcissistic satisfactions in being alive to sever its attachment to the non-existent object. We may imagine that, because of the slowness and the gradual way in which this severance is achieved, the expenditure of energy necessary for it becomes somehow dissipated by the time the task is carried through."80

While this theory may be confusing to some people, it has been explained by using the analogy of the electrical system within each of our homes. Each area of the home will have its own special circuit, with either a fuse or a circuit-breaker at the end of that circuit. If one were to place appliances into every open socket in that one area, and turn them on all at once--the result would be a blown fuse, or a broken-circuit, and all of the appliances would be shut off. However, if each appliance and each socket were turned on separately, with a little time spaced in between, it is likely that that particular circuit would not be cut off, and that all of the appliances would function normally. The ego seems to function in just this way. When the love-object has been lost, all of the energies that the mourner had once given to the deceased will now become bottled up, with no place to go. If the mourner is able to find another outlet for these energies, he will experience a normal grief reaction. However, if the mourner can find no substitute for these energies, an abnormal grief reaction will occur. Thus the ego will either re-channel the unused energies--leading to a normal experience; or it will not re-channel the unused energies--leading to an abnormal grief experience.

Freud now speaks of the possibility of ambivalent feelings coming to the forefront. He states that "as the work of grief, by declaring the object to be dead, and offering the ego the benefit of continuing

to live, impels the ego to give up the object, so each single conflict of ambivalence, by disparaging the object, denigrating it, even as it were slaying it, loosens the fixation of the libido to it."81 He further states:

"The loss of a love-object constitutes an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself felt and come to the fore. Consequently where there is a disposition to obsessional neurosis the conflict of ambivalence casts a pathological shade on the grief, forcing it to express itself in the form of self--reproaches, to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved one, i.e. desired it. These obsessional states of depression following upon the death of loved persons show us what the conflict of ambivalence by itself can achieve, when there is no regressive withdrawal of libido as well."82

Freud also states that grief seems to pass away after a certain period of time, and leaves no real trace of any overall change in the individual who has been mourning. "It appeared that in grief this period of time is necessary for detailed carrying out of the behest imposed by the testing of reality; and that by accomplishing this labour the ego succeeds in freeing its libido from the lost object."83

chapter three...NIHUM AVELIM AND FUNERAL
PRACTICES IN OUR CULTURE

SETTING OF DEATH IN OUR CULTURE:

W. Lloyd Warner, in his book The Living and The Dead 84, points out that in our American society, which is made up of a large number of groups and cultures, there is one element which unifies and integrates us all; that element is death. "The graves of the dead are the most powerful of the visible emblems which unify all the activities of the separate groups of the community. The cemetery and its graves become the objects of sacred rituals which permit opposing organizations, often in conflict, to subordinate their ordinary opposition and cooperate in collectively expressing the larger unity of the total community. The rites show extraordinary respect for all the dead, but they pay particular honor to those who were killed in battle 'fighting for their country.' The death of a soldier in battle is believed to be a 'voluntary sacrifice' by him on the alter of his country." 85

Warner points out that the physical changes one undergoes plays an important role in our culture's attitude toward death. "As man changes physically, the 'conveyor belt' of social time redefines his changing place in the community and moves him onward until finally, at death, it ceremonially dumps him into a new set of meanings where human time no longer defines his existence."86

Underlying Warner's attitude concerning death in our society, is our concept of the disposal of the dead, and their burial in a graveyard. His discussion on this particular area is quite lengthy. The following excerpts from his long discussion on the cemetery make his overall position quite clear.

He states:

"The cemeteries...are divided into lots of varying sizes which are ordinarily the property of particular families, occasionally of associations. The burial plots are referred to by the surnames of the families who own them. The individual graves, with their individual stone markers, are arranged within the limits of the lots--more often than not according to the status of the dead individuals within the family.....The emotions and thoughts of the living about their dead always express the antithetical elements that enter into the placement of the dead. Human time continually makes its demands for controlling eternity; maintenance of the identity of the dead is partly dependent on placing them in living time and space. Human space concepts continue to be used to locate the dead. Location of the dead in time and space helps to maintain their reality to those who wish to continue their relations with them. The cemetery contributes its material signs to help maintain this system of meanings and feelings."87

Warner points out that the fundamental secular problem that the graveyard solves, is the fact that it rids the living of the now decaying corpse, freeing them "from nauseous smells of corruption and from the horror of seeing the natural decomposition of a human body, thereby helping to maintain the satisfying images of themselves as persistent and immortal beings." 88 The cemetery also provides a fixed social place, ritually consecrated for this purpose, wherein the "disturbed sentiments of human beings about their loved dead can settle and find peace and certainty." 89 Warner devotes a great deal more time to this particular subject of the final resting place of all men, and while the large amount of information he gives the reader is interesting and pertinent, it is the following quotation that best expresses his overall view. He says:

"The cemetery provides the living with a sacred realm they have created by means of their social control of divine power, a function of sacred symbolism, in which they can deposit the impure and unclean corpse in a grave

that belongs to it not so much as a corpse but as a sacred person, in a grave which also belongs to them, the living. The grave with its markings is a place where the living can symbolically maintain and express their intimate relations with the dead. There is a kinship of kind, too; today's dead are yesterday's living, and today's living are tomorrow's dead. Each is identified with the others fate. No one escapes." 90

Leaving the sacred realm of the graveyard, Warner now proceeds to discuss the many varied reactions of relatives, friends, and even strangers; reactions which may occur either at the time of death, or years later. Warner points out that "at a time of death, the ambivalent feelings of hostility and love which ordinarily exist in all families between such kindred as parents and their children, brothers and sisters, as well as parents-and children-in-law, are carefully and smoothly handled by our conventions and the traditional symbolic behavior of the death rites." 91 Warner continues to say that the behavior of the other relatives and friends at the time of death undergoes even more of a change, than does that of those directly related to the deceased. He states:

"Often relatives appear at funerals, express their grief, and confess their 'unwarrented' enmity for the dead man whom, while he was alive, they strongly disliked and avoided. Formal and informal behavior during funerals sometimes results in old feuds being settled and rebellious members reintegrated into the family. This is accomplished by the hostility of the secular living members of the family for the dead man being translated into a feeling of guilt during the crisis and rites of death. Meanwhile, the once ordinary living man, now dead, is transformed in their thoughts and feelings into a sacred person. The ordinary living with their hostile thoughts feel inadequate before the dead; external aggression is often turned inward on the (guilty) self."92

He next points out that many times, even a full generation later, those persons who were not originally present, in their desire to become

an integral part of the emotional excitement of days gone by, and in a sense becoming actual participants in that excitement, will formally declare some sort of holiday which is dedicated to the dead hero. This holiday may either celebrate his birthday, or his death. 93 Examples of this type of vicarious celebration are Lincoln's and Washington's Birthdays, as well as the celebration of a non-American, Columbus. The best example of a holiday which tries to recapture the past historical events is our own Memorial Day. Of this, Warner says the following:

"...in the Memorial Day ceremonies, the anxieties man has about death are confronted with a system of sacred beliefs about death which give the individuals involved...a feeling of well-being. Further, the feeling of triumph over death by collective action is made possible in the Memorial Day Parade, by recreating the feeling of euphoria and the sense of group strength and individual strenght in the group power.."94

While this analysis of the Memorial Day celebration deals with group strength on the secular level, he further points out that it is also a time of ethnic and religious union. He says:

"Memorial Day is a cult of the dead which organizes and integrates the various faiths and ethnic and class groups into a sacred unity. It is a cult of the dead organized around the community cemeteries. It's principal themes are those of the sacrifice of the soldier dead for the living, and the obligation of the living to sacrifice their individual purposes for the good of the group so that they too, can perform their spiritual obligations."95

Thus, in our American culture, death not only allows the individual to participate in past events of his country, but it also serves to unify the entire community into one cohesive group which will work together in concord, forgetting for the moment any past hatreds or discrepancies.

Another sociologist, Dr. Robert Fulton, comments on this country's attitude toward death by stating that "death is now a temporal matter. In America today, we have come to a point in our history at which we are

beginning to react to death as we would to a communicable disease."96 Fulton further points out that we in America seem to be obsessed with youth and beauty, and as a result of this we have made death an obscene and shameful thing for elderly people and their survivors. "Today families run away from their dying relatives. People begin to withdraw from you when you're about to die. Once you get old and get wrinkles, people pull away from you. You're an offense to the eye."97 Fulton also feels that death has become a "vulgar accident" due to the decline of religious beliefs in which death was viewed as part of a divine plan, and was a personal matter between man and God.98

While the above statements by Dr. Fulton seem to indicate a quite pessimistic view on his part of death in our society, he seemingly is a firm believer in the American funeral and all of its ritualism. He states that "the dramatization of death and the rituals that accompany it have a valid place in contemporary society. Funerals facilitate the normal grieving process and make it easier for the survivors to overcome their sense of loss. The funeral service not only serves the necessary function of disposing of the body of the dead person, but also reorients the survivors to the viable world and provides them with an appropriate commemorative gesture to show their love for the deceased."99

We may conclude therefore, that the setting of death in our culture is one in which the general community actively participates, with the immediate family, in a great many of the rituals that are connected with the dead. This area of the life cycle becomes one of paramount importance, for by our participation in it, we become one with those who have gone before us.

SOME CONTEMPORARY REFORM JEWISH FUNERAL PRACTICES:

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, through the office of Eugene J. Lipman, the Director of Synagogue Activities, National Headquarters, has made the following statement concerning Reform Jewish funeral practices:

"When death is imminent or sudden, this group prefers that a member of their clergy be notified as soon as possible. They have no ritual, rules, or opinions on the removal, embalming, dressing, encasketing, cremation, earth or mausoleum interment. They have a preference for earth burial but no official opinion has been voiced. This denomination has no specification regarding the casket the family may prefer. They prefer the funeral services be held at the mortuary, except for congregational leaders and clergy. If the deceased is a congregational leader or clergy, there are no regulations as to procedure of arrival at the synagogue. There are no specifications, except local, as to how the casket should be placed in the synagogue, but the casket should be so placed before the arrival of the congregation. While there is no opinion as to whether the casket should be opened or closed during the service, it is preferred that it be closed, and not opened again at any time. Floral arrangements are designed by local custom. There are no restrictions as to whom the family may select as casket bearers. There are no specifications other than local custom in taking the remains from the building in which the funeral services have been held to the awaiting casket coach. The clergy would prefer to ride with the family from the place the services have been held to the cemetery. On the arrival at the cemetery, the clergy will take the lead to the lowering device, ahead of the casket, and the family will follow the casket. After the casket has been placed on the lowering device, the clergy will stand at the head. While this group does not prefer the casket to be lowered as part of the committal, local custom may prevail."100

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, through the office of Sidney E. Regner, Executive Vice-President, National Headquarters, has also made a statement concerning Reform Jewish funeral practices:

"This group of the Jewish religion does not feel the necessity of a Rabbi when death is imminent or sudden, but it is advisable to notify the Rabbi who is to officiate as soon as possible. They have no opinions, rules, or ritual as to the removal, embalming, dressing,

encasketing, cremation, earth or mausoleum interment. This may be taken care of and arranged in the usual manner. There are no services to prepare for prior to the regular funeral service. While the remains are lying in state, candles, or a candelabra are used. Consult the local officiating Rabbi in this regard. The family is free to select the place of service and casket bearers without restriction. If the services are held at the synagogue, the casket is placed in the synagogue closed, prior to the arrival of the congregation and usually is not opened again. Consult the officiating Rabbi regarding any other aspects of the service. Flowers may be handled according to local custom. Consult the officiating Rabbi regarding the procession from the place where the services have been held to the casket coach, and from the casket coach to the lowering device over the grave. The Rabbi will stand at the head of the grave. The remainder of the committal may be governed by local custom."101

The above two statements appear to be quite general and they leave virtually every aspect of the funeral service to the discretion of the local Rabbi. This might very well lead to a great deal of confusion, not only on the part of the Reform Rabbinate, but also on the part of the Reform Jewish community in general. This confusion might even be the very basis upon which those who criticize Jewish funeral practices in America today lay their claims.* In the following chapters the reader will find that for the most part, the Reform Rabbis of this country do share similar opinions when questions are asked them concerning some specific practice or procedure. In a later chapter these men will make suggestions as to how some of the basic problems within the field of funeral practice and Nihum Avelim may be solved.

Aside from the above two statements, the only other sources of information one seems able to find and use, is that found in Solomon Freehof's Reform Jewish Practice 102, and that which one is able to

*See Jessica Mitford's The American Way of Death; Leroy Bowman's The American Funeral; Henry N. Rapaport's "Funeral Practices--U.S. Model 1965", The Torch, (Spring Issue 1965); and Samuel H. Dresner's "The Scandal of The Jewish Funeral", The Torch, (Spring Issue 1963).

glean from the Reform Rabbis through personal conversations, and through questionnaires. It will be the purpose of the following information to describe as briefly as possible just what does take place in the Reform Jewish community when a death occurs.

For the most part, the Rabbi is notified of the death by the Funeral Director, and not by the family. Then the Rabbi contacts the family. At this time he will make preliminary arrangements, as well as offer consolation and some counsel. The next day the family will meet with their Funeral Director, and make all necessary arrangements with him. When the time has been set, the Rabbi will be notified. In cases where the Rabbi has other prior commitments, the necessary time changes will be made. The Funeral Director also arranges for death notices to appear in local newspapers. These serve to inform the general public, and those who knew the deceased, as to the time and place of the funeral. In large cities, it is possible that such notification could not be made by phone. Normally, the Rabbi will then meet with the family, at which time he will secure all necessary information, such as the deceased person's English and Hebrew names, and any wishes that the family may have as to the eulogy. This is most important when the deceased and the Rabbi were total strangers. If the Rabbi had a close relationship with the deceased, such information is not needed. For the most part, the family and the Rabbi will not meet again until the day of the funeral.

While it is the custom among Orthodox Jews to bury the deceased as soon after death as possible, it has become the practice of Reform Judaism to wait a few days between the time of death and the funeral. Many times this is to allow sufficient time for members of the family,

or close friends, who may be out of town to arrive. Thus the custom of visiting the funeral home the evening prior to the funeral has arisen. This particular practice has become one of great concern, and great unrest among the Reform Rabbinate.*

The day of the funeral finds the family seated in the family room, which is usually adjacent to the chapel proper. It is here that friends and relatives may come and offer their sympathy and consolation to the mourners, prior to the funeral. The casket may either be found in this room, or in the chapel. It is often open for public viewing prior to the funeral service. Immediately preceding the funeral service, the family will take their "last look" at the deceased, and then the casket is closed. It is not opened again.

Very often it is at this point that the Keriah service is performed. While the Tradition prescribed the rending of the outer garment, the custom today involves the cutting of a black ribbon which all mourners wear. This not only saves their garments from being ruined, but also preserves the symbolic act of rending the garments. This ceremony is conducted by either the Rabbi or the Funeral Director, depending upon local custom. Then the service begins.

*The Central Conference of American Rabbis, in their Guide for Synagogue Decorum, adopted in June 1964, made the following statement concerning the visitation at the funeral home prior to the funeral. "While it is proper for close friends and members of the immediate family to visit the bereaved before the funeral, such visitation should take place in the home. The growing practice in some communities of pre-funeral chapel visitation-- a recent innovation--is not only in disharmony with Jewish tradition, but it is also psychologically unsound. It is ill advised to place the mourner in the kind of social situation which occurs at a pre-funeral chapel visitation. The placing of the body of the departed on public exhibit in the presence of the grief-stricken family, the necessity for the exchange of small talk and visiting with friends, are a grievous strain on the mourner. Certainly, at the height of grief, for the family to feel compelled to 'receive' those who have come to the chapel, is cruel and unfeeling. Those under severe emotional strain should not be obliged to greet the public at large, away from the comfort and the sanctuary of the home."

The funeral service is conducted by the Rabbi. There are times when a fraternal organization such as the Masons or the Knights of Pythias will conduct a brief prayer service prior to the funeral service. When this is finished, then the Rabbi will begin. In general, the Reform Rabbi will use the Rabbi's Manual 103 to conduct the service, for this gives him a choice of many services. Usually, parts of the service will be done in Hebrew, with the prayers of consolation and those which reaffirm God's goodness and providence being recited in the vernacular. The service at the funeral home is usually concluded with the recitation of the El Male Rahamin. In many instances, there is a recessional which finds the Rabbi at the head, followed by the immediate family and friends.

The procession from the site of the funeral service to the cemetery is one of great formality. The hearse, followed by the family car, and then the cars of the friends and relatives. The Rabbi usually rides with the immediate family. In many parts of the country, the funeral cortege has a police escort. When the cortege arrives at the cemetery, the Rabbi will usually be the first person to arrive at the grave. The casket arrives next, followed by the family and friends. The Rabbi stands at the head of the grave and recites some additional prayers. The graveside service will conclude with the Kaddish. Often the casket is lowered to ground level by means of a lowering device, and is then covered over with artificial greens. In most cases the casket is not lowered completely into the grave until the family and the procession have departed. At this point, the funeral service has been completed, and the family will return home to begin the Shivah.

SOME CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF NIHUM AVELIM:

While the funeral practices have changed in many respects, the practices of Nihum Avelim have for the most part remained the same. There have been changes over the years, but these have been minor ones. Apparently, the overall custom of comforting those who are bereaved has remained as it was. Once again we must turn to Freehof's Reform Jewish Practice 104, and to the Reform Rabbis, for a view of this process of comfort.

One change in the process of Nihum Avelim is seen at the very beginning of the mourning period. Today the family notifies a Funeral Director when a loved one dies, and it is this professional who speaks to them and who tries to console them in the first hours of their grief. He takes care of all necessary arrangements, and tries to relieve the grieving family of all unnecessary burdens. This is in contrast to the Traditional practice of the Hevra Kaddisha.

The role of the relatives and friends has not changed very much. The only real change seems to be the practice of pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home. Traditionally this was done in the home of the mourner. This is understandable, since there was no such thing as a funeral home when Jewish law and custom was being formulated. The Central Conference of American Rabbis state in their Guide For Synagogue Decorum, found on page thirty-five of this thesis, that the practice of pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home is non-Jewish and psychologically unsound. This position may be quite correct. However, there is another school of thought in regard to this matter. Since no funeral homes existed within the "traditional" Jewish community, the custom of visiting in the home of the bereaved was the only logical

procedure. The phrase "in disharmony with Jewish tradition" seems to indicate that there is some legal prohibition with regard to pre-funeral visitation at a funeral home. Apparently this is not so, for such a prohibition is nowhere to be found.

There is also a very practical reason for this pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home. When people congregate in a home or an apartment, they sometimes leave without bothering to help straighten up. Ashtrays will be filled with cigarette butts. There might even be a burn found in a rug or on a piece of furniture. These are exaggerated examples of what might happen, and yet the possibility does exist. When the comforters depart, it is the mourner who has the unneeded task of cleaning up after them, and this is certainly not a part of the mourning process as prescribed by tradition. The advantage of the pre-funeral visitation taking place in the funeral home is that it provides the mourner with a place to which his "comforters" might come, without his having to straighten up after they have departed for the evening.

It is also true that no family is "compelled to receive those who have come to the chapel"; they may receive them at home if they so desire. My research into the sociological and psychological aspects of death in our society, leads me to believe that it is not unhealthy for the mourner to see his dead before him; nor is it unhealthy for him to receive the consolation of friends and relatives at this time. On the contrary, it is the mourners need to re-channel much of the energies he once devoted to the deceased upon other people, if he is to adjust properly to the reality of that person's death, which makes this practice a sound and healthy one.

The comforters also play an important role during the funeral service itself. Today, people seem more concerned with how many people attended the funeral, and not with what the Rabbi had to say. This does not mean that they do not listen to the Rabbi's words; on the contrary, they do. When the service is over, the comforters ride to the cemetery in the formal procession, and upon arriving there, stand by the graveside during the committal service. When this final phase of the funeral is completed, the mourners follow the traditional practice of forming two rows, through which the Rabbi and the mourners pass. 105 This is of course subject to local custom.

The next important role of Nihum Avelim is that of attending the meal of consolation. When the mourners arrive at home, the meal has already been prepared and set out on the table. The preparations for this meal of comfort are done by any number of people; usually by neighbors and close friends. The contents of the meal may vary according to family or local custom. There are also many folktales and superstitions with regard to the food served at this meal. Many times the mourners are served beans and eggs. "The meal of eggs and beans served to mourners on their return from the funeral--the funeral meats--bears a striking resemblance to that which was offered to the dead themselves in the religious practices of the Greeks and Romans."106

Since there are those who do not like to admit that a Jewish custom goes back to the Greeks or the Romans, the Jewish sages found an incident in their tradition which gives real basis to the use of beans at the meal of consolation. "The prophet Ezekial, they pointed out, was instructed specifically not to mourn over the just doom appointed for the wicked city of Jerusalem, and therefore not to go

barefoot nor 'eat the bread of men' (Ezekial 24:17). This, they inferred, implies that even in his day, some special type of meal was a feature of mourning ceremonies. Even more fancifully, they traced the custom of eating lentils during mourning to the fact that Jacob 'gave Esau bread and a pottage of lentils', when the latter sold his birthright (Genesis 25:34). The patriarch, they said, had been cooking lentils because it happened to be the anniversary of his grandfather Abraham's death."107

Following this meal, and for the conclusion of the days of the Shivah, the comforters return to the home of the bereaved each day. Sometimes there is a Minyan service, which may be conducted by any adult. After this initial period of mourning, the friends always try to include the mourner in group activities. This role of continued friendship serves the mourner in good stead. He feels that his loss has not made him a social pariah, and it gives him the needed opportunity to re-channel the energies that he had once spent on the deceased.

SUMMATION:

While the funeral practices and the procedures of Nihum Avelim in use today are, for the most part, like those practiced by our long tradition, there are a few major changes. These changes are due to various factors. The setting of death in our culture is one of the factors. The theology of Reform Judaism is another. And the scientific advances in the realm of cosmetology and preservatives is still another. And we cannot leave out the factor of the size of the world in which we live. Today as never before, relatives may be scattered

over various parts of our country and our world. Even though transportation is no longer a problem, it still takes considerable time to travel thousands of miles on a sudden notice. There is also the factor of the availability of a chapel. With so many people living in one particular area, it is often possible that a funeral home will have all of its equipment and all of its available space, tied up for one or two days. Then too, the Rabbi may have other prior commitments which he may not be able to reschedule. It is also a fact that the labor unions involved in the death industry force cemeteries to require prior notice of every grave opening. This time varies with each cemetery--but none of them will open a grave on too short notice. Thus the family must often wait for one or two days before the funeral can take place. All of these factors have combined to cause the change in the practice of immediate burial.

As to the actual rite itself, the Rabbi's Manual is used by most Reform Rabbis. The prayers contained within this book are for the most part modern in scope. The Kaddish and the El Male Rahamim and the Tziduk HaDin are the only traditional prayers found in the funeral service, with the exception of a few chosen psalms of praise to God. The Rabbi may, if he wishes, supplement this service with his own original prayers, or those he has taken from other sources. There is no strict guide to be followed.

There are other customs which are practiced by some people today. Such a custom is the use of the Shomer--the watcher. This is practiced by relatively few Reform Jews today. It is an ancient custom which had many practical uses in its time. Freehof points out that in ancient times, there was the possibility of rodents or insects coming

upon the body of the deceased, thereby desecrating it. The watcher stood guard over the body, to insure that no such desecration would take place. 108 Today there are many superstitions attached to this practice, and it seems doubtful than very many Jews even know the origins of this procedure.

As to other such customs, I refer the reader to Theodor H. Gaster's The Holy and The Profane. 109 In the specified chapters on death, the author discusses such customs as the opening of windows; the closing of the eyes, and the mouth of the deceased; the use of white garments; interment without a coffin; the use of the earth from the Holy Land; passports for the dead; the pouring out of water, and the washing of the hands; and other rituals of ancient times.

Thus we may conclude that the customs and practices in use today are similar to those used in the past. Most of the superstitious elements have disappeared, but some still remain in local areas. We find that the practices in use today are designed to make the mourners as comfortable as possible, and to provide proper respect for the deceased.

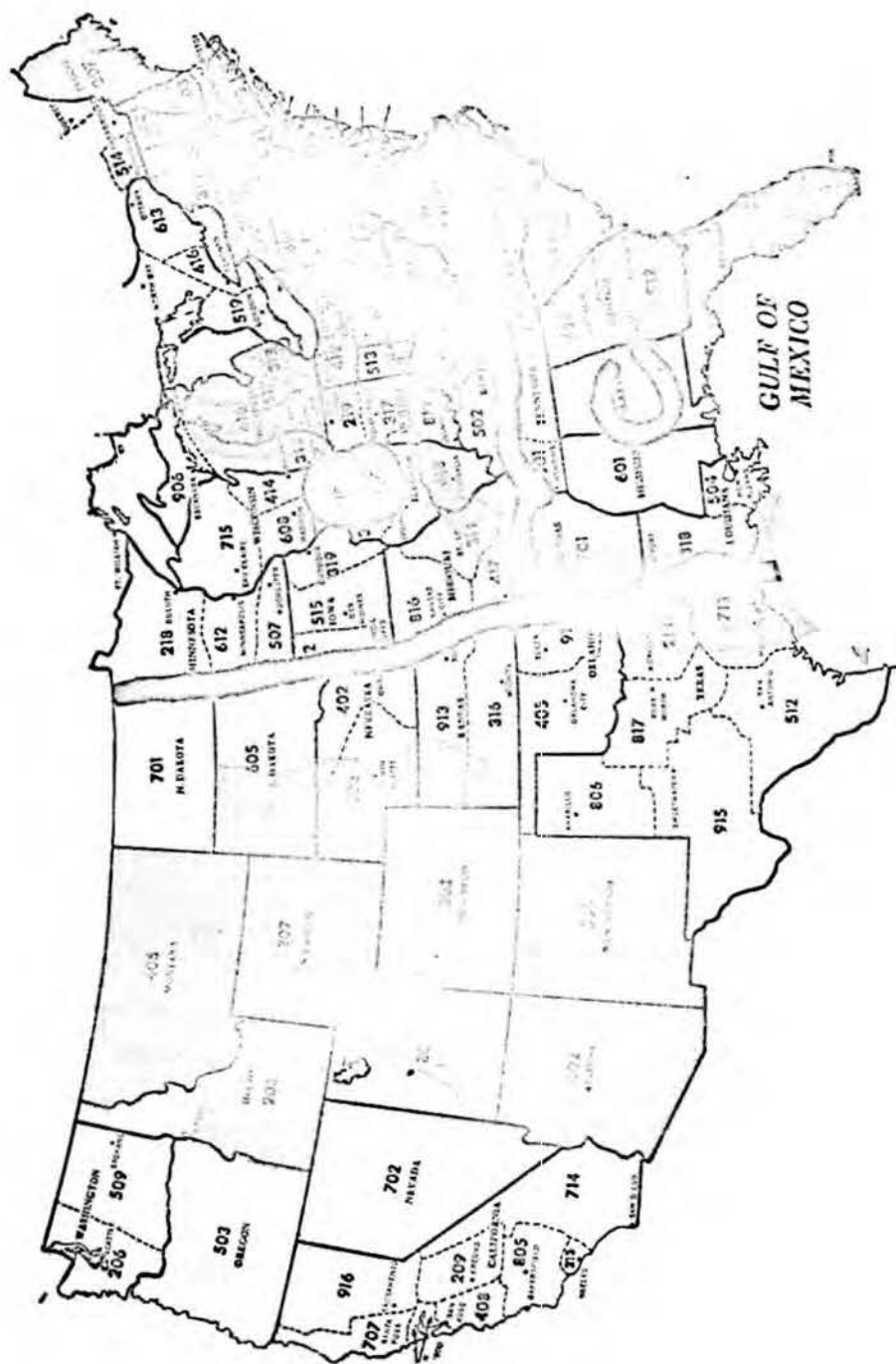
**chapter four...SUMMARY AND EVALUATION
OF QUESTIONNAIRES**

FORMATION OF CHAPTER:

Perhaps the most interesting and important answers to the problem of Nihum Avelim and funeral practices in Reform Judaism today come from those who are most involved in these procedures--i.e. the Rabbis and the Funeral Directors. One of the primary purposes of this thesis was to elicit this information from these two professional groups. This was accomplished by sending questionnaires to one-hundred-seventy Reform Rabbis and seventy Jewish Funeral Directors. The country was divided into four major geographical areas. These areas can be found on the map of the United States on page 44. I received answers from one-hundred-twenty-four Reform Rabbis; a total of seventy-three percent; and from fifty-six Jewish Funeral Directors; a total of eighty percent.

The following pages of this chapter will show the answers to the specific questions. Pages 45-47 contain the total number of answers to each question based on the country as a whole. Pages 48-59 contain the total number of answers to each question based on the four geographical areas of the country. Certain trends can be seen when one studies the responses carefully.

In summarizing and evaluating these questionnaires, the first question to be answered will be: what practices seem to be followed today? Our next concern will be whether or not the geographical area has any affect on the customs and rituals that are practiced within each of the four areas of the country. The third area of concern will be a comparison of what is being practiced, and how the Rabbis feel about these practices. Finally, some conclusions will be offered.



"NIHUM AVELIM IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

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How commonly are these Traditional Funeral Practices observed among your members?
Please check.

	<u>Rarely or Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	91	28	5
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	93	24	7
c) Keeping casket closed at all times.	35	51	38
d) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	108	5	11
e) Tearing of clothing.	94	21	9
f) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	113	7	4

I-Please evaluate the religious and psychological value of these Customs.

	<u>No Value</u>	<u>Some Value</u>	<u>Considerable</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	57	36	31
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	78	40	6
c) Work of Hevra Kaddisha.	83	30	11
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	27	34	63
e) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	99	10	15
f) Tearing of clothing.	82	30	12

II-How common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	45	29	50
b) Embalming.	100	17	7
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	77	30	17
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	79	34	11
e) Use of music.	53	41	30
f) Use of Kriah Ribbon.	38	30	56
g) Use of Memorial Candles.	89	30	5
h) Covering of mirrors in House of Mourning.	8	34	82

V-What is your position concerning the following procedures?

	<u>Encourage</u>	<u>Discourage</u>	<u>Not Concerned</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	13	96	15
b) Conversing with mourners prior to funeral.	62	38	24
c) Reading of Psalms and other literature.	61	6	57
d) The "Meal of Consolation."	66	10	48
e) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	20	35	69
f) Visitation at the home after the funeral.	115	3	6
g) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings	116	1	7

V-What is your practice as a Reform Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Do you go to the home of the bereaved before the funeral?	a) <u>119</u>	<u>5</u>
b) Do you call at the Funeral Home the night prior to the funeral?	b) <u>28</u>	<u>96</u>
c) Attendance at the "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>71</u>	<u>53</u>
d) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	d) <u>18</u>	<u>106</u>
e) Visitation after the funeral.	e) <u>122</u>	<u>2</u>

VI-If you are asked concerning the following bereavement procedures---which do you recommend?

	YES	NO
a) Receiving relatives and friends at the Funeral Home prior to the funeral.	a) <u>18</u>	<u>106</u>
b) Reading of Psalms and other literature prior to funeral.	b) <u>72</u>	<u>52</u>
c) The "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>90</u>	<u>34</u>
d) Receiving relatives and friends at home following the funeral.	d) <u>122</u>	<u>2</u>
e) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	e) <u>121</u>	<u>3</u>
f) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for the full seven days.	f) <u>58</u>	<u>66</u>
g) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for only three days.	g) <u>101</u>	<u>23</u>
h) Coming to Services every Shabbos to recite Kaddish for one year.	h) <u>117</u>	<u>7</u>

VII-Which of the following are appropriate responsibilities of the Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Performing services in the house of mourning during the <u>Shivah</u> .	a) <u>101</u>	<u>23</u>
b) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	b) <u>116</u>	<u>8</u>
c) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	c) <u>122</u>	<u>2</u>
d) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	d) <u>25</u>	<u>99</u>
e) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	e) <u>89</u>	<u>35</u>
f) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	f) <u>42</u>	<u>82</u>

VIII-Do you feel that Rabbis should accept funeral gratuities?

YES 91

NO 33

OPINION?: _____

IX-Should Rabbis use such gratuities for their personal needs?

YES 82

NO 42

OPINION?: _____

X-Can you draw on your experience for suggestions to Rabbinical Students and young Rabbis, on helpful practices in Nihum Avelim?

- a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
d) _____

"NIHUM AVELIM IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

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Which of these Traditional Funeral Practices are observed by the bereaved families you serve? Please check.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely or Never
a) Use of plain pine box.	0	22	34
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	26	14	16
c) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	22	16	18
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	9	30	17
e) Use of Shomer (Watcher).	20	18	18
f) Tearing of clothing.	7	5	44

-How Common are the following practices?

	Common	Occasional	Rarely or Never
a) Embalming.	41	8	7
b) Calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral.	28	14	14
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	36	16	4
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	24	16	16
e) Use of music.	16	14	24
f) Use of Kriah ribbon.	31	9	16

I-In dealing with the mourners, which of the following are included in the role of the Rabbi, in your opinion?

	YES	NO
a) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	a) 0	56
b) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	b) 18	38
c) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	c) 0	56
d) Advising the family as to prices they should pay.	d) 1	55
e) Directing the funeral service at the funeral home.	e) 8	48

-What is the role of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim (Comforting the Mourners)?

	YES	NO
a) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	a) 50	6
b) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	b) 35	21
c) Making <u>all</u> funeral arrangements for the family.	c) 46	10
d) Directing the funeral at the Funeral Home and Cemetery.	d) 53	3
e) Advising family as to Social Security, Veteran, Welfare and other such benefits.	e) 51	5

What changes in Funeral Practices would you be in favor of. Please explain if possible.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

"NIHUM AVELIM IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

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How commonly are these Traditional Funeral Practices observed among your members?
Please check.

	<u>Rarely or Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	34	17	3
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	38	10	6
c) Keeping casket closed at all times.	16	14	24
d) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	43	3	8
e) Tearing of clothing.	39	8	7
f) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	47	5	2

Please evaluate the religious and psychological value of these Customs.

	<u>No Value</u>	<u>Some Value</u>	<u>Considerable</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	23	14	17
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	29	24	1
c) Work of Hevra Kaddisha.	29	22	3
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	7	14	33
e) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	37	3	14
f) Tearing of clothing.	26	18	10

I-How common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	29	8	17
b) Embalming.	35	14	5
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	29	15	10
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	20	25	9
e) Use of music.	17	23	14
f) Use of Kriah Ribbon.	27	14	13
g) Use of Memorial Candles.	39	13	2
h) Covering of mirrors in House of Mourning.	7	22	25

What is your position concerning the following procedures?

	<u>Encourage</u>	<u>Discourage</u>	<u>Not Concerned</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	6	40	8
b) Conversing with mourners prior to funeral.	29	12	13
c) Reading of Psalms and other literature.	26	3	25
d) The "Meal of Consolation."	29	5	20
e) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	10	16	28
f) Visitation at the home after the funeral.	50	2	2
g) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	54	0	0

-What is your practice as a Reform Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Do you go to the home of the bereaved before the funeral?	a) <u>51</u>	<u>3</u>
b) Do you call at the Funeral Home the night prior to the funeral?	b) <u>11</u>	<u>43</u>
c) Attendance at the "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>31</u>	<u>23</u>
d) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	d) <u>10</u>	<u>44</u>
e) Visitation after the funeral.	e) <u>52</u>	<u>2</u>

I-If you are asked concerning the following bereavement procedures---which do you recommend?

	YES	NO
a) Receiving relatives and friends at the Funeral Home prior to the funeral.	<u>12</u>	<u>42</u>
b) Reading of Psalms and other literature prior to funeral.	b) <u>36</u>	<u>18</u>
c) The "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>42</u>	<u>12</u>
d) Receiving relatives and friends at home following the funeral.	d) <u>54</u>	<u>0</u>
e) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	e) <u>54</u>	<u>0</u>
f) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for the full seven days.	f) <u>37</u>	<u>17</u>
g) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for only three days.	g) <u>46</u>	<u>8</u>
h) Coming to Services every Shabbos to recite Kaddish for one year.	h) <u>52</u>	<u>2</u>

II-Which of the following are appropriate responsibilities of the Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Performing services in the house of mourning during the <u>Shivah</u> .	a) <u>44</u>	<u>10</u>
b) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	b) <u>52</u>	<u>2</u>
c) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	c) <u>53</u>	<u>1</u>
d) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	d) <u>15</u>	<u>39</u>
e) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	e) <u>36</u>	<u>18</u>
f) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	f) <u>15</u>	<u>39</u>

III-Do you feel that Rabbis should accept funeral gratuities?

YES 44

NO 10

OPINION?: _____

X-Should Rabbis use such gratuities for their personal needs?

YES 35

NO 19

OPINION?: _____

-Can you draw on your experience for suggestions to Rabbinical Students and young Rabbis, on helpful practices in Nihum Avelim?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

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I-How commonly are these Traditional Funeral Practices observed among your members?
Please check.

	<u>Rarely or Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	27	3	0
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	24	6	0
c) Keeping casket closed at all times.	10	13	7
d) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	29	1	0
e) Tearing of clothing.	23	7	0
f) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	28	0	2

II-Please evaluate the religious and psychological value of these Customs.

	<u>No Value</u>	<u>Some Value</u>	<u>Considerable</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	14	11	5
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	21	7	2
c) Work of Hevra Kaddisha.	22	5	3
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	9	10	11
e) Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	28	2	0
f) Tearing of clothing.	27	3	0

III-How common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	10	10	10
b) Embalming.	28	1	1
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	21	6	3
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	22	6	2
e) Use of music.	14	6	10
f) Use of Kriah Ribbon.	3	7	20
g) Use of Memorial Candles.	21	7	2
h) Covering of mirrors in House of Mourning.	0	9	21

IV-What is your position concerning the following procedures?

	<u>Encourage</u>	<u>Discourage</u>	<u>Not Concerned</u>
a) Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	2	25	3
b) Conversing with mourners prior to funeral.	13	12	5
c) Reading of Psalms and other literature.	15	2	13
d) The "Meal of Consolation."	19	2	9
e) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	5	5	20
f) Visitation at the home after the funeral.	27	1	2
g) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings	27	0	3

V-What is your practice as a Reform Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Do you go to the home of the bereaved before the funeral?	a) <u>29</u>	<u>1</u>
b) Do you call at the Funeral Home the night prior to the funeral?	b) <u>10</u>	<u>20</u>
c) Attendance at the "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>21</u>	<u>9</u>
d) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	d) <u>5</u>	<u>25</u>
e) Visitation after the funeral.	e) <u>30</u>	<u>0</u>

VI-If you are asked concerning the following bereavement procedures---which do you recommend?

	YES	NO
a) Receiving relatives and friends at the Funeral Home prior to the funeral.	a) <u>3</u>	<u>27</u>
b) Reading of Psalms and other literature prior to funeral.	b) <u>15</u>	<u>15</u>
c) The "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>24</u>	<u>6</u>
d) Receiving relatives and friends at home following the funeral.	d) <u>29</u>	<u>1</u>
e) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	e) <u>30</u>	<u>0</u>
f) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for the full seven days.	f) <u>12</u>	<u>18</u>
g) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for only three days.	g) <u>26</u>	<u>4</u>
h) Coming to Services every Shabbos to recite Kaddish for one year.	h) <u>27</u>	<u>3</u>

VII-Which of the following are appropriate responsibilities of the Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Performing services in the house of mourning during the <u>Shivah</u> .	a) <u>23</u>	<u>7</u>
b) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	b) <u>27</u>	<u>3</u>
c) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	c) <u>29</u>	<u>1</u>
d) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	d) <u>4</u>	<u>26</u>
e) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	e) <u>22</u>	<u>8</u>
f) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	f) <u>11</u>	<u>19</u>

VIII-Do you feel that Rabbis should accept funeral gratuities?

YES 22

NO 8

OPINION?: _____

IX-Should Rabbis use such gratuities for their personal needs?

YES 22

NO 8

OPINION?: _____

X-Can you draw on your experience for suggestions to Rabbinical Students and young Rabbis, on helpful practices in Nihum Avelim?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

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How commonly are these Traditional Funeral Practices observed among your members?
Please check.

	<u>Rarely or Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
a)Use of plain pine box.	15	2	0
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	17	0	0
c)Keeping casket closed at all times.	6	8	3
d)Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	15	0	2
e)Tearing of clothing.	16	1	0
f)Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	17	0	0

I-Please evaluate the religious and psychological value of these Customs.

	<u>No Value</u>	<u>Some Value</u>	<u>Considerable</u>
a)Use of plain pine box.	11	4	2
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	14	3	0
c)Work of Hevra Kaddisha.	14	0	3
d)Keeping casket closed at all times.	8	4	5
e)Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	15	2	0
f)Tearing of clothing.	15	2	0

II-How common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a)Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	5	6	6
b)Embalming.	16	1	0
c)Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	13	3	1
d)Use of flowers and wreaths.	15	2	0
e)Use of music.	6	7	4
f)Use of Kriah Ribbon.	4	2	11
g)Use of Memorial Candles.	12	4	1
h)Covering of mirrors in House of Mourning.	1	2	14

IV-What is your position concerning the following procedures?

	<u>Encourage</u>	<u>Discourage</u>	<u>Not Concerned</u>
a)Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	5	11	1
b)Conversing with mourners prior to funeral.	10	5	2
c)Reading of Psalms and other literature.	9	0	8
d)The "Meal of Consolation."	4	2	11
e)Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	1	6	10
f)Visitation at the home after the funeral.	17	0	0
g)Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings	15	0	2

7-What is your practice as a Reform Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Do you go to the home of the bereaved before the funeral?	a) <u>17</u>	<u>0</u>
b) Do you call at the Funeral Home the night prior to the funeral?	b) <u>5</u>	<u>12</u>
c) Attendance at the "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>6</u>	<u>11</u>
d) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	d) <u>1</u>	<u>16</u>
e) Visitation after the funeral.	e) <u>17</u>	<u>0</u>

II-If you are asked concerning the following bereavement procedures---which do you recommend?

	YES	NO
a) Receiving relatives and friends at the Funeral Home prior to the funeral.	a) <u>1</u>	<u>16</u>
b) Reading of Psalms and other literature prior to funeral.	b) <u>8</u>	<u>9</u>
c) The "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>7</u>	<u>10</u>
d) Receiving relatives and friends at home following the funeral.	d) <u>16</u>	<u>1</u>
e) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	e) <u>14</u>	<u>3</u>
f) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for the full seven days.	f) <u>2</u>	<u>15</u>
g) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for only three days.	g) <u>11</u>	<u>6</u>
h) Coming to Services every Shabbos to recite Kaddish for one year.	h) <u>16</u>	<u>1</u>

VII-Which of the following are appropriate responsibilities of the Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Performing services in the house of mourning during the <u>Shivah</u> .	a) <u>14</u>	<u>3</u>
b) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	b) <u>15</u>	<u>2</u>
c) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	c) <u>17</u>	<u>0</u>
d) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	d) <u>2</u>	<u>15</u>
e) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	e) <u>15</u>	<u>2</u>
f) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	f) <u>7</u>	<u>10</u>

VIII-Do you feel that Rabbis should accept funeral gratuities?

YES 10

NO 7

OPINION?: _____

IX-Should Rabbis use such gratuities for their personal needs?

YES 10

NO 7

OPINION?: _____

X-Can you draw on your experience for suggestions to Rabbinical Students and young Rabbis, on helpful practices in Nihum Avelim?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

"NIHUM AVELIM IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

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-How commonly are these Traditional Funeral Practices observed among your members?
Please check.

	<u>Rarely or Never</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Often</u>
a)Use of plain pine box.	15	6	2
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	14	8	1
c)Keeping casket closed at all times.	3	16	4
d)Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	21	1	1
e)Tearing of clothing.	16	5	2
f)Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	21	2	0

I-Please evaluate the religious and psychological value of these Customs.

	<u>No Value</u>	<u>Some Value</u>	<u>Considerable</u>
a)Use of plain pine box.	9	7	7
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	14	6	3
c)Work of Hevra Kaddisha.	18	3	2
d)Keeping casket closed at all times.	3	6	14
e)Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	19	3	1
f)Tearing of clothing.	14	7	2

II-How common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a)Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	1	5	17
b)Embalming.	21	1	1
c)Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	14	6	3
d)Use of flowers and wreaths.	22	1	0
e)Use of music.	16	5	2
f)Use of Kriah Ribbon.	4	7	12
g)Use of Memorial Candles.	17	6	0
h)Covering of mirrors in House of Mourning.	0	1	22

V-What is your position concerning the following procedures?

	<u>Encourage</u>	<u>Discourage</u>	<u>Not Concerned</u>
a)Calling at the Funeral Home the night before the funeral.	0	20	3
b)Conversing with mourners prior to funeral.	10	9	4
c)Reading of Psalms and other literature.	11	1	11
d)The "Meal of Consolation."	14	1	8
e)Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	4	8	11
f)Visitation at the home after the funeral.	21	0	2
g)Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	20	1	2

V-What is your practice as a Reform Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Do you go to the home of the bereaved before the funeral?	a) <u>22</u>	<u>1</u>
b) Do you call at the Funeral Home the night prior to the funeral?	b) <u>2</u>	<u>21</u>
c) Attendance at the "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>13</u>	<u>10</u>
d) Use of Hevra Kaddisha.	d) <u>2</u>	<u>21</u>
e) Visitation after the funeral.	e) <u>23</u>	<u>0</u>

VI-If you are asked concerning the following bereavement procedures---which do you recommend?

	YES	NO
a) Receiving relatives and friends at the Funeral Home prior to the funeral.	<u>2</u>	<u>21</u>
b) Reading of Psalms and other literature prior to funeral.	b) <u>13</u>	<u>10</u>
c) The "Meal of Consolation."	c) <u>17</u>	<u>6</u>
d) Receiving relatives and friends at home following the funeral.	d) <u>23</u>	<u>0</u>
e) Contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.	e) <u>23</u>	<u>0</u>
f) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for the full seven days.	f) <u>7</u>	<u>16</u>
g) Sitting <u>Shivah</u> for only three days.	g) <u>18</u>	<u>5</u>
h) Coming to Services every Shabbos to recite Kaddish for one year.	h) <u>22</u>	<u>1</u>

VII-Which of the following are appropriate responsibilities of the Rabbi?

	YES	NO
a) Performing services in the house of mourning during the <u>Shivah</u> .	a) <u>20</u>	<u>3</u>
b) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	b) <u>22</u>	<u>1</u>
c) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	c) <u>23</u>	<u>0</u>
d) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	d) <u>4</u>	<u>19</u>
e) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	e) <u>16</u>	<u>7</u>
f) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	f) <u>9</u>	<u>14</u>

VIII-Do you feel that Rabbis should accept funeral gratuities?

YES 15

NO 8

OPINION? : _____

IX-Should Rabbis use such gratuities for their personal needs?

YES 15

NO 8

OPINION? : _____

X-Can you draw on your experience for suggestions to Rabbinical Students and young Rabbis, on helpful practices in Nihum Avelim?

- a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
d) _____

"NIHUM AVELIM IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

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Which of these Traditional Funeral Practices are observed by the bereaved families you serve? Please check.

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	0	16	19
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	21	5	9
c) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	17	9	9
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	7	20	8
e) Use of Shomer (Watcher).	15	11	9
f) Tearing of clothing.	4	3	28

I-How Common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Embalming.	23	5	7
b) Calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral.	15	7	13
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	18	13	4
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	8	12	15
e) Use of music.	9	6	20
f) Use of Kriah ribbon.	23	4	8

II-In dealing with the mourners, which of the following are included in the role of the Rabbi, in your opinion?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	a) 0	35
b) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	b) 15	20
c) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	c) 0	35
d) Advising the family as to prices they should pay.	d) 1	34
e) Directing the funeral service at the funeral home.	e) 5	30

V-What is the role of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim (Comforting the Mourners)?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	a) 32	3
b) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	b) 22	13
c) Making <u>all</u> funeral arrangements for the family.	c) 27	8
d) Directing the funeral at the Funeral Home and Cemetery.	d) 32	3
e) Advising family as to Social Security, Veteran, Welfare and other such benefits.	e) 31	4

What changes in Funeral Practices would you be in favor of. Please explain if possible.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

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I-Which of these Traditional Funeral Practices are observed by the bereaved families you serve? Please check.

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a)Use of plain pine box.	0	2	10
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	4	6	2
c)Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	4	4	4
d)Keeping casket closed at all times.	2	5	5
e)Use of <u>Shomer</u> (Watcher).	4	2	6
f)Tearing of clothing.	2	2	8

II-How Common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a)Embalming.	9	3	0
b)Calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral.	6	6	0
c)Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	9	3	0
d)Use of flowers and wreaths.	7	4	1
e)Use of music.	5	4	3
f)Use of Kriah ribbon.	4	4	4

III-In dealing with the mourners, which of the following are included in the role of the Rabbi, in your opinion?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a)Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	a) 0	12
b)Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	b) 3	9
c)Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	c) 0	12
d)Advising the family as to prices they should pay.	d) 0	12
e)Directing the funeral service at the funeral home.	e) 3	9

IV-What is the role of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim (Comforting the Mourners)?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a)Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	a) 10	2
b)Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	b) 9	3
c)Making <u>all</u> funeral arrangements for the family.	c) 10	2
d)Directing the funeral at the Funeral Home and Cemetery.	d) 12	0
e)Advising family as to Social Security, Veteran, Welfare and other such benefits.	e) 11	1

What changes in Funeral Practices would you be in favor of. Please explain if possible.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

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Which of these Traditional Funeral Practices are observed by the bereaved families you serve? Please check.

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Use of plain pine box.	0	2	3
b) Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	0	2	3
c) Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	0	2	3
d) Keeping casket closed at all times.	0	3	2
e) Use of Shomer (Watcher).	0	3	2
f) Tearing of clothing.	0	0	5

I-How Common are the following practices?

	<u>Common</u>	<u>Occasional</u>	<u>Rarely or Never</u>
a) Embalming.	5	0	0
b) Calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral.	5	0	0
c) Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	5	0	0
d) Use of flowers and wreaths.	5	0	0
e) Use of music.	0	3	2
f) Use of Kriah ribbon.	2	0	3

II-In dealing with the mourners, which of the following are included in the role of the Rabbi, in your opinion?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a) Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	a) 0	5
b) Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	b) 0	5
c) Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	c) 0	5
d) Advising the family as to prices they should pay.	d) 0	5
e) Directing the funeral service at the funeral home.	e) 0	5

V-What is the role of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim (Comforting the Mourners)?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
a) Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	a) 4	1
b) Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	b) 1	4
c) Making <u>all</u> funeral arrangements for the family.	c) 5	0
d) Directing the funeral at the Funeral Home and Cemetery.	d) 5	0
e) Advising family as to Social Security, Veteran, Welfare and other such benefits.	e) 5	0

What changes in Funeral Practices would you be in favor of. Please explain if possible.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

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I-Which of these Traditional Funeral Practices are observed by the bereaved families you serve? Please check.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely or Never
a)Use of plain pine box.	0	2	2
b)Use of shroud, tallis, etc.	1	1	2
c)Work of the Hevra Kaddisha.	1	1	2
d)Keeping casket closed at all times.	0	2	2
e)Use of Shomer (Watcher).	1	2	1
f)Tearing of clothing.	1	0	3

II-How Common are the following practices?

	Common	Occasional	Rarely or Never
a)Embalming.	4	0	0
b)Calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral.	2	1	1
c)Open casket (Viewing of the Dead).	4	0	0
d)Use of flowers and wreaths.	4	0	0
e)Use of music.	2	1	1
f)Use of Kriah ribbon.	2	1	1

II-In dealing with the mourners, which of the following are included in the role of the Rabbi, in your opinion?

	YES	NO
a)Making all funeral arrangements for the family.	a) 0	4
b)Making some funeral arrangements for the family.	b) 0	4
c)Accompanying the family to the casket showroom.	c) 0	4
d)Advising the family as to prices they should pay.	d) 0	4
e)Directing the funeral service at the funeral home.	e) 0	4

V-What is the role of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim (Comforting the Mourners)?

	YES	NO
a)Counselling the mourners prior to the funeral.	a) 4	0
b)Counselling the mourners after the funeral.	b) 3	1
c)Making <u>all</u> funeral arrangements for the family.	c) 4	0
d)Directing the funeral at the Funeral Home and Cemetery.	d) 4	0
e)Advising family as to Social Security, Veteran, Welfare and other such benefits.	e) 4	0

What changes in Funeral Practices would you be in favor of. Please explain if possible.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE:

It is apparent that the funeral practices in use today are for the most part not in accordance with those prescribed and practiced by Traditional Judaism. There are a few exceptions to this however, and these exceptions provide us with some very interesting information. It is apparent that the Hevra Kaddisha and its specific functions are very rarely found within Reform Jewish circles. Yet, the fact that a small percentage of congregations do find some value in the functions of this group, permits us to say that the Hevra Kaddisha is not a "mythical" organization, nor is its function one which Reform Judaism has fully eliminated.

We also find that the use of a plain casket is not quite as rare as many have said. Though its use is minimal, it still exists. This would apply to almost all of the traditional practices in question here, with the exception being the closing of the casket throughout the entire period before and during the funeral. This seems to be the only traditional procedure that is practiced regularly among Reform Jews today. The tearing of the mourners garments is still practiced in rare instances, as can be seen in the answer given to question I:e of the Rabbinical Questionnaire on page 45, and the answer given to question I:f of the Funeral Directors Questionnaire on page 47. The general practice today, if the Keriah ceremony is performed, is the practice of the tearing of the Keriah ribbon. The practice of the Shomer sitting with the body before the funeral is not widely used, but there are some people who desire his presence either because of family traditions or superstitions. A few Funeral Directors advise me that they have permanent Shomerim on call.

It is also evident that most Reform Jews dress their dead in suits or dresses, rather than in shrouds. The overall opinion seems to be that the practices of Tradition were fine for Tradition, but that they fill no real need now. One must remember however, that the presence of some traditional practices within Reform Jewish ritual does exist, and therefore cannot be ruled out of Reform Jewish practice entirely.

As to the practices and procedures in use today, we find great diversity of opinion. The practice of calling at the funeral home the night prior to the funeral is common--and yet, it is not the practice of any large majority. Those people who apparently practice this pre-funeral visitation number approximately 60%; those people who apparently do not practice it number approximately 40%. Further analysis of this custom will be found in the geographical comparison to follow.

Embalming is quite common among Reform Jews, and it seems that only those Reform Jews with Traditional backgrounds or Traditional ties do not practice it. While it is true that the Rabbis and Funeral Directors seem to agree that the casket should remain closed at all times, the people themselves seem to want it to remain open until the service begins. This fact is clearly evident in the answers given to question III:c of the Rabbinical Questionnaire on page 45.

The practice of sending flowers to the funeral home is also quite widespread, though the Rabbis seem to prefer contributions to charities instead of the floral offerings. Most Reform funerals seem to contain music, with the only exception being area A. The

majority of Reform Jews seem to use the Memorial candle, which burns in their homes during the Shivah period. The belief in the covering of mirrors seems rare, but is practiced by some.

The Reform Rabbis questioned seem to follow the same procedures generally, and they all seem concerned with certain of the practices in use today. Most of them discourage the pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home--yet there are those who find it most helpful to the mourner, and therefore encourage it. There is a clear disagreement concerning the practice of conversing with the mourners prior to the funeral--those that encourage it are not the clear majority. This is seen in the answer given to question IV:b of the Rabbinical Questionnaire on page 45. Here we find that 50% of the Rabbis encourage this practice, while 50% either discourage it or are not concerned.

The majority of the Rabbis favor the meal of consolation, and find it a healthy practice for the mourners to engage in. Although those who would encourage the use of the Hevra Kaddisha are in the minority, they do total a significant number. This "ancient" society cannot be ruled out altogether. Visitation at the mourners home after the funeral is widely practiced and encouraged. And the overwhelming majority seem to favor contributions to charities in place of the floral offerings. Most Rabbis accept gratuities and use them for their personal needs--relatively few do not accept or use them.

The role of the Rabbi and that of the Funeral Director in Nihum Avelim seem closely related; as do the opinions of these two professional groups who have answered the questionnaires. They

both seem to recognize the value of their working together for the benefit of the mourner. They do not seem to feel that their roles conflict with each other. For the most part their answers to the same questions were similar, with only a few exceptions. The Rabbis answered that the use of shrouds in burying the dead was quite rare; the Funeral Directors said that this practice was quite common among the Reform Jews they serve. The Rabbis feel that shrouds are used only 25% of the time; the Funeral Directors answered that this practice occurs 71% of the time.

This difference of opinion also applies to the work of the Hevra Kaddisha. Once again the Funeral Directors find it not such a rare practice, while the Rabbis feel it to be uncommon. The Funeral Directors state that it is used approximately 67% of the time; the Rabbis find that it is used only 9% of the time.

The use of the Shomer seems to be common according to the Funeral Directors; while the Rabbis feel it is quite rare. Thus the Funeral Directors answer that the Shomer is used approximately 67% of the time; the Rabbis find that it is used only 13% of the time.

The wide differences in opinions as seen above may be due, in part, to some distortion in the reporting. This distortion seems to be a part of almost every scientific research, and thus the possibility cannot be ruled out. However, these three practices seem to be the only ones in which we find any real difference of opinion. All other practices and procedures received similar, if not identical opinions from both of these groups.

Many of the Rabbis and Funeral Directors, in answering the questions, were kind enough to clarify some of their answers. Thus it seems apparent that the Hevra Kaddisha which is functioning today is different from the Hevra Kaddisha of yesterday. Today, this group seems more concerned with Nihum Avelim than it is with the Taharah. While many of these Hevrot do prepare the body for burial, most of them are concerned with the preparation of the meal of consolation, and the visitation of the house of mourning during the Shivah period. Most of the Rabbis and Funeral Directors who favor the existence of these Hevrot seem to do so only if the functions of these groups revolve around the comforting of the mourners, and not around the preparations for burial.

GEOGRAPHICAL COMPARISON:

In studying the answers from a geographic point of view, one finds that the Rabbis and Funeral Directors agree on almost every aspect of Nihum Avelim and funeral practice. The only areas of major disagreement are with respect to the use of the Shomer, the Hevra Kaddisha, and the shroud. In all four geographical locations the Rabbis agree that these three customs are uncommon or rare. The Funeral Directors indicate that these three customs are common practice in areas A and B; while in areas C and D they are practiced approximately 50% of the time. The custom of using music during the funeral service was found to be common in all areas of the country, with the only exception being in Area A. Here we find some slight disagreement between the Rabbis and Funeral Directors. The Rabbis in area A find that music is common during the funeral; the Funeral Directors feel that it is uncommon in this area of the country.

The only other disagreement one finds between these two professional groups is in the area of the Keriah ceremony. They both agree that the tearing of the mourners garments as prescribed by Tradition is uncommon. However, with respect to the cutting of the Keriah ribbon, the Rabbis answered that it is common only in area A. The Funeral Directors answered that it is common in areas A, B and D; area C being the only place in the country that this ceremony is uncommon.

Thus we find that both the Rabbis and the Funeral Directors feel that the practices of using a plain pine box and tearing the mourners garments are uncommon today. They agree that closed caskets, embalming and flowers are commonly practiced today. Both groups have one more thing in common. They both agree that the open casket is commonly practiced today. This is in complete contradiction to the above sentence, in which they have answered that closed caskets are common. It is possible that here too we find a case of distortion in reporting. It may well be that while they report that the open casket is common, they themselves strongly disagree with that practice, and have therefore stated their preference for closed caskets in answering the question.

In studying the answers to the Rabbinical Questionnaire alone, one finds only two areas of major disagreement. The first has to do with pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home. In areas A, B and C we find that this practice is quite common. The Rabbis who report that this practice is common number 65%. The Rabbis in area D however, report that this custom is practiced only 25% of the time. As is clearly seen the percentages are totally different.

The second area of major disagreement between the Rabbis has to do with the Keriah ceremony. We find that the cutting of the Keriah ribbon is uncommon in areas B, C and D. It is only common in area A where it seems to be practiced 75% of the time. Because of this, we find that the overall answer to the question of cutting the Keriah ribbon was that it is common. It is only when the answers are broken down into geographical areas that one sees this fact.

Geographically then, we may posit that area A seems to be no more Traditional in its practice than are areas B, C and D. Where we find some disagreement as to practice and custom, it seems to be because of family traditions and superstitions, rather than because one area might have a larger population of Orthodox Jews than another. A further study of local custom, and the history of such Minhagim in individual areas might provide us with a clearer picture.

In studying the answers to the Funeral Directors Questionnaire alone, we find only three areas of slight disagreement. The use of the Shomer appears common only in area A. The use of flowers and music during the funeral service is common in areas B, C and D. Here too we are unable to assume that area A is more Traditional in its outlook than areas B, C and D. In fact, from the overall picture of Nihum Avelim and funeral practice in our country today, we find that no one area of the country is more Traditional than any of the others. We can say that Reform Jewish practice varies greatly from the prescriptions and practices of Tradition. These variances seem to be caused more by scientific advance, and the size of the world in which we live, than by a desire on the part of Reform Judaism to break away from Tradition.

HOW THE RABBIS EVALUATE MODERN DAY PRACTICES:

We have found that the use of the plain pine box is quite rare today. It has been reported that it is used on 26% of the time. The Rabbis seem to feel that it has some religious and psychological value, for in evaluating its use, 54% of them feel it to have some value for the mourner. As to the use of the shroud in burying the dead, both the evaluation of the Rabbis, and the apparent practice being used today are in close agreement. 75% of the Rabbis report that the shroud is not being used today; 64% of the Rabbis find that the use of the shroud has no religious or psychological value to the mourner. The casket seems to remain closed 72% of the time, and the Rabbis seem to feel that this is as it should be, for 78% of those who answered the question find it has some value. As to the use of a Shomer sitting with the body prior to the funeral, 80% of the Rabbis feel it to have no value to the mourner; it is apparently practiced only 12% of the time. The tearing of the mourners garments as prescribed by Tradition is practiced approximately 27% of the time today; the Rabbis find it has little value for they gave an affirmative answer in only 34% of all cases. The work of the Hevra Kaddisha was reported by only 8% of the Rabbis who answered the question; however, 33% of those who answered feel that the Hevra Kaddisha has some religious and psychological value for the mourner. From these percentages, it is apparent that the Reform Rabbis who answered the questionnaire agree with what is being practiced today, with two exceptions. They seem to feel that the plain pine box should be used more often, for they feel it has some value. There are some Rabbis who seem to feel that the Hevra Kaddisha is needed today.

In general, we find that the Reform Rabbis lean neither toward the Traditional modes of burial, nor toward the more modern modes of burial. Certain Traditional customs seem to have their place within Reform Judaism today; other seem to have lost all meaning and value for the Reform Jewish community. The overall picture that one gets is that the Reform Rabbinate is quite selective in its approach to Jewish burial customs and their modern day practice.

60% of the Rabbis found calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral the common practice today; only 10% of them encourage this practice. There seems to be no majority opinion as to the conversing with mourners prior to the funeral, or as to the reading of Psalms and other literature, or as to the meal of consolation. However, most of the Rabbis who do not encourage these three practices seem to be unconcerned with them. Those who do encourage them number much more than those who do not encourage them. 93% of the Rabbis favor the visitation at the mourners home following the funeral; approximately the same number of Rabbis practice this as well. 93% of the Rabbis favor the contributions to charities in place of the floral offering. The majority of the Rabbis do attend the meal of consolation following the funeral service. We also find that 95% of the Rabbis recommend that the mourners attend Sabbath Services for a full year, at which time they recite the Kaddish. 82% of the Rabbis recommend a Shivah period of three days. Only 47% of the Rabbis recommend a Shivah period of seven days. The Rabbis seem to stress the counselling of the mourners as one of the most important roles that a Rabbi must play. 95% of them stress the counselling of mourners prior to and after the funeral.

It is this area of counselling that the Rabbis seem to always stress. As will be seen in the following chapter, the Rabbis place more emphasis on the role of counselling the mourners, than they do on any other aspect of Nihum Avelim. It may well be that this aspect of counselling, in which the Rabbis try to ease the pain of grief, and yet at the same time try to bring home the reality of the death of the loved one, that is responsible for their favoring the simple, non-elaborate casket which should be kept closed.

SOME CONCLUSIONS:

It has been the purpose of this chapter to summarize and to evaluate the questionnaires included herein. The facts speak for themselves. Perhaps one might find some further conclusions hidden away within those questionnaires. There are ten points which seem most important to the Reform Rabbis questioned. Perhaps they may serve us as a guideline in our attempts to comfort the mourners.

These ten points are as follows:

- 1...Rabbis should visit the house of mourning prior to the funeral.
- 2...Rabbis should counsel the mourners prior to the funeral.
- 3...The casket should be kept closed at all times.
- 4...The Rabbi should encourage and attend the meal of consolation.
- 5...The Rabbi should perform the Minyan service during the Shivah.
- 6...Rabbis should urge the mourners attendance at Sabbath Services for a full year, at which time the mourners should recite Kaddish.
- 7...Rabbis should recommend contributions to charities in place of floral offerings.
- 8...Rabbis should urge mourners not to receive friends at the funeral home the night prior to the funeral.

9...Rabbis should return often to the house of mourning after the funeral, especially during Shivah.

10..Rabbis should counsel the mourners after the funeral, during the period of grief.

chapter five...PRESCRIPTIONS FOR NIHUM
AVELIM AND FUNERAL PRACTICES
IN MODERN TIMES

RECEIPT OF PERQUISITES AND THEIR USE:

The majority of the Reform Rabbis, in answering questions VIII and IX as they appear on page two of the Rabbinical Questionnaire, also gave their opinions as to the receipt of perquisites and how they should be used. Many of the answers were identical, and so, in order to save time and space, only the following opinions are being included here. It will be remembered that the overall opinion as to the receipt of perquisites was quite affirmative. Those who would disagree seem to be in the minority. The following answers are taken from those Rabbis who do not accept perquisites for their services at funerals. Since I did not seek permission to use the names of those who answered, these statements will remain anonymous.

One Rabbi states: "I would like to see the fee system completely abolished. A member of a congregation should be entitled to every service his Temple or his Rabbi can render. The Rabbi can let his people know that he does not accept fees, and that if any are sent he will apply them to some educational or charitable institution or project." Another Rabbi who takes a similar position states: "I have always found it distasteful for anyone to profit from the sorrows of anyone; consequently I particularly object to the funeral gratuity. Abolishing the system of gratuities would raise the status of the Rabbi."

One Rabbi felt that the receipt of gratuities was only acceptable if the family he served was not affiliated with his congregation. He says: "This is one of the services that a Rabbi provides, as the Rabbi of the congregation. The answer would be yes only if the family is not affiliated." Another Rabbi feels that this is a matter

of judgement, for circumstances and situations vary greatly. He states that gratuities are "never to be sought or solicited. A Rabbi is not 'hired' for a funeral."

Many of the Rabbis felt that this whole matter would be done away with if all Rabbis received higher salaries. One states: "The ideal situation is one where the Rabbi's salary is high enough that he does not have to accept gratuities and the gratuity could then be placed in the discretionary fund when the family insists. The acceptance of a gratuity denigrates the Rabbi's services." Another who feels much the same way remarked: "I do not believe in gratuities at all. They lessen the dignity of the Rabbi; but he should be paid an appropriate salary."

The overall opinion of those who do not accept perquisites for funeral services is quite simple. The Rabbi should be paid a higher salary, for then he would have no need of this "extra" money. They would all seem to agree that when this higher salary is a reality, that anyone who wants to donate some money for the Rabbi's services, should do so. This money will be placed in either a discretionary fund, or a good works fund. Some of this money would even go to charities, other than those sponsored by religious institutions.

Those who do accept gratuities for their services are in the majority. They have many varying reasons for this shared opinion. One Rabbi states: "Non-members, unless charity recipients, should remember the Rabbi's services. Personally, I have accepted perquisites for funerals from members. They feel 'good' about it; and frankly, my congregational salary has always been small enough not to cause

a spiritual or economic conflict of interest." Another says: "The family in so offering wants to express gratitude in a concrete manner; to refuse is to reject that gratitude. And such token gifts can afford such useful professional items as journals, books and the like." And another says: "From non-members--by all means. From members--only if offered. I usually use such gratuities for personal charitable donations or for books for my library. When people spend \$1,000 for a funeral, \$15-25 for the Rabbi as a personal gesture for his services won't hurt them or their relationship to the Rabbi."

Many of the Rabbis felt that the receipt of a gratuity for ones services is only another part of the Rabbi's overall salary, since the performance of the funeral for a member of the congregation is still part of the Rabbi's role." Many of the Rabbis who accept perquisites for funerals do so only from non-members. One Rabbi suggests that if the family is not affiliated with his congregation, and is affluent, he will "set a good stiff fee, payable in advance." Still another who favors the acceptance of gratuities says that "it has the merit of permitting the bereaved to express personally felt gratitude, instead of their being indebted for a mitzvah, or expressing thanks through the gifts of useless 'white elephants'." Most of these Rabbis agree that a fee should be charged for non-members of their congregations.

The overall opinion then is that the Rabbi should receive some compensation for his services at funerals. Many have made the comment that the time involved in the funeral service is greater than most people realize. The Rabbi has to prepare his eulogy, visit the

bereaved family before and after the funeral, and in the big metropolitan areas of the country even ride to and from the cemetery for some two to three hours. If a Rabbi is expected to devote this much time to each funeral, he deserves some compensation for his time.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR NIHUM AVELIM AND FUNERAL PRACTICES--WHAT THE RABBIS SAY:

The last question on page two of the Rabbinical Questionnaire was a request, on my part, for some personal viewpoints as to the performance of Nihum Avelim. The results are quite gratifying. The suggestions are numerous, and quite helpful. One Rabbi suggests the following: "The Rabbi should be present at the moment of death, or as soon as possible thereafter. The quoting of theology should be minimal. The Rabbi should listen rather than speak. He should allow the mourners to express their grief and emotions--which is a necessary catharsis. It is good for them to cry." Another Rabbi says: "Be as helpful as possible. Remember the advice given in Pirke Avot: 'not to console one in the hour when his dead lies before him.' The Rabbi's presence is more consoling than any word he may utter. In the final analysis, experience is the best teacher."

There were many helpful suggestions as to the eulogy over the dead. One Rabbi found that the best practice is to "visit the bereaved family prior to the funeral and discuss the deceased with them. Find out the essential character traits of the deceased and incorporate them in your eulogy." Another Rabbi states: "Avoid platitudes. The message of comfort should 'pin-point' the identifiable character traits of the deceased. Use poetry wherever possible--many delicate thoughts can be expressed more easily and readily and beautifully by means

of verse." Still another cautions us to "keep the eulogy short", and another "to speak in words that all can readily understand--do not 'show-off' your command of the English language at a time like this."

The great majority of the suggestions that the Rabbis make are in the area of Nihum Avelin after the funeral, especially during the period of Shivah and Sheloshim. "The personal presence of the Rabbi during Shivah and Sheloshim is essential to morale. The Rabbi ought to devote time to the children--encourage their expression of feelings and discourage well-meaning relatives from trying to 'quiet' them down. Protecting the rights of children to be children in times of crisis can be the most important comfort brought." Another Rabbi states that "it is most important just to be with the mourners at the time of their loss. No service in the Rabbinate is as important. One visit is not enough; if possible two visits are desirable. It is also important to express the condolences of the congregation when the mourners attend their first Sabbath Service following the death of their loved one. The congregation should be involved when a member loses a loved one." Many Rabbis insist that all Rabbis should visit the homes of the mourners regularly, and that they should get others to do likewise.

A few of the Rabbis suggest the conducting of the Minyan service at the home of the bereaved. One suggests that we should "explain the uncertainty of life, and encourage the mourners to count their blessings and to concentrate on the living, in the memory of the departed." A great many Rabbis tell us to try for empathy. We should show as much personal and sympathetic concern as possible. Another states: "I believe in making the mourning period as easy as possible for the

mourners. When the person mourned for is of highly traditional background, I encourage the mourners to observe traditions as much as possible; but only after I explain them. This is done in order to alleviate guilt. I urge mourners to make funerals inexpensive and not elaborate, in accordance with Jewish tradition. I urge the use of the Jewish funeral home. I don't allow the lowering of the casket in the family's presence. The congregation provides the Minyan service in the mourners homes for the period of the Shivah. This makes the congregation feel responsible for one another and brings them closer together." As if in direct response to the above statement, another Rabbi stated the following: "While flexibility is important, I do feel it important for the Rabbi to uphold the principles of Reform Judaism. Where for example a bereaved family may wish to cover the mirrors, or to have a Minyan during the Shivah period of only men, the Rabbi should point out that the latter custom is not in keeping with our principle of equality of sexes, and that the former custom is not in consonance with Reform Judaism." The overwhelming majority of the Rabbis feel it quite important to explain all customs and practices that may be performed--making sure to point out which are merely superstitions, and which have some concrete traditional basis.

One important suggestion comes from many of the Rabbis. The following statement includes all of their opinions. It says: "Many young families need Rabbinical counsel prior to the funeral. This counsel takes the form of helpful suggestions as to the modesty of the coffin, and the funeral arrangements. It also includes the sharing of grief with the children and the Minhagim of the community. This is also the time to secure the family reactions to the deceased, which should be reflected in the eulogy. Letting them 'talk out'

their loving remembrances of the deceased is the first important act of rendering comfort today. The Rabbi's empathetic listening is more important than any words he can say 'while the dead still lies before them.' The Rabbi should visit the home after the funeral, and return often for short periods of time. He should arrange for permanent Yarzeit in the congregational records, and he should encourage their coming to Temple on the Sabbath to recite the Kaddish. He should assist them in solving the problems that often arise. This is more important than the Rabbi's leading the Minyan service during the Shivah."

Another Rabbi makes the following suggestions. He says: "I do not find the 'calling hours' at the funeral home objectionable. In our community, we have found that when there are no 'calling hours' at the funeral home, the friends call at the home of the mourner. This is more trying. I am afraid to suggest the reading of Psalms and other such literature, because if I know our fellow Jews, the Rabbi will wind up reading them to the corpse. Rabbis should never get involved in the 'business aspect' of the funeral; neither in the selection of the casket nor in the selection of the cemetery plot. When a situation arises where feelings 'run high' with regard to the service or some custom--if it does not violate Jewish religious law, I feel it advisable to let the member have his way. No one is rational or reasonable at the time of death of a loved one."

The following is an excerpt from a letter I received from Rabbi Leo R. Wolkow of Temple B'nai Yehuda in Chicago. In this letter Rabbi Wolkow has informed me of the Havra Kaddisha that is active in his congregation. He states: "This congregation had ethnic (German)

origins, and many of its members (along with many of the members of the neighboring Conservative Congregation) belong to a Hevra Kaddisha. This Hevra is a delight to behold, in an area where the dismal Funeral Parlor business practices prevail. (Incidentally this Hevra is forced to operate out of a non-Jewish Funeral Parlor). When a member of the Hevra dies, the Hevra takes care of all arrangements, washes and dresses the body, supplies the casket, etc. The total cost is fixed (about \$250). The family is relieved of all the burdensome details and choices (for which they are generally unprepared). Every large congregation should have its own Hevra."

I also received a letter from Rabbi Herman Eliot Snyder, Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Springfield, Massachusetts. This letter deals with the standards that that community has set up in regard to Jewish funerals. Rabbi Snyder states: "We have been pioneers in setting forth certain standards for funerals, and were able to persuade even the Orthodox and Conservative Rabbis to join in certain 'minimum' standards--such as closed caskets; uniform, inexpensive caskets; caskets covered with plain cloth--giving uniformity in death; no visiting at the funeral parlors; no refreshments and no meals served in the homes of mourning for visitors and those attending home-service; recitation of Psalms immediately prior to the formal funeral service, etc." This set of minimum standards has become known as the Springfield Proposal, and the entire proposal can be found in Samuel Dresner's article in The Torch, entitled "The Scandal of the Jewish Funeral". 110

Rabbi Julius J. Nodel, Rabbi of Temple Shaare Emeth in St. Louis, Missouri, has taken issue with the above mentioned proposal. In a letter to Mr. Clarence B. Roth of the Herman Rindskopf Funeral Home,

of St. Louis, he has stated the following: "No one should be told how to mourn his dead, nor be induced to shed more tears, nor be shocked into greater fears at the moment of parting from the last visible remains of his dear one. In the Responsa literature of the Rabbis, the general principle frequently repeated in discussing certain funeral rites and customs is: 'That which is for the honor of the living shall be done.' To insist on a self-created discipline as the Springfield, Massachusetts Rabbis have done when that discipline obviously is in conflict with the desires of many of the people as well as with the social pattern of our times, will not result in universal observance of the mandate but will be ignored by some with possible ill effects of guilt, rebellion and concomitant defection from the Jewish community with loss of respect for the unrealistic, unrelenting and stavistic thinking of the Rabbis. Discipline per se would not give rise to an appreciation of the values in Judaism. Certainly, trying to correct the business practices of some funeral directors by taking away their businesses is the last refuge of those who have failed to be effective in their powers of moral persuasion. The use of force, at least in religion, is a sign of moral weakness. What can't be done by conviction cannot be done by the use of compulsion and competition."

CHANGES IN FUNERAL PRACTICE--WHAT THE JEWISH FUNERAL DIRECTORS SAY:

The Jewish Funeral Directors were asked for their opinion as to what changes, if any, they would like to see in Jewish funeral practices. Their response too was most gratifying. Perhaps the best overall answer I received from this group is the following: "All groups of

Rabbis should agree upon one method of burial, instead of every Rabbi using his own personal ideas." This answer, along with many others like it, points up the need for some Rabbinical uniformity in this matter. What many Rabbis criticize as being non-Jewish, seems to be what other Rabbis claim as being traditionally Jewish. The Funeral Director seems to plead for some direction, so that his services to the Jewish community will meet the approval of all concerned.

Another Funeral Director believes that Rabbis, "if asked by a family as to which funeral home he would recommend, should give the names of all Jewish Funeral Directors in the community, without showing personal preference." Another points out that "the graveside service is becoming more frequent, especially among the elderly. The pre-funeral visitation is becoming less and less frequent." He also feels that "visitors should take a course in behavior, for they tend to make a reception out of it."

In the Rabbinical Questionnaire, I:e and II:f, the tearing of the garments in performing the Keriah was questioned. A small number of Rabbis stated that this was common practice in their communities. One Funeral Director urges that the Reform Rabbis "should have more consideration for families feelings when those families request the Keriah ribbons in place of the tearing of their personal clothing." The majority of the Rabbis would seem to agree with this Funeral Director.

There were many changes suggested as to the ritual of the funeral service itself. There were almost as many differences of opinions as there were suggestions. One Funeral Director would like to do away with "viewing the night prior to the funeral; viewing the

actual interment and the filling of the grave; and making a big showing at the Shivah period, where the overall custom seems to be one of serving liquor, food and other 'goodies'." Another who agrees with the first says that "calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral is an extreme hardship on the family and accelerates their emotions." Others who would disagree state that "the viewing of the deceased the night prior to the funeral is a healthy situation for the mourners and the relatives and friends, especially if they feel guilty about the way they treated him while he was still alive."

One shared opinion is in the area of the relationship between the Rabbi and the Funeral Director. Thus one Funeral Director states that "I see no reason for any changes other than a better understanding between the clergy and the Funeral Director. Too many times the Rabbis preach about the high costs of the funeral, and then request me to set their fee at fifty-dollars if anyone questions me." And another says: "Funeral Directors should not advise the family as to religious observances; this is the Rabbis job. Neither should the Rabbi advise the family as to funerals and their costs; this is the Funeral Directors responsibility."

The Funeral Directors seem to feel that their relationship with the Reform clergy is just fine. The only time they seem to complain is when they deal with a young Rabbi, "fresh out of the Seminary." They all suggest, as do numerous Reform Rabbis, that all students in Rabbinical School should receive some practical and theoretical training on how to handle the death situation. "This in-experience on the part of the young Rabbi seems to lead to many problems, both for the community and himself."

Another suggestion that the Funeral Directors seem to share is that funerals should be held in the funeral home, with the rare exception being those funerals on Temple Presidents and Directors, and the clergy. One Funeral Director states: "Funeral homes are better equipped to run funerals and to convenience families." This opinion is shared to a great extent by the Reform Rabbis questioned. They too feel that the Temple should only be used in rare instances.

SOME CONCLUSIONS:

It would appear that the funeral practices being employed today are not, on a whole, as far removed from tradition as many have asserted. Most of the modern practices are designed for the type of culture in which we live. Those communities which do employ more traditional modes of burial, and Nihum Avelim, are in the minority--yet that minority is not so small as to have no influence on what is being done today.

Whatever changes have been suggested are on a whole well thought out, and designed to keep Jewish funeral customs "non-barbaric." They are also designed to ease the burdens of the mourners, and to provide the most dignified mode of burial as possible. The dignity of the deceased is also stressed throughout the traditional literature. In this respect, tradition and modern day practice are in complete agreement. Both groups of professionals seem equally concerned with doing away with superstitions that have arisen down through the ages. It is apparent that these superstitions are often taken for Jewish religious law, especially by those non-affiliated Jews who seek the services of the Reform Rabbis.

In general then, the overall picture seems quite clear. Both the Rabbis and the Jewish Funeral Directors would like some unified procedures to be outlined, and adopted, and put into practice. No doubt there would still remain some local custom or family tradition. But if the Rabbinate was precise in what it accepted and what it did not accept, its policies would no doubt be effective and lasting.

chapter six...SOME PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

SOME PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS:

It is apparent that the practices and procedures of the burial of the dead and the comfort of the mourners which are used today, are not in consonance with those practices and procedures of Traditional Judaism. It is just as apparent that our culture sees death--and everything connected with death--from a totally different perspective than that of Traditional Judaism. Our forefathers lived in a society which, when compared to ours, seems primitive and naive. Their outlook on life was quite narrow--ours seems less narrow. Their world was small and compact--ours is large and spread out. Their science was limited and unsophisticated--ours makes new advances every day and is quite sophisticated.

When a death occurred in their day, it was necessary to bury that person as quickly as possible. This seems due more for matters of community hygiene than for reasons of theology. The ritual washing of the deceased cleansed the body from germs which could possibly contaminate a whole town. The bereaved was set apart from the community. His appearance was not that of a "normal" person, for his hair was uncut and his clothing was torn. He could not occupy his normal place in the synagogue. Everyone knew that he was a mourner. Today, the bereaved person is hard to pick out in a crowd. The only physical signs of his grief may be a torn Keriah ribbon and watery eyes. No wonder then that the setting of death in our culture barely resembles the setting of death in Traditional Judaism.

Some elements do remain however. Many of our people today have the same superstitions about death as did their ancestors. They still cover mirrors, and wash their hands, and hire a Shomer to

guard the dead. These superstitions are negative vestiges of the past. However, most of what remains of Traditional funeral practices and procedures of Nihum Avelim seem to be positive in scope. The concept of the Havra Kaddisha and its role of comforting the mourners is quite necessary, and probably always will be necessary. Even its function of preparing the body for burial and making all necessary arrangements for the burial remain today in some small measure, although this function is deemed unnecessary and unimportant by most.

The meal of consolation also remains. Often it becomes a gay party, where the bereaved must supply his comforters with food and drink. This "party" atmosphere is most negative. However, in the majority of instances where the meal of consolation is held, it does serve a most important purpose. It provides the mourner with his first meal after the funeral. This is according to Traditional practice and prescription. Today, as we learned from Sigmund Freud and his theory of economics, this meal of consolation serves an even more important function. It allows the mourner to begin to rechannel the energies he is no longer able to give to the deceased loved one, and this is necessary if he is to experience a normal grief reaction, and if he is going to rebuild his shattered world. While it is likely that the Rabbis of Tradition had no knowledge of the theoretical aspects of grief, it is quite probable that they were striving for the same solution to the problem of grief.

Traditionally the comforters came to the mourners homes before the funeral. Today the practice of visiting the mourner at the funeral home seems to be the general rule. While many Rabbis find

this pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home in dis-harmony with Jewish religious law, the majority seem to feel that it is the only practical solution to the problem. In large metropolitan areas the funeral home may be the only convenient location for friends and relatives who live great distances from the mourners home, to come to. And if the mourner has a large family, and many friends, his own home may be too small to accomodate such large numbers of people at one time.

There are many other variables acting upon our modes of burial and Nihum Avelim today. The size of our world and the possibility of family members living thousands of miles away from the home of the deceased cause us to delay burial for two or three days. While Traditonal Judaism prescribed immediate burial, it also took note of the possibility of great distances to be traveled, and therefore allowed for a certain amount of delay in burying the dead. The science of cosmetology and the methods of preservation in use today, allow us to delay the burial without exposing ourselves to any contamination which might otherwise result from such a delay in burial.

The one conclusion we may safely assume is that there is as yet no unified position on the part of the American Rabbinate in regard to the burial of the Jewish dead. Certainly it would seem that it is the Reform Rabbinate that is less unified on this subject, than are the Orthodox and Conservative Rabbinate. Yet, this is quite understandable, for the Reform Rabbinate has no dogmatic code to follow in such matters. It has no Halachic basis on which to stand.

The Reform Rabbinate seems quite concerned over this fact. The majority of Reform Rabbis who answered the questionnaire have suggested that some unified code is needed, and needed soon. The Funeral Directors for the most part take the same approach. They too would like to have some unification on this matter. Perhaps this will come to pass in the near future. If it does not, it is safe to assume that the confusion present today in matters of burial and comfort of the mourners will remain. It may be hypothesized that the future of what some might call the "Jewish way of death" rests in the hands of the American Reform Rabbinate.

APPENDIX

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Rabbi

Dear Rabbi

I am doing a rabbinic thesis on the subject

"SOME ASPECTS OF NIHUM AVELIM IN THE TRADITION AND IN REFORM
JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

Will you be good enough to help me evaluate some trends in the Reform Jewish community in practices concerning Nihum Avelim? If you can spare a few moments, please fill out the enclosed questionnaire. If you wish, skip over the sections that may require too much time. Any information you can give will help me identify certain trends.

In my thesis I deal with the Jewish sources as well as with such information that I can obtain from Rabbis and from a number of Funeral Directors. I hope that my research may be of interest to you and other members of the Conference.

From my own limited observation and from conversations with a few Rabbis, I feel that some interesting changes are taking place. I would like to evaluate, for example, the extent and significance of the trend of calling at the funeral home the night before the funeral. Several Rabbis are quite concerned with this particular development and with other emerging practices.

This thesis will be relevant to situations arising in your own congregation and community. Is there any pattern emerging?

I will be greatly in your debt, if you will help me, as a colleague-to-be, by filling out the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to me in a few days. Thanking you in advance, I am

Very truly yours,

Peter E. Kasdan
Senior Student
Cincinnati School, HUC-JIR.

ENCLOSURE

Questionnaire

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
CINCINNATI OHIO 45220

page -89-

Mr.

Dear Mr.

I am doing a rabbinic thesis on the subject

"SOME ASPECTS OF NIHUM AVELIM (COMFORTING THE MOURNERS) IN THE TRADITION
AND IN REFORM JEWISH PRACTICE TODAY"

In my thesis I deal with the Jewish sources as well as with such information
that I can obtain from rabbis and from a number of Funeral Directors. I hope that
my research may be of interest to you and other members of the Jewish Funeral
Directors of America, Inc.

During the past few months, I have received the advice of Mr. George Goodstein,
your legal advisor, and my father Albert Kasdan, past president of the Jewish
Funeral Directors of America, Inc. They have assured me that I will receive
your full cooperation, and for this, I am truly grateful.

Will you be good enough to help me evaluate some trends in the Reform Jewish
community in practices concerning Nihum Avelim? From my own limited observation
and from conversations with a few Rabbis, I feel that some interesting changes
are taking place. I would like to evaluate, for example, the extent and
significance of the trend of calling at the Funeral Home the night before the
funeral. Several Rabbis are quite concerned with this particular development and
with other emerging practices. Any information you can give will help me
identify these trends.

I will be greatly in your debt, if you will help me, as a Rabbi-to-be, by
filling out the enclosed questionnaire, and returning it to me in a few days.
Thanking you in advance, I am

Very truly yours,

Peter E. Kasdan
Senior Student
HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, Ohio

ENCLOSURE

Questionnaire

consistent misspelling of YOREH

FOOTNOTES:

1. Jessica Mitford, The American Way of Death (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).
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