HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES

AUTHOR STACY LAVESON

TITLE DEATHBED CONFESSION:
BEING THERE WHEN IT HAPPENS

TYPE OF THESIS: D.H.L ( ) Rabbinic (✓)

Master's ( ) D. Min ( )

1. May Circulate ( )

2. Is restricted (✓) for 2 years.

   Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses for a period of no more than ten years.

   I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. ___ yes ✓ no

March 4, 1993
Date

Stacy Laveson
Signature of Author

Library Record

Microfilmed _____
Date

_____
Signature of Library Staff Member

Report on the Thesis of Stacy Laveson

Deathbed Confession: Being There While it Happens

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman

Ever since Elisabeth Kubler Ross's 1972 classic, On Death and Dying, Americans have been jogged into recognition that as a nation they are positively phobic over dying. Drawn to movies glorifying violent death through war or crime, but simultaneously repulsed at the thought of anyone actually dying around us, we have erected a protective wall around our own mortality, preferring to imagine that death never comes. What Kubler Ross depicted as national ignorance regarding the process of dying could equally have been demonstrated beyond the boundaries of the United States in particular, as it typifies modern, western, scientific culture in general. It can even be argued that from the European colonizers of this country to the scientific enterprise itself, the entire history of western "accomplishment" has been fueled and driven by a sacred vision of overcoming death. Think, for example, of the intrepid explorers who pushed on mercilessly to Florida, because they hoped to find a fountain of youth, or of the science of mechanics which has pursued as its unique holy grail the invention of a perpetual motion machine. Denial of death goes very deep in our collective psyche.

By itself, this is hardly news any more. But like the weather, our fear of death is (as they say) something everyone discusses, while doing nothing about it. Stacy Laveson has given us a thesis that is calculated to do something about it.

Her work thus addresses this consuming need to deny death. In contrast to western culture, Ms. Laveson emphasizes the traditional liturgy of death-bed confession, urging us as modern Jews to recapture our right, indeed, our responsibility, to take dying seriously, and to prepare for death spiritually. Laveson's interest in dying is both personal and academic. She recalls visiting Joe in the nursery home, Joe who had worked for Pony Express (of all things) and demonstrated a "gentle acceptance of death"; and her friend Tim, who died slowly of AIDS but was able to do so with aplomb because he confessed daily as his life slipped away. Why, she wonders aloud, do we all not learn from Tim, and claim our own religious confession tradition? Hence this thesis: a very solid piece of scholarship that traces the rabbinic confession liturgy from its putative biblical origins all the way through classical mishnaic and talmudic literature, and then well beyond into the kabbalistic era where confession became a complex liturgical norm.

Laveson leaves no doubt about the minimal role that confession had in the Bible. Here as elsewhere, Rabbis found proof texts for their own beliefs on the subject, but biblical Jews simply did not spend their time in prayer about anything, least of all, dying. The first several chapters make it clear, in fact, that until the end of the geonic age, not much emphasis was

given to the death-bed phenomenon. Even those Rabbis who advocated daily confession did not compose much of the complicated ritual that we now associate with confessing before we die. Pre-geonic contributions are largely limited to confessions by criminals, an issue raised by M. Sanhedrin. Others may -- indeed, should -- confess, but they may say what they will. To some extent, 10th-century worthies (Saadiah and Rabbenu Nissim) provide some verbal guidance, but in large part, nothing substantive is composed until Nachmanides, whose Torat Ha'adam became a central study of dying and death in Jewish tradition.

Given the terrors of the Crusader era for German Jewry and the subsequent rise of Chasidut in Ashkenaz, one might have expected a detailed liturgy of confession from Yehudah HeChasid or Eleazer of Worms, but instead, liturgical expansion of the confession comes from Sefarad, particularly through the Zohar. Only then does liturgically ritualized preparation from death becomes central to Jewish consciousness.

The strength of this thesis is largely apparent in its author's insistence on following through her subject to its very end. Laveson thus traces the legal literature from the Rif all the way through Maimonides, the Tur, the Shulchan Arukh, and the acharonic commentaries, in order to see what novelty each authority presents. But above all, she traces developments through specific pietistic writings, all of which build on the Zoharic tradition. Aaron Berechiah of Mantua's Ma'avar Yabok (published, 1626), is clearly the most important of such works, but Isaiah Horowitz's Shnei Luchot Habrit (1649) and Simon Frankfurter's Sefer Hachayim (1703) are significant volumes also, especially the latter which draws on the European ambience of what Campbell has labelled "religion of the heart" to provide the pious with a simple manual on dying. These books are detailed lucidly by Laveson, who sets each one in historical context.

At the end, Laveson turns to her own time, and takes up the personal and academic theme that motivates her work. No one more than Woody Allen epitomizes America's passion for life of the flesh. In Sleeper (1973), he cheats death through being frozen through the centuries; and in his later Crimes and Misdemeanors he flirts with an outright denial of the basic premise on which religious faith in an ultimately just fate depends. It is Allen who supplies Laveson with her subtitle. "I'm not afraid to die," he says, "I just don't want to be there when it happens."

On the contrary, Laveson argues in her synoptic chapter, be sure to be there when it happens. A variety of literary and religious snapshots are then adduced to justify the claim that dying consciously is what we all want after all.

Ms. Laveson has thus provided us with mandatory reading. It ought to be on the curricula of every D. Min. program, as it ought to be on the shelf of every rabbi who purports to be able to counsel the dying. At once logically and compellingly presented, this comprehensive work is a rabbinic thesis at its best.

Deathbed Confession:
Being There When It Happens

Stacy Laveson

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 4, 1993
Referee: Professor Lawrence A. Hoffman

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friends and family for their constant support and guidance, not only during the thesis writing process, but throughout my life. I am blessed with a loving family and devoted friends. Their generous concern, understanding, and good humor have both encouraged and guided me. Without their many long distance phone calls, cards, and boxes of chocolate, I am not sure this thesis would have been written.

In my years of study at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I have learned many lessons from learned and caring professors and rabbis. Their real concern for my intellectual, professional, and spiritual growth has helped me to realize my goals. I wish to thank in particular my advisor and teacher, Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, whose enthusiasm and scholarship guided through every step of writing this thesis. His gentle insistence upon intellectual honesty and clarity motivated both my research and writing. At every turn, Dr. Hoffman's creative ideas, expert editorial skills, and respect for my own ideas inspired me and fostered my growth.

The support and understanding of Rabbis Levine and Panken of Congregation Rodeph Sholom have enabled me to

complete my thesis. I greatly respect the warmth, intellect, and commitment of both, and am proud to call them my rabbis. Their generosity, caring, and love of Judaism are models of excellence. Thank you.

I owe a tremendous measure of gratitude to Tim Kann, who died from AIDs on March 20, 1992. In his life, Tim graced me with his overwhelming honesty, vitality and passion. It is through Tim's example that I came to truly appreciate the value of confession and its important role in the dying process. Despite the pain and uncertainty Tim experienced during his final days of his life, he also exuded an unusual sense of tranquility, acceptance, and completion.

In retrospect, I attribute these characteristics to Tim's use of confession during throughout his illness. He used his final days as a preparation for death and showed me the power inherent in sincere confession. Tim's confession was characterized by three essential elements, which I have come to understand as fundamental to the deathbed confession: an acute honesty, a relentless search for truth, and a love of confrontation with God, self, and others. Tim demonstrated that the deathbed confession is not only an academic issue to be studied, but a practical and useful rite as well. I am blessed with the opportunity I had to spend so much time with Tim in his last days of life, and will forever treasure the insight I gained as a result of the precious

time we shared. His memory continues to inspire and motivate me.

Finally, I thank God who has blessed me with life. God is the true Source of permanence in my life. May God's name be sanctified and magnified...

INTRODUCTION

My interest in death and dying began when, as a teenager, I spent many hours over the course of three years visiting my grandfather in nursing homes and hospitals. During this time, I gained a unique awareness of the fragility of life, which is often veiled from adolescents. Death and serious illness were tangible realities in my daily life as my grandfather, "Mutt," hovered between life and death for much of this time. My grandfather's imminent death created an ever present drama in my life. Yet despite this fact, I also spent many joyful and memorable hours with him, singing old songs and hearing the same stories day after day. It was during this time that he taught me and my sister basic Yiddish (which we later taught our dog to understand).

While visiting Mutt, I became acquainted with other patients in the nursing home and hospitals where he resided. I will never forget Joe, one of his many roommates. Joe, who was 97 years old when we met, told me that he was a courier for the Pony Express (I doubted the veracity of this statement). What was most striking about Joe however, in addition to his vivid cowboy stories, was his gentle acceptance of death. Joe actually wanted to

die, having lived a long, and satisfying life. Such a marked impression did Joe's attitude leave on me that even today, 14 years after his death, I still vividly remember his words and his calm resolve. "This is no longer my world," he remarked, "I've done all the living I can do, and it's time for me to die." The equanimity with which Joe approached death surprised me, a young woman with most of my life yet unlived. How could one possibly **want** to die, I wondered. Yet Joe seemed peacefully resigned to his death.

I witnessed a similar attitude toward death in some of the other nursing home patients as well. They seemed remarkably calm in the face of death. Today, I liken it to a pregnant woman who, at the end of her ninth month of pregnancy, can't wait for the birth of her child. She has been pregnant long enough, is uncomfortable, and wants relief from her burden. Her desire to give birth overshadows her fear of pain and the unknown associated with childbirth.

Similarly, a person plagued with illness or the physical and mental ravages of old age, may feel that she has lived long enough, accomplished all she can, and that death will relieve her of her burden. These people seem to possess a faith that death will bring them comfort. Through the example of many of the people I met at the

nursing home, I began to view death with less apprehension and terror. I saw that death was an inescapable reality of life, and that for some, death was actually a central part of life, the only part they had left to live! These people **lived their death**, making death another stage of life to be confronted. Gradually, I came to view death not as a moment in time, but as a process. Death, then, in my mind, became the last stage of life.

In the years since my grandfather's death, gaining greater insight into death has become a consuming passion for me. In particular, I have endeavored to understand Judaism's approach to death. The more I learned of Judaism's attitude to death, the more my own was reinforced, for I found that Judaism too viewed death as the final stage of life. This I concluded after studying the Jewish rituals for death, mourning, and burial, as well as the Jewish emphasis upon the sanctify of life (and while death is part of life, it too is sanctified). My outlook on death was reinforced not only by my academic studies of death and dying, but through my work with sick and dying people. Through this work, I have found great meaning in my relationships with those on the threshold of death. Where the physical and mental condition of a dying person allow, there is a remarkable level of honesty and insight rarely found in healthy individuals. I am often reminded

of the transience of life, and of the holiness of every lived moment.

Similarly, the Jewish rituals for mourning and burial emphasize the sacredness of life and encourage the acceptance of death. For example, the standard form of the mourner's *kaddish* never mentions death, but rather, praises God and affirms life. Moreover, the practice of throwing dirt on the casket prevents the mourner from escaping the reality of death. These, and many other rituals, guide the mourner through the grieving process which follows the death of a loved one. So complete is Judaism's system of mourning that death-related rituals are prescribed for the mourners throughout their lifetime, recognizing the persistence of the need to mourn and remember the dead (one commemorates a death on the anniversary of death every year).

Judaism has developed an elaborate and effective system of burial and mourning. Jewish mourners everywhere, in varying degrees, practice these well-known rituals. Even school children learn of these rituals in their synagogue classrooms and life-cycle courses. Missing from the textbooks however, and absent from the practice of many Jews, is a ritual for dying. While such a ritual does exist, little is known about it. For me, Jewish rituals which guide a person through the process of dying seems

vitally important. Yet, I could not imagine how in all of my studies and experience with death, I never found a detailed account of the ritual which a Jew performs on the deathbed. I was familiar with the practice of saying the *shema* on the deathbed, and knew that a confession was recited before dying. Apart from these two facts, I knew nothing of the liturgy or rites Judaism prescribes for the deathbed.

Thus, I decided to explore the deathbed confession in an attempt to accomplish the following goals: to trace the historical development of the confession, to understand the spiritual and theological implications of the confession and accompanying liturgy, and to evaluate the contemporary usage of the confession on the deathbed. When I began my study of deathbed confession, I encountered many obstacles. First, I uncovered very few references to this phenomenon in primary classical sources. Second, I discovered even fewer citations of it in secondary literature, the card catalog presenting a dead end in my inquiry into confession on the deathbed. It seemed that Jews throughout most of history were simply not concerned with *vidui al hamitah* (confession on the deathbed). Over the course of many months, I traced every lead and conducted a comprehensive study of confession on the deathbed.

In so doing, I have discovered the beauty and power of the Jewish ritual of deathbed confession. The liturgy and ritual prescribed for the moments before death promote self-examination as well as an acceptance of death. Furthermore, the confession and accompanying prayers offer comfort during the process of dying. Through the confession, a person is able to ask for forgiveness in order to purify one's soul before dying. These rituals directly address the needs of dying people, guiding them through this most mysterious and awesome stage of life.

In an age when the percentage of older people is growing, and the presence of deadly disease such as AIDs and cancer is overwhelming, there is a strong need for such a ritual. Yet very few Jews utilize the rituals for the deathbed. While for some it is impossible to recite the confession (one does not always know that death is imminent), others are simply not aware that Judaism maintains the practice of confession on the deathbed. Even fewer realize that Judaism directly instructs all dying people to confess. Moreover, very few Jewish people who learned of my thesis topic knew that Jews **do** confess on the deathbed. Many insisted to me that Reform Jews do not confess before dying. However, confession is more than a Jewish ritual, it is a commandment, and the deathbed confession appears as such even in the Reform rabbi's manual.

This thesis, I hope, is the beginning of an effort to increase general awareness of confession on the deathbed, for such a profound ritual should not be wasted, hidden beneath pages of ancient texts and esoteric theology. Rather, the words of the confession would be more effective heard from the mouths of the sick and dying.

Chapter One
Confession in Classical Sources

The exploration of confession on the death bed in classical sources begins with the Bible. A search of the Bible, however, reveals no explicit references to this phenomenon. While in later classical texts (the Talmud and Tur for example) a number of biblical citations of *vidui* are associated with confession on the deathbed, the Bible itself makes no direct reference to confessing before death. Similarly, certain instances in which biblical characters have prayed before their deaths (and merited God's mercy) are later interpreted by the Rabbis as examples of confession before death. These biblical sources thus later became prooftexts of the efficacy of confession on the deathbed despite the apparent absence of this phenomenon in the Bible.

The earliest direct reference to confession on the deathbed in classical sources appears in the Mishnah. While a number of passages in the Mishnah refer to either confession of sin (primarily on Yom Kippur) or confession of the second tithe, only one passage deals directly with confession at death. Whereas confessing before death is generally known as *vidui al ha-mitah* and *vidui sh'khiv me'ra*, (confession on the deathbed and confession for the critically ill), the Mishnah prescribes confession not for

a mortally ill person at all, but for one who is condemned to die and is within moments of facing execution.

M. Sanhedrin 6:2 directs a person who is about to be put to death to confess. When one stands ten cubits from the place of stoning, one is instructed to "make confession, for it is the practice of all who are about to be put to death to make confession." Important to note is that it is not the practice of all who are about to die to make confession, but only of those who are about to be executed. The Mishnah establishes the existence and validity of such a confession through the following biblical prooftext: Joshua entreats Achan, "my son, I pray thee, give glory to the Eternal, the God of Israel, and make confession to God, and tell me what you have done, do not hide it from me" (Joshua 7:19). Central to the discussion of *vidui al hamitah*, this passage appears frequently throughout the literature on the subject, as we will see in the course of this thesis.

In this passage, Achan, along with the Israelite army, broke faith with God thereby incurring guilt. God commanded the Israelites not to take of that which was to be designated for God; when Achan transgressed this directive, God grew incensed and tells Joshua that they confess in order to repair the covenantal trust they had betrayed. In response to God's plea, Joshua then entreats Achan to confess and purify himself. Here, the confession assumes the form used by Achan in answering Joshua,

"vaya'an Akhan et-Yehoshua, vayomar, omna anokhi chatati laAdonay Elohei Yisrael "Indeed, I have sinned against the Eternal, and thus and thus have I done" (Joshua 7:20). Achan proceeds to confess his sins in detail, delineating the ways in which he has transgressed God's commandments. The initiative for this confession is God's admonition to Joshua that the Israelites have sinned by running from their enemies and transgressed the covenant with God by stealing and keeping forbidden objects in their homes. In order to gain their sanctity, (Joshua 7:12), the Israelites must first destroy the accursed objects in their midst following which they must confess to God.

Furthermore, according to the Mishnah, confessing at the time of death grants the confessor a share in the world to come. It is apparent, then, that in the tanaitic period confession is a means through which people guilty of a crime serious enough to warrant execution, may atone for this sin and achieve redemption through their death. What proof do we have that confession before death makes atonement for those who are guilty, asks the Mishnah? Joshua 7:25 provides the explanation: "And Joshua said, why have you troubled us? The Eternal shall trouble you this day. And all Israel stoned him [Achan] with stones, and burned them [his forbidden possessions, animals, tent, and all he had] with fire, after they had pelted them with stones." Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:2 explains the Joshua

passage: "This day you are troubled, but you will not be troubled in the world to come." Thus, although a sinner incurs guilt in this world, confession procures atonement and entrance to the world to come.

While no specific confessional formula is given, the Mishnah does state that if one does not know how to confess, it is acceptable to say, "May my death be an atonement for my sins." This brief formula is later incorporated into the liturgy of the confession on the deathbed. Inherent in offering an alternative to those who do not know how to confess is the assumption that there is a specific manner in which one should confess. That Achan's confession is used as the precedent for confession before death suggests a biblical paradigm for the rite, namely, "Thus and thus have I done," followed by a detailed explication of one's transgressions.

One guideline to confessing is introduced by Rabbi Judah, an Amora from the third century (d.c. 290 CE). In his opinion, if one is wrongly accused and sentenced through false testimony, one may say, "Let my death be an atonement for all my sins except this sin." The sages rejected Rabbi Judah's ruling however. All people who are convicted of a crime could easily claim innocence and thus, would confess in this way in order to clear themselves.

Moreover, using Rabbi Judah's disclaimer discredits the witnesses and seriously compromises justice.

Tosefta's brief discussion regarding confession on the deathbed primarily reflects information which appears in the mishnah as well. It thus exemplifies the Talmud's penchant to provide commentary on the Mishnah as it already existed in the third century. T. Sanhedrin 9:5 contends that even a criminal sentenced to death by the *bet din* can earn a place in the world to come through confession. "Those who are put to death by the *bet din* have a place in *olam haba* because they have confessed all their sins." This assertion attests to the Rabbi's faith in the great power of confession at the time of death. So strong is the efficacy of confession to atone for one's transgressions, that even those who have committed a crime heinous enough to warrant execution can be cleansed through admission of guilt. T. San. 9:5 continues, "when one is ten cubits from the place of stoning, one should be told to confess. It once happened that when a certain person was approaching the place of stoning, he was told to confess. He then said 'May my death be an atonement for my sins, but if I have sinned [in the way you have said], then do not pardon me, for may the *bet din* of Israel be clean [upright].' And when this matter was brought before the *bet din* their eyes flowed with tears. They said, 'To restore him is

impossible and the only conclusion to this matter is that behold, his blood still hangs from his neck.'"

We have seen that in both the Tosefta and the Mishnah, confessing before one's death is prescribed only for a condemned person immediately prior to execution. The Talmud not only extends the discussion of confession for the case of one condemned to die, but introduces additional circumstances in which one must confess as well. Similar to the Mishnah, however, the Talmud neither provides a formula for the confession nor offers an extensive explanation of the rite itself. While one passage deals only with the confession of a condemned person, the other prescribes confession for one who is ill and about to die. It is this second passage, Shabbat 32a, which serves as the basis for later developments of the *vidui al ha-mitah*, the confession on the deathbed.

Sanhedrin 43b does not elaborate extensively upon the discussion found in M. Sanhedrin 6:2. The purpose of the gemara to Sanhedrin is not to elaborate further upon the phenomenon of confession, but to outline Achan's sins and to distinguish between secret and revealed transgressions. It presents no new information and thus, affords us no greater understanding of the confession itself. Thus, although Sanhedrin 43b fails to give us more insight into

confession on the deathbed, it does reiterate the central points found in the Mishnah: one should be urged to confess; whoever confesses has a share in the world to come; and confession makes atonement for one's sins. In both of these passages, Joshua 7:19-25 is employed as a prooftext establishing the validity and efficacy of confession. (M. Sanhedrin 6:2 and Sanhedrin 43b both add that if one does not know how to confess one may say, "May my death be an atonement for my sins.").

In the Talmud, the second reference to deathbed confession is found in Shabbat 32a. Of the two, this section is the most pertinent to the study of confession on the deathbed. While the previous passage we examined discusses confession before execution, Shabbat 32a extends the circumstance in which one must confess to include illness or imminent death. Since the confession before death is generally recited on one's deathbed (and not by a condemned person about to be stoned to death), this passage is crucial in establishing the practice of confession for one who is mortally ill.

In Shabbat 32a the Rabbis taught in a *baraita*, "whoever becomes ill and is about to die, is told, 'make confession,' for all who are about to die must confess." The passage continues,

> When a person goes outside, it is similar to one who has been given over to an officer to be brought before a court for trial. When one has a headache, it is similar to when one has been placed in prisoner's chains. When one gets into bed and falls, it appears to be like one who ascends the executioner's scaffold (to be punished), for all who ascend the scaffold to be punished, if they have great advocates, they will be saved. But, if they do not have great advocates, they will not be saved. And these are the great advocates of human beings: repentance and good deeds. And even if 999 teach on behalf of a person's guilt, and one teaches on behalf of a person's merit (in the person's favor), then that person is saved, as it is said, "If a person has one angel, an advocate, one of 1,000, to tell a person what is right, then the angel is gracious unto him and says, redeem him from descending into the pit," (Job 32:23).
>
> Rabbi Eliezar, son of Rabbi Yossi the Galilean said: even 999 parts of that one angel who supports a person's guilt, and one part supports the person's innocence, the person is saved, as it is said, one advocate in every 1,000.

Hence, Shabbat 32a demonstrates not only a connection between confessing on the deathbed and confessing before execution, but illustrates the immense power of the confession. The passage likens confession to an angel; both are advocates who have the power to save a person, to spare one from eternal guilt. Confession possesses the power to redeem a human being, to cleanse one of sin and guilt thereby facilitating entrance to the world-to-come. Moreover, the theology underlying this phrase suggests that while sin causes sickness, it is confession that brings about healing. So strong is the power of one's earnest confession that even one confession of the smallest scale grants atonement and rescues one from death's hold.

The paucity of references to confession on the deathbed that we noted in the Mishnah and the Talmud, is matched by the midrash as well. In fact, the tannaitic and amoraic periods gives us only Mishnaic reference directly relevant to the discussion of confession at death. The passage, Sifre to Numbers 5:6-7, is so significant that hereafter, Numbers 5:6-7 not only comes to be understood as the basis of the commandment to confess on one's deathbed (as we will see throughout the remainder of this work). The midrashic passage explicates the following verse, "All souls who incur guilt, shall confess the sin which brought on their guilt." Through the midrash we learn two lessons of major importance. First, without prior confession, a sin-offering alone does not effect atonement. This assertion emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's sins as well as admitting them through the act of confession.

Second, Rabbi Natan's assertion at the end of this passage is integral to the discussion of confession on the deathbed. Rabbi Natan states that, "This passage (Numbers 5:6-7) serves as the foundation of the principle that all those who are about to die must confess their sins." Hereafter, those who write about confession on the deathbed look to Numbers 5:6-7 to provide a biblical precedent upon which to base the practice of confession on the deathbed which is developed after this period.

An additional reference to confession for one condemned to die is appears in Semachot 44a, an 8th century work. One of the Minor Tractates, Semachot 44a closely follows the discussion found in M. Sanhedrin 6:2. In fact, this passage deviates from the mishnaic discussion at only one point, adding that Achan states, "I have sinned," (Joshua 7:19) to emphasize that it is he, and not his wife or children, who has sinned. Thus, upon confessing, one admits to and takes responsibility for one's sins. Semachot asserts that this demonstrates that he has confessed in good faith. Confessing truthfully is important in assuring that confession will make atonement for the accused.

The exploration of confession on the deathbed during the tannaitic and amoraic periods has not been a fruitless one; the Mishnah and Talmud have provided the fundamental principle that one must confess before one's death, and the midrash manages to read confession on the deathbed into the biblical injunction to confess one's sins. Despite these few references to *vidui al hamitah*, the phenomenon is still undeveloped during this entire period, with only the basic directive in place.

Chapter Two
From Talmud to Tur

Even by the end of the amoraic period, we have seen little development in the rituals and liturgy of the confession on the deathbed. The geonic period displays an equally limited amount of material written about this subject, the geonim and their Palestinian and North African contemporaries paying little attention to this still uncultivated phenomenon. A distinct lack of novelty is present in the scant references of the geonim to the *vidui al hamitah.*

While the following authorities remark on the confession on the deathbed, they offer no significant insights or new developments. Their comments seem to suggest that from 500-1000 CE, confessing before death was not of major concern for Jews. In his commentary to Shabbat 32a, for example, Rabbenu Chananel (990-1055) just repeats the talmudic text adding no new decisions. In his commentary to Shabbat 32a, Rabbenu Nissim (990-1062) adds only that R. Yitzchak, son of Rav Yehoshua, maintains that people should eternally request mercy so that they will not fall ill. This statement infers that praying at the time of illness, and by extension, death, may have curative effects.

[illegible] Maharal [illegible] Derashot Mesorah [illegible] pp. 48 [illegible]

[illegible] Aaron Berechiah [illegible] Modena. Maavar Yabok [illegible] pt. [illegible] Yerushalayim: Yahadut [illegible] 1967.

[illegible] Rabbi Chaim Zanvel [illegible] Goldberg. [illegible] Halakhah (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd. [illegible] 1991), p. [illegible]

Regarding the confession said at the moment of death, Rabbenu Nissim merely reiterates the ruling of the Talmud that whoever is about to die should be told to confess, for this is the way of all who are dying. While he does not directly contribute to the development of the confession on the deathbed, however, Rabbenu Nissim is credited with the composition of a confession which is still recited by some on Erev Yom Kippur.[1] In the 17th century, the *vidui* of Rabbenu Nissim was also recited by Torah scholars on their deathbed and R. Nissim's is not the only liturgical composition in this regard.[2]

We find also that while Saadia Gaon (892-942) does not include a confession on the deathbed in his *siddur*, he does compose a prayer for recovery to be recited immediately prior to the *vidui skhiv me'ra*.[3] So, despite the fact that there is still no development in the formula of the deathbed confession, the prayers composed by Saadia Gaon and Rabbenu Nissim begin to fill the void between the theory that confession is desirable and the lack of an exact liturgical ritual that people might draw upon to satisfy the theory. While the direct association of these

---

[1] This confession can be found in Rabbi Nosson Scherman, The Complete Art Scroll Machzor: Yom Kippur (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1990), pp. 48-51.

[2] Aaron Berechiah b. Moses of Modena, Maavar Yabok (1626; rpt. Jerusalem: Yashfeh, 1927), section II:7.

[3] Rabbi Chaim Binyamin Goldberg, Mourning in Halachah (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1991), p.438.

prayers with confession on the deathbed occurs only in a later period, the appearance of prayers for mercy and healing point to an increased interest in illness and death.

Like other authorities of the period, Alfasi (1013-1103) too does not directly address the issue of confession on the deathbed. He does, however, remark upon the confession of Yom Kippur, examining and expounding upon various types of sins and the appropriate confession for each one (end of Yoma 36b). Similarly, even in northern France, Rashi (1040-1105), Alfasi's contemporary, uses his commentary to the Talmud merely to clarify ambiguities in the text, offering no innovations to the deathbed confession. An example of Rashi's treatment of the confession can be seen in his commentary to Shabbat 32a. The Talmud states that those who are ill and about to die should be told to confess. Seizing upon the lack of specificity of this statement, Rashi asserts that "*ha'omdim sham*," those who are standing by the patient bear the responsibility for urging the patient to confess. While Rashi does not develop the actual confession, he does indicate obliquely that one should not die alone; other people must be present, for the injunction to confess is not upon the sick person alone, but also upon those who surround the sick person.

Thus, we have seen that the confession on the deathbed is not foremost on the agenda until after the geonic age. No major developments are established during this period and no major debates take place. Not until the Rishonim in Europe do we begin to see an active interest in confession on the deathbed. Through the end of the geonic period, no specific formula or instructions guiding the act of confessing exists. It becomes evident that under the influence of the Rishonim of Europe, the confession begins to take shape, both liturgically and theologically.

Contributing to the proliferation of confession as an important part of Jewish ritual are the German Pietists, or *Chasidei Ashkenaz*. During the 12th and 13th centuries, direct confession becomes for them, a central component of religious life in general, and a tool which facilitates initiation into pietistic orders in particular. While the German Pietists do not deal directly with confession on the deathbed, they do make the act of confession integral to their spiritual, moral, and religious wellbeing. Thus, while deathbed confession is not focused upon specifically, the vital role of confession in general among the German Pietists reflects a religious milieu in which deathbed confession might be more easily appreciated.

Strongly influencing the thought and practice of the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* are the writings of the earlier Jewish

mystics. Many of the ideas and rituals of the pietists were informed by and developed as a direct result of contact with such mystical texts and thought. As well as a heightened concern with drawing nearer to God (or the *shekhinah*) and in preparing one's soul for such a task, these pietists were also characterized by an increased attention to prayer and "meticulous concern for ritual."[4] These attitudes, along with the incorporation of confession into the lives of German Pietists, pave the way for the acceptance of confession on the deathbed during this period. Thus, the influence of the early mystics upon the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* is integral to the discussion of confession on the deathbed in that it is clear that during this and later periods, where mysticism moves, there is a greater interest in confession.

Early mystical texts (including Sefer Yetsirah and *hekhalot* literature) arrived in the Rhineland via southern Italy during the ninth century, the very period that the Kalonymus family is credited with laying the foundation of Rhineland Jewry.[5] Soon, the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* were well versed in the recent developments in Jewish mysticism. According to the tradition of the German Pietists of the 12th century, the "new mysteries" of mysticism, including matters of the Merkavah and the power of the system of

---

4 Robert M. Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 423.
5 ibid., p. 422.

gematria, were transmitted in the year 870 to R. Moses ben Kalonymus in Lucca by Abu Aharon, the son of R. Samuel Ha-Nasi of Baghdad. Following this revelation, R. Moses went to Germany where he "laid the foundations of the mystical tradition of the Chasidei Ashkenaz, which grew around this new element (the mysteries of the *Merkavah*)."[6] According to Scholem, this chain of names links Babylonian and Palestinian mysticism to its later developments in Germany and France. Moreover, he adds "There is no doubt that at the end of the geonic period, mysticism spreads to Italy as well, in the form of *Merkavah* literature."[7]

It is apparent through the writing of the German Pietists (including a *gematria*-based midrash fragment that speaks of angels active during the Exodus from Egypt[8]) that mysticism directly influenced their attitudes and practice. But we can trace the chain of mystical influece further still. The German pietistic literature was eventually read by the kabbalists, informing their attitudes as well. Evidence of this phenomenon appears in the fact that Bachyia Ibn Pekudah's Chovot Halevavot, written in the early 11th century, was translated by the kabbalists in 1160 on the initiative of Meshullam ben Jacob and the circle of kabbalists in Lunel.[9] The widespread success of

---

6 ibid., p. 33.
7 ibid., p. 33.
8 ibid., p. 35. Found in the British Museum, Ms. 752 fol. 132b.
9 ibid., p. 36.

this work is evidence of the popularity of the mystical and pietistic notions contained within.

Furthermore, a direct correlation can be established between the heightened interest in repentance and confession and new trends in mysticism. During the geonic period these mystical trends included, " The ascent of repentance to reach the Throne of Glory [as] interpreted in a late Midrash [Pesikta Rabbati 185a] as an actual ascent of the repentant sinner through all the firmaments...The process of repentance is closely connected here with the process of ascent to the Chariot."[10] Where the early mystics underscored the importance of repentance in drawing one closer to the Divine Presence, the German Pietists went further, making central to their religious practice the use of confession. The *Chasidei Ashkenaz* of the 11th and 12th century Germany thus established the practice of public confession.

Sefer Chasidim, written by R. Yehuda HeChasid, (1150-1217) reflects the importance of confession as well as the mystical intention of prayer. In Sefer Chasidim, an elaborate penitential system exists which facilitates the transition from non-pietism into pietism.[11] Marcus

---

10 Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1974), p. 32.

11 Ivan G. Marcus, Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 76.

indicates that repentance and atonement were the very roots German piety.[12] It is through direct confession to another person, a Sage of the pietist movement, that one was initiated as a pietist. "The ritual drama of making oral confession to another Jew was one of the boldest innovations in Judah's sectarian form of pietism and he [Judah] sought to legitimate it in Sefer Chasidim as being part of earlier Judaism."[13]

Public confession, acompanied by public humiliation experienced as a result of the equally public penances, was the vehicle through which one's status changed. These acts, according to Marcus, represent a symbolic death, which complete the initiation rite into pietism.[14] The association of the initiation rite of the pietists with a symbolic death suggests the liminality of the initiation experience. That confession is the vehicle through which this transition is achieved makes a statement about the power of confession in facilitating transition at a liminal moment(whether it be the changing of one's status from non-pietist to pietist, or the ultimate liminal experience, death). So powerful were the affects of confession, that at times "a Sage was successful in winning over a non-Pietist through confession and penances."[15]

---

12 ibid., p. 77.
13 ibid., p. 82.
14 ibid., p. 77.
15 ibid., p. 78.

Not only was confession capable of transforming one into a pietist, but the emphasis upon confession informed other areas of religious life for the *Chasidei Ashkenaz* as well. For example, according to Scholem, the act of confession and repentance among the pietists strongly influenced Jewish ethical teaching and behavior.[16] The incorporation of confession into the ritual system of the Chasidei Ashkenaz was widespread and not confined to Sefer Chasidim alone. For example, R. Elazar Rokeach, a disciple of Judah HeChasid, includes a section on *vidui* in his work, Harokeach, in which he speaks of approaching the holy throne of God through confession and repentance.[17] As is the case with Sefer Chasidim, HaRokeach does not make specific mention of confession on the deathbed. Yet despite the lack of attention payed to confession on the deathbed, the centrality of confession and the great emphasis placed upon its power to facilitate a major life change among the German Pietists, paved the way for acceptance of the deathbed confession in later generations.

For German Jewry, the late 12th and 13th centuries witness wide-spread hatred that went so far as anti-Jewish violence.[18] For Sephardic Jews, on the other hand, the

16 Scholem, p. 37.

17 R. Elazar Rokeach, HaRokeach, p. 9.

18 Seltzer, p. 365.

12th and 13th centuries are a period of great freedom in which typical Sephardi culture reached its zenith. Whereas the Ashkenazic Rishonim pay little attention to confession on the deathbed, it is the Sephardim who have the greatest impact upon the development of ritual and liturgy associated with this phenomenon. Among the first to elaborate specifically upon *vidui al hamita* is Maimonides (1135-1204). In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides clearly establishes a link between the biblical injunction to make confession, and the deathbed. While much of his discussion deal with general confession of sin, Maimonides extends the obligation to include at death, thereby making his entire discourse on confession relevant to confession before death.

In the Mishnah Torah, Maimonides contends that verbal confession (as opposed to silent confession) is a positive commandment.[19] The biblical source of this commandment, according to Maimonides, is Numbers 5:6-7, the very prooftext used in the Mishnah and Talmud: "If a man or a woman sins against another...they must confess the sin that they committed." "How does one confess," asks the Rambam in the Mishnah Torah? One should state,

> I implore you, God, I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity before you by doing thus and thus.

---

19 Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah, 1:1. According the Sefer HaMitzvot, confession is positive commandment #73.

> Behold, I regret and am embarrassed by my deeds. I promise never to repeat this act again.[20]

This formula comprises the essence of the confessional prayer. As Maimonides asserts that confession is required on the deathbed, and that this formula is the only one presented in his chapter, it can be assumed that this confessional formula applies to the deathbed as well as the other contexts Maimonides includes. This formula, derived from Yoma 66a, describes the confessional prayer of the High Priests on Yom Kippur.

Noteworthy is Maimonides' assertion that sacrifice without a verbal confession as well will not atone for sins. Leviticus 5:5 serves as the source for this directive, "One must confess the sins one has committed." Through this assertion, Maimonidies underscores the necessity of confession in helping to bring about cleansing and atonement; sacrifice and repentance alone do not suffice; confession too is needed in order to complete the atonement process.

Maimonides then establishing a connection between the obligation to confess with the moment of one's death: individuals do not achieve atonement through death until they have repented and confessed. "Those who are sentenced

---

20 ibid., 1:1.

to be executed or lashed by the court do not attain atonement through their death or lashing unless they repent and confess."[21] Thus Maimonides, who notes that verbal confession is a positive commandment, extends this obligation to include the moments before death. Curious, however, is Maimonides' limiting the list of those who are commanded to confess to people about to be executed or lashed to death by the *bet din*. He still operates within the confines of the Mishnah when confession is linked solely to criminals, and not the population in general.

The brief confessional formula which Maimonides includes in the Mishnah Torah thus may be used as the confession at death, although it was not not intended specifically for use in this context. Nachmanides, on the other hand, is the first person who has actually recorded confession to be pronounced on the deathbed. It is this confession, contained in Torat Ha-adam, which is still used today as the central confessional prayer one recites before dying. Thus, more than any other figure, R. Moshe ben Nachman (Nachmanides) is responsible for the formulation of deathbed confession.

Nachmanides' interest in the confession on the deathbed was directly influenced by his personal background. He was born in 1194 in Gerona, Spain and died

---

21 ibid., 1:1.

in 1270 in Eretz Yisrael. In addition to being a talmudist and the foremost halakhic authority in Spain, Nachmanides was also an eminent kabbalist, a central figure of the Gerona circle of kabbalists.[22] In fact, Nachmanides was known as a "great mystic," and, was the "last of the ancient kabbalistic school who received direct transmission of the mystical secrets that were later revealed," according to Rabbi Azriel, himself a distinguished kabbalist.[23]

It took over 1,000 years since the first mention of confession on the deathbed (in the Mishnah), until a confessional formula finally appeared. The question one must ask, therefore, is why the formula is written specifically during this period (in the mid-13th century), and why is it Nachmanides who recorded it. The answer clearly points to Kabbalah and the Zohar as that which stimulates interest in the phenomenon of confession on the deathbed. Nachmanides' association with Kabbalah (according to Scholem, he had "joined the ranks of the kabbalists as a young man [and] prepared the way for reception of the Kabbalah in Spain"[24]) led to his concern with the fate of the soul at death and the integral role confession played in regard to that fate. Thus,

---

22 Scholem contends that were it not for Nachmanides' association with the Gerona kabbalists, they would not have been as influential. Scholem, p. 50.

23 Rabbi Nosson Scherman/ Meir Zlotowitz, eds., The Rishonim (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1982), p. 92.

24 Scholem, p. 50.

Nachmanides paved the way not only for the reception of Kabbalah, but for the receptiveness to confession on the deathbed as well.

The kabbalists' emphasis on the soul, redemption, and yearning for the Divine (*shekhinah*) may have fueled their interest in confession on the deathbed. It is clear that the views of Nachmanides and other kabbalists are found in the wording of confession itself as well as later rituals associated with the deathbed confession. It is Nachmanides, along with the inner circle of the Gerona kabbalists, who discuss the mystical basis of redemption, which becomes thematically important to confession. This notion stems from the view that, "in the Divine realm, the state of redemption is expressed as the end of the exile of the *Shekhinah*, the restoration of the Divine unity throughout all areas of existence."[25] It is through confession on the deathbed, as we will see later in this study, that one effects the unity of the Divine and comes face to face with the *Shekhinah*.

Nachmanides records his views regarding the laws of mourning, reward and punishment, and resurrection of the dead in his treatise entitled Torat Ha'adam.[26] What lends this treatise special significance is Nachmanides'

---

25 Scholem, p. 335.

26 Nachmanides also discusses the fate of the soul following death in Sha'ar Hagemul in the Zohar. Scholem, p. 333.

inclusion of a confessional formula to be used specifically on one's deathbed Prior to him, throughout the 1,000 years since the first directive to confess at death, there is no evidence of a confession intended solely for that occasion. His brief confession provides the cornerstone of the liturgy recited upon death, and is still recited by Jews in every stream of Jewish life upon their deathbeds. Thus, the contribution made by Nachmanides to both the formula and philosophy undergirding the confession make his influence upon this phenomenon unparalleled. Not only was Nachmanides the first to record the confession used on the deathbed, but he was also the first to devote a discussion completely to the subject of *vidui al hamita*.

Before presenting his *vidui*, Nachmanides compiles and synthesizes the existing classical sources dealing with deathbed confession. He includes rabbinic material which we have already seen in the previous chapter (Shabbat 32a, Sanhedrin 43b, and Semachot 44b). To the discussion in Semachot 44b, Nachmanides adds that a tanna was about to die, and it was said to him, "You should confess so that you will not die." Nachmanides explains:

> There are many who confessed and have not died, and there are many who did not confess and did die...on the merit of the dying person's confession, one shall live.

Clearly, for Nachmanides, confession is a potent prayer with the power to avert death.

Nachmanides also incorporates practical instructions about. These simple rules suggest that there is an interest among Jews in confessing and that perhaps a practice of confession already exists. These pragmatic rules are the first we find which instruct one regarding **how** confess. Thus, finally, Jews are able to carry out the directive set forth in the Gemara, that a Jew about to die should confess. According to Nachmanides in Torat Ha'adam, if one is able to confess out loud, one should. If not, one should confess in one's heart. One may confess aloud and in one's heart provided that one is of sound-mind, *hada'adt m'yushav alav*. It becomes clear in Nachmanides' discussion that one must be in a proper mental state in order for confession to be optimally effective. Furthermore, all of these things should not be said before common, ignorant, unlearned people, and not before women or children, lest they cry and their hearts break (causing a premature onset of death for the dying person).

Nachmanides adds that

> if the sick are about to die, do not inform them, lest they go out of their minds. And do not rend garments, lest the dying see this and worry that death is imminent. Do not cry or eulogize the dying patient lest their hearts break from fear and they die prematurely. The comforters should maintain composure and be quiet in the midst of the dying in order not to disturb them.

According to Nachmanides, Numbers 5:6-7 is the

bana av, the biblical source from which confession on the deathbed is derived. In Sifre, Rabbi Natan ties the Numbers text to the act of confessing on the deathbed. This is the source for all those dying to make confession. Nachmanides then cites Sanhedrin 43b and Joshua 7:19, as is the case of Achan. If one does not know how to confess, one should be instructed to say, "May my death be an atonement for my sins." Nachmanides offers additional instruction regarding the actual confession based on the confession of Yom Kippur in Yoma 36b. "Our Rabbis taught in a baraita, how should one confess? Say, *aviti, pashati, chatati,* (I have committed iniquity, transgression, and sin) (Lev. 34:7). And likewise, when one confesses for another, one should say, "Confess for him and for all of the sin of Israel and all of their transgressions." Nachmanides makes the connection between confessing on Yom Kippur; on the deathbed, like Yom Kippur, one should first confess all of the deliberately evil deeds one has committed followed by the mistakes. After reviewing the content of various biblical and talmudic citation which address the issue of confession, Nachmanides asks, how should one confess? In that Nachmanides himself recorded (if not wrote) the central prayer of the confession, this question and the ensuing discussion are of great significance.

Nachmanides's chapter on confession on the deathbed concludes with the actual text on the confession. He states, that this is the order of the confession for the terminally ill as has been handed down to us by *chasidim v'anshei ma'asei*, by rightoues people, and those of good deeds. This term appears to be a generic term, and not one indicating a specific group of individuals. While Nachmanides does not take credit for actually composing the text of the confession, there are no earlier references to an author prior to this. Nowhere does it state who else may have composed this or even, who else was interested in the phenomenon. Thus, the confession has come to be associated with Nachmanides as he was the first to record it and compile a conclusive explanation of textual background of confession. The text of the confession, found in the end of Nachmanides' section regarding death in Torat Ha'adam, is as follows:

> I acknowledge before You, my God and God of my ancestors, that my recovery or my death are both in Your hands. May it be Your will that You heal me with a complete recovery. But if I die, may my death be an atonement for all of my mistakes I have made, the sins I committed, and the rebellious behavior for which I am responsible. May You grant me a portion in the Garden of Eden, and may You allow me to merit entrance into the world to come which lies in store for the righteous.

In the confession, not only does one pray for a complete recovery, but the dying person attests loyalty and faith in God, ready to accept death if this is God's will. Thus, in this brief formula, the dying person bargains with God in

hopes of earning forgivenss and recovery; if this is of no avail, however, one prays for a portion in the world-to-come. Inherent in both of these pleas is a resignation to God's will based on a trust in God. This liturgical formula quickly became the accepted liturgy recited on the deathbed. Even today, Nachmanides confession forms the cornerstone of the confessional *seder*.

The *Zohar* is the central literary work of the Kabbalah. Written primarily between 1280 and 1286 by Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon (who died 1305) in Guadalajara, Spain, the work reflects many of the attitudes prevalent among the Gerona circle of kabbalists (of which Nachmanides was a part). Reflected in the *Zohar* is a heightened interest in death as well as a concern for the fate of the soul following its departure from the body. As a result, the moment of the soul's departure from the body (the moment of death) is the subject of extensive discussion.

In the *Zohar*, it is through confession and repentance at the moment of death that one may alter one's fate. Confession and repentance at the end of one's life are of particular importance in that on the day of death, human beings are judged. According to the *Zohar*, the last day of one's life is the ultimate and final Day of Judgment. The fate of one's soul is dependent upon the outcome of the judgment which occurs on this awesome day. Thus, in the

Zohar, we find, for the first time in Jewish literature, that confession plays a prominent role in one's death and is of major consequence in determining the fate of the soul.

Scholem characterizes the central elements of the *Zohar* in the following statement:

> In a pseudepigraph attributed to Simeon b. Yochai and his friends, Moses de Leon clothed his interpretation of Judaism in an archaic garb- in the form of long and short Midrashim of the Torah and the three books Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations. The explanation in the book revolves around two poles- one consisting of the mysteries of the world of the *Sefirot* that constitute the life of the Divine, which is also reflected in many symbols in the created world; and the other of the situation of the Jews and their fate both in this world and in the world of souls.[27]

As in the *Zohar*, the day of death, more than any other day in one's lifetime, is of unparalleled importance. On this day that three critical events occur; the soul separates from the body, one confronts the *shekhinah*, and judgment is passed upon one's life. First, upon separation from the body, the soul embarks upon an unknown path, a journey whose destination is unknown. This day is one of anger and dissension. Moreover, the specific moment at which the soul departs from the body is characterized as one of crisis and violence:

> when the time comes for a man to depart from the world, and he sees what he sees, the spirit moves through every part of the body, following all its

27 Scholem, p. 58.

> convolutions, like someone who sets out to sea without oars, going up and down without any peace. And it (the soul) goes and asks leave of every part of the body, and (no time) is more violent than the day when the spirit separates from the body."[28]

However, the intensity of the ecstasy that death occasion far surpasses its violence. The *Zohar* contends that we die with open eyes, looking forward to death. The separation of the soul from the body, therefore, is not viewed primarily with dread, but rather, with joyful anticipation. "Death frees the soul from the shackles of the body. The body forms a barrier between the soul and the upper world, which is the origin of the soul, the eternal resting place as well as the source."[29] An individual longs to return to the source and to encounter the *shekhinah*. Thus, one need not fear death.

On the contrary, an individual greets death openly with the knowledge that upon death one is greeted by the *shekhinah*. At this moment, "the dying man's exaltation reaches its height."[30] It is through death that one's soul achieves ultimate peace, for "death frees the soul so that it can ascend unhindered to contemplate the radiance of the angels and the divine *sefirot*."[31] The *Zohar*'s description

---

28 Isaiah Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 832.
29 Isaiah Tishby, p. 838.
30 ibid., p. 834.
31 ibid., p. 835.

of death as a radiant, ecstatic moment creates a receptivity toward discussing death that we have not seen in previous works. This openness produces an elaborately detailed description of death and the subsequent journey of the soul.

The day of death is elevated to supreme importance not only because this is the day on which one confronts the *shekhinah*, but also because this is the ultimate day of judgment. In a description which is reminiscent of Yom Kippur themes, the day of death is depicted as the Day of Judgment, the day on which the books are opened and the accusers appear. On this day, the "body and soul stand together to give an accounting of their deeds, before the soul is separated from the body."[32] It is during the entire period of a serious illness and impending death that one is judged. While the day of death is the ultimate day of reckoning, sickness too is viewed as a precarious period in which a person's deeds are considered and judged. The finality of the judgment that occurs during illness is summarized in the following statement, "Every serious illness is seen as a dangerous crisis when one's life is in the balance, to be judged either favorably or unfavorably, for life or death."[33] A favorable judgment produces prolonged life; on the other hand, an unfavorable outcome

---

32 ibid., p. 838.
33 ibid., p. 832.

leads to death. However, life in this world is not the only reward of a favorable judgment; eternal reward is attained when the spirit leaves the world and returns to the Source.

What is it that determines the outcome of divine judgment? The *Zohar* maintains that confession and repentance spare one from unfavorable judgment. *Parashat Pikudei* of the *Zohar* maintains that those attempting to induce repentance are like the advocates of goodness in that they cause the sick to be saved from the attribute of stern judgment and death. Ultimately, engaging the sick in confession spares them from death and causes a revival of life. No wonder that when death is imminent, one is urged to examine one's life and confess (a directive which we first saw in T. Shabbat 32a)! The process of confession in the *Zohar* is described in the following passage:

> Rabbi Eleazar said: Happy are the righteous who study the ways of the Holy One, blessed be God, so that they may walk in them and fear the Day of Judgment. For one must plead and render account before the Holy One, blessed be God.
>
> He began by quoting "it is sealed in the hand of every person, so that everyone may know one's deeds" (Job 37:7). They have interpreted this verse. Come and see. On the day when one's allotted span is completed and one is about to leave the world, the day when the body is broken and the soul seeks to part from it, one is permitted to see all that has previously bee hidden when the body was healthy and in control. A person is confronted by three messengers who examine one's days and sins and all that one has done in the world. The dying person then confesses everything with one's own lips, and then seals it by the hand. This is the meaning of "one seals it by the hand of every person."

> With his hand they are all sealed, so that judgment may be passed in that world on (all of one's sins), early and late, new and old; not one is forgotten.[34]

Thus, confession involves two steps; first, one must examine one's life, taking an accounting for one's deeds and misdeeds. Only after searching one's soul can the actual verbal confession ensue. Confessing with one's own lips suggests confessing with self-knowledge: each human being take a personal accounting for him or herself. It is this public declaration, or confession, which lends completion to one's life, which "seals" transgressions in the past, and which elicits a favorable judgment.

The *Zohar* underscores the importance of confession in the following passage, where confession is likened to an angel who appears at the moment of death:

> Come and see. Man moves in this world and imagines that it belongs to him forever, and that he will always remain in it. While he moves in this world he is put in chains. And when he is seated they judge him in the field with others who are to be judged. If he has a defense then he is rescued from judgment. This is the meaning of "if he has an angel, an intercessor, to vouch for a man's uprightness, the He is gracious to him, and says: deliver him from going down into the pit. I have found a ransom" (Job 33:23-24).[35]

This comparison between confession and an angel is one we have seen previously in *Shabbat* 32a. In fact, the exact verses from Job are employed in both the *Zohar* and the

---

34 Zohar I, 78b-79a Tishby, p. 844.
35 Zohar III, 126a-127a, cited by Tishby, p. 846.

talmudic passages to demonstrate the great redeeming strength of confession. So, while illness enshackles a human being, it is confession which frees one from these shackles. In this passage from the *Zohar*, the process by which confession operates is described in greater detail. While one lies shackled in the chains of illness, two figures (whom Tishby explains are scribes of the heavenly court) approach and record all of the deeds that the sick person has just confessed.

> [The sick person] gives an account of it all and they (the heavenly figures) write it all down in his presence. This is the meaning of "behold, He that forms the mountains, and creates the wind tells man what his thought is..." (Amos 4:13). And he (the ill one) confesses them. Why? Because every deed that he performs ascends and stands ready to testify about him, and they continue to exist to offer testimony and then they all descend and are listed in his presence and stand before him, and they do not depart until the time arrives for him to be judged through them in that world.[36]

Through this passage it becomes clear that while one may confess either during an illness or when death becomes imminent, it is at death that all that one has confessed is judged. Good deeds are held in one's favor while transgressions are accounted negatively. The moment when a person is about to leave the world is thus the time of great judgment. All of our actions and words in this world become a testimony to our lives. After examining and reviewing our lives, we may feel remorse and dread our

---

36 ibid., p. 846.

past. However, confession has the power to heal, enabling us to confront our lives and to move peacefully to the world to come; "we groan because of the things we have done, but it avails us nothing, unless the healing power of repentance has taken effect before this moment."[37] While sin and evil bring about illness and even death, confession restores health and renews life. At times, confession actually saves one from the grip of death. On the other hand, confession has the power to neutralize the negative effects of one's sins, enabling one to pass into the world to come along with the righteous.

Before completing this discussion of *Zohar* and its influence on confession on the deathbed, one final issue must be raised. The sins a human being commits affect not only that person's immediate world, but the entire universe, including the heavenly realm. The *Zohar* to Numbers 5:6-7, (121b-122b), contends that one's actions affect the balance of the universe, with sins negatively affecting universal harmony. "When a man or woman shall commit any sin...then they shall confess...and they shall make restitution. The truth, however, is that through their penitence the Almighty, as it were, rectifies on high the wrong committed, and thus the world is put right again."[38] According to this passage, sins disrupt the

---

37 ibid., p. 847.

38 Translation by Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling, The Zohar, (London: The Soncino Press, 1934), p. 179.

balance of the world, while confession and penitence restore that balance. Thus, the ramifications of confession are cosmic.

In the years following the publication of the *Zohar*, Jacob ben Asher and his family fled persecution in Germany arriving in Spain in 1303. After living with his brother in Barcelona, Jacob ben Asher moved to Toledo, where his father, The Rosh, was a rabbi.[39] Not only did ben Asher serve as a member of the Toledo *bet din*, but he also became a noted scholar. Ben Asher produced numerous *halakhic* and scholarly works, most notable of which is his *Arba'ah Turim* (the Tur). In that ben Asher's background include exposure to both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewry, he incorporates both traditions into his *halakhic* code.

In the Tur, ben Asher discusses the phenomenon of confession on the deathbed. His discourse on the matter, however, lacks significant innovation. While ben Asher does mention a number of practical *halakhic* rulings regarding the approporiate behavior for visitors of the dying, he fails to present new information about the confession itself. Mention of confession on the deathbed is found in *Yoreh Deah* 338. This section opens with a reiteration of the discussion found in *Shabbat* 32a equating confession with an advocate who saves human beings from

---

39 Scherman and Zlotowitz, p. 144.

punishment. Ben Asher then adds a number of Nachmanides' statements from Torat Ha'adam regarding the effectiveness of confession: "In order that one's heart not be broken, the dying person should be told that many have confessed and did not die, while many who did not confess, die. On the merit of confession, one may live."

This statement is followed by a number of pragmatic considerations which we have seen in earlier works (that if one is unable to confess aloud, one should confess in one's heart, and that if one does not know how to confess, one should say, "may my death be an atonement for my sins").[40] Much of the *halakhah* regarding confession on the deathbed which ben Asher summarizes reflects a concern for the physical and emotional well-being of the dying patient. For example, that the confession should not be said in front of women, children, or ignorant people lest they cry and upset the sick person (this is originally found in Nachmanides' Torat Ha'adam).

The only specific mention of the confessional formula itself is the repetition of the words recorded by Nachmanides, which we already seen, and, the advsie, new o the Tur, that Torah scholars, instead of saying *aviti, pashati, chatati*, they should say, *chatati, aviti, pashati*.

40. Jacob ben Asher, The Tur, Yoreh Deah, 338.

No explanation of this alteration is offered. Thus, an exploration of the Tur reveals only one *halakhic* innovation regarding the confession on the deathbed. Instead, ben Asher offers a summary of the extant classical sources that discuss this phenomenon.

Joseph Caro, like Jacob ben Asher, spent much of his life in Toledo, Spain, where he was born in 1488. Fleeing to Turkey in 1492, Caro finally moved to Safed in 1535, where he assumed leadership of the *beit din* (he died in Safed in 1575).[41] Caro's great *halakhic* work, the Shulchan Arukh, reflects the tradition and ritual of Sephardic Jewry. Morevover, Caro became of student of the Kabbalah, writing a mystical interpretation of various Torah verses entitled, Maggid Meisharim. The discourse found in *Yoreh Deah* 338 closely resembles that found in the Tur. Similarly, no innovations or new legal rulings appear in the Shulchan Arukh regarding confession on the deathbed. Where the Shulchan Arukh departs from the Tur is in its inclusion of the biblical passage Joshua 7:19 (which we have already cited seen in the mishnah and talmud). Like the Tur, however, Shulchan Arukh provides no new insight into the rituals or liturgy associated with confession on the deathbed.

---

41 Rabbi Hersh Goldwurm, The Early Acharonim, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publication, Ltd., 1989), pp. 84-85.

This period sets the stage for the significant developments to the deathbed confession which take place in subsequent generations. We have seen not only an increased usage of confession in general, but also, for the first time an actual confessional formula appears. Moreover, the influence of Kabbalah upon Jewish thought and practice creates an atmosphere conducive to interest in death and dying as well as a concern for the fate of the soul following death. Therefore, while no significant deathbed ritual is introduced, (apart from Nachmanides' confession), the theological and liturgical seeds of the deathbed confession are planted during this period. These seeds, as we will see, come to fruition in manuals written specifically for the sick and dying. The subject of the next two chapters, these manuals bear an incomparable impact upon the development of the deathbed confession and ritual.

Chapter Three
Ma'avar Yabok: A Bridge to Death

In the preceding chapters, we surveyed Jewish texts spanning more than 1350 years in an effort to trace the development of the deathbed confession within Judaism. We have explored these texts in order to gain greater insight into the liturgy, ritual, and theology associated with this phenomenon. This search, however, reveals that until the mid-sixteenth century (the Tur, with which we concluded the previous chapter, was published in the 16th century) confession on the deathbed remained an undeveloped and little discussed ritual within Judaism. While the Talmud instructs us to confess before death, it offers little direction and only a one-sentence formula. The codes somewhat expand these directives, including Nachmanides' confessional formula and a few pragmatic considerations. Only in the Zohar have we uncovered clues to the greater power and significance of confession before death. Yet, we are still left with numerous unanswered questions.

The literature of the next 150 years provides us with answers to these questions. For the first time in Jewish history, we find detailed guidelines instructing the dying person how to confess in the last moments of life. The order, or *seder* of confession undergoes considerable expansion with the addition of numerous Psalms and prayers as well as various rituals to be performed by the patient.

Yet the discussion of *vidui al hamitah* in this period focuses not only on practical instructions for confessing, but on the theological and spiritual implications of the confession as well. A body of literature appears from the mid-sixteenth century on in which these expanded confessions are found. These works, written and published throughout Europe, contain prayers and rituals for the sick and dying. Many of these, especially those of the 16th and earl 17th centuries, contain kabbalistic views which significantly influenced the nature of the confession recited on the deathbed. The most important of these works, and the subject of this chapter, is Ma'avar Yabok, written by Aaron Berechiah of Mantua, Italy (published in 1626).[1]

In Ma'avar Yabok, Berechiah presents a rich and fascinating ritual for confession. The kabbalistic notions discussed in the work and reflected in the rituals make Ma'avar Yabok compelling to the reader. Before exploring this work, however, we must first analyze the cultural, religious, and historical factors that led to the creation of this and other works of this genre. We will investigate to central role played by mutual aid societies in promoting the therapeutic use of prayers for the sick and dying. Furthermore, we will examine the integral role Kabbalah played in increasing public interest in confession on the

---

1 Aaron Berechiah ben Moses of Modena died in Italy in 1639.

deathbed and in creating an atmosphere receptive to such a ritual.

Aaron Berechiah (along with Samuel ben Elisha Portaleone) made Italy one the foremost centers of Kabbalah.[2] Yet even before Berechiah's influence was felt in Mantua, there existed an interest in Kabbalah, made evident by the fact that the first printed edition of Sefer Yetsirah appeared in Mantua in 1569. Scholem contends that the spread of Lurianic Kabbalah to Italy can be attributed to the journeys of one man, Israel Sarug (who also travelled to Poland bringing kabbalistic teachings there as well). During this time, the presence of Kabbalah grew rapidly, "as Kabbalah began to radiate outward from Safed to the Diaspora, it generated great religious excitement, particularly in Poland, Italy, and Turkey."[3] During the early 17th century, Lurianic theology and ritual spread throughout the Jewish world and "had established a supremacy that was virtually unchallenged."[4] As a result, Lurianic theology and practices were quickly incorporated into ritual lives of Jews throughout Europe.

Aaron Berechiah was no exception, for more than any other theology of his day, it was Lurianic Kabbalah that informed his views. In fact, so apparent is the direct

---

2 Scholem, p. 76.
3 ibid., p. 76.
4 Marcus, p. 61.

influence of Lurianic Kabbalah upon Berechiah's work that Scholem remarks, "The views of the Lurianic school are crystallized in Ma'avar Yabok."[5] The influence of Lurianic Kabbalah upon Berechiah is evident in his emphasis of the following notions: the different fates of the three parts of the soul (*nefesh*, *ruach*, and *n'shamah*), the importance of the letters forming God's name, the *tikkun* which is brought about through confession, and the importance of purging one's soul of impurity.[6] In fact, Luria himself regularly confessed as part of his religious devotional practice.[7]

The impact of Lurianic Kabbalah was felt not only in the theological realm; it extended into the sphere of ritual practice as well. Lurianic Kabbalah stressed the importance of the spiritual well-being of the soul. This, along with the kabbalistic concern with the fate of the soul following death, created the groundwork for increased interest in ritual upon the deathbed. "Under the influence of Lurianic Kabbalah, which was intensely interested in the welfare of man's soul, the ritual at the bedside of the very sick and dying assumed substantial proportions."[8] This becomes clear after an initial glance at Ma'avar

---

5 Scholem, p. 333.
6 For a more detailed discussion of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Scholem, Kabbalah, pp. 128-144.
7 Marcus, p. 66.
8 ibid., p. 261.

Yabok; Whereas the Tur, the last published major work before Ma'avar Yabok to address the subject, discusses the ritual for the sick and dying in just three pages, Ma'avar Yabok devotes 344 pages to this subject alone.

Moreover, Ma'avar Yabok gained rapid acceptance as the standard for ritual practice for the sick and dying. Further attesting to the widespread use of Ma'avar Yabok are its numerous republications throughout Europe.[9] This work became the accepted manual for those attending to the gravely ill. An abbreviated form of the work was produced in 1682, and by 1800, at least 18 editions of the Kizzur Ma'avar Yabok appeared. Marcus, in part, attributes the widespread use of the abbreviated version to the fact that the full edition was too heavy and cumbersome to carry from home to home while administering to the sick.[10]

Aaron Berechiah was among a group of Mantuans who cared for the sick and dying. These mutual aid societies, of which he was a part, stemmed from a trend toward lay leadership existing in Italy in the mid-17th century.[11] The development of mutual aid societies can also be

---

9 Marcus lists the following titles of editions of Ma'avar Yabok which were published in European lands between 1682 and 1800: Zikron Aharon, Prague, 1682, Magen David, Venice, 1704, Refuat Neshamah, Frankfurt, 1704, Keriah Ne'emanah, Venice, 1715, Korban Aharon, Brun, 1759, Divre Emet, Prague, 1789, p. 230.

10 ibid., p. 229.

11 Phillipe Aries, The Hour of Our Death (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.433.

attributed to the expulsion from Spain. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Jewish Brotherhoods functioned as a central part of Jewish life in Spain. Seventy years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, these societies began to appear in Germany and provided for many of the religious needs of Jews in smaller, rural communities.[12] Holy Brotherhoods, as they were sometimes called, functioned in a number of ways, including visiting the sick, providing financial support to needy families, and conducting worship services at the homes of mourners. In Germany, the rise in anti-Semitic acts toward Jews fueled the need for such groups who could care for the wounded and provide an appropriate burial of the dead.[13] Mutual aid societies did not develop in Italy until after 1492. The earliest example is the *chevrat gemilut chasadim* of Modena which was fully functioning in 1516.[14]

While the central function of these societies was to aid the sick and dying in their homes, their ultimate goal, according to Marcus, was to "give the soul rest through speech and deed, and by speech they meant prayer and words of comfort."[15] Thus, we see an increased emphasis upon the spiritual well-being of the soul as well as a belief in the healing power of prayer. This notion is grounded in the

---

12 Marcus, p. 64.

13 Marcus notes that Jews were massacred in great numbers in over 300 German towns. Ibid., p. 64.

14 ibid., p.65.

15 *Mantua*, 1785, Introduction; Berlin (Hebrew), 1750, par. 21. As cited by Marcus, p. 216.

kabbalistic philosophies popular in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century. Moreover, the Italian Jewish community paid great attention to the spiritual care of its infirm and dying members. This increased interest in death and dying and belief in the therapeutic powers of prayer, together, inspired the development of a new genre prayer for the sick and dying.

The extended prayer service found in Ma'avar Yabok for use upon the deathbed is an example of such prayer. In Ma'avar Yabok, we find an intricate and well developed ritual for the dying patient. Central to this ritual is the deathbed confession. The development of this confession reaches its zenith in Ma'avar Yabok and all subsequent works on this subject rely heavily upon Ma'avar Yabok as a model. While numerous manuals for the sick and dying are published after 1624, none is as comprehensive or innovative as Ma'avar Yabok. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an explication of the confession and accompanying rites found in Berechiah's work. The quintessential manual on deathbed confession, Ma'avar Yabok warrants and deserves an extensive study and analysis.

THE DEATHBED CONFESSION OF MA'AVAR YABOK

The title, Ma'avar Yabok, originates in Genesis 32:23, where it refers to the fjord over which Jacob crosses with his family and physical possessions before meeting Esau.

For Jacob, the *ma'avar yabok* serves not only as the physical bridge separating him from his estranged brother Esau, but as an emotional bridge as well. The fjord symbolizes the emotional and spiritual bridge Jacob must cross before he truly confronts himself and reconciles with his brother. In Berechiah's Ma'avar Yabok, the fjord represents the bridge between this world and the next. When crossing this bridge, one must first look back, gathering one's spiritual possessions. Before reaching the other side, one must confront oneself, as Jacob does. And finally, one encounters the Presence of God, achieving ultimate reconciliation.

In Ma'avar Yabok, it is confession which bridges this world to the world-to-come. The deathbed confession guides and transports an individual through the transition between life and death. Berechiah explains the meaning of *ma'avar yabok* and states his principle goals in the following passage from the introduction to Ma'avar Yabok:

> I composed new ideas and different explanations...to present them as an offering and as incense in love and in reverence before the holy congregation, in order that it will make a way in the midst of the shaking worlds. It is a bridge from the world of change and destruction, with its sinful condition, to be joined with the heavenly pleasures of Unity, Blessing, and Holiness...And (the dying) will pass the fjord of Yabok to wrestle with *Adonay*...until the dawn- that is immortality- for then our soul and body will no longer be called Jacob; but rather Israel, in that we

Aaron Berechiah ben Moses of Modena, [illegible] Bnai Yashish, 1579, p. 14

> will be a kingdom of priests and we will be worthy of seeing God face to face.[16]

The "offering" Berechiah presents in Ma'avar Yabok is the deathbed confession and its accompanying rites and explanations. Facilitating passage through the fjord, the confession enables one to journey safely between the worlds. Moreover, it helps to prepare one for an encounter with God and for eternal life lived in the light of dawn.

Ma'avar Yabok does not intend to achieve these goals solely through Nachmanides' 39 word confession, the only standardized and widely known confessional formula which existed at the time of its writing. Rather, Berechiah compiles a confessional *seder* complete with prayers, Psalms, and rites which together, guide the sick patient through the process of death. The confession for the deathbed reflects Berechiah's extensive knowledge of Lurianic Kabbalah as well as his considerable insight into death and dying. Thus, the confession operates simultaneously on two levels. First, the confession functions on the personal plane, guiding an individual through the dying process through a spiritual preparation for death. The confession and accompanying ritual facilitate dying by leading through the following stages- self-examination, standing in judgment, spiritual cleansing, acceptance of death, and finally, an affirmation

---

16 Aaron Berechiah ben Moses of Modena, Ma'avar Yabok (1626, rpt. B'nai Berak: Yashfeh, 1929), p. 14.

of God. Only after one completes the process of confession is one fully prepared to encounter the Divine Presence and enter the world-to-come.

Not only does confession effect the spiritual well-being and fate of an individual, but its ramifications extend to the universal and Divine realms as well.[17] On this second level, the confession is a powerful tool with the capacity for the following: to solicit Divine attention; to awaken the Divine attributes of mercy, forgiveness, and kindness; and to restore the spheric harmony that sin disrupts. The aforementioned attributes of the confession reflect a theology present in the Zohar (the subject of an earlier discussion to which I will refer in this chapter) and in Lurianic kabbalah.

The infusion of kabbalistic theology into the deathbed confession greatly increases its ramifications; when one confesses to God, requesting forgiveness for human failings, this confession simultaneously operates in the upper world, creating a balance which sin disrupts. Of course, the strong emphasis upon the theological implication of confession in Ma'avar Yabok does not undermine the importance of its therapeutic impact upon a dying person. Therefore, my assessment of the deathbed

---

17 By universal, I mean the realm which transcends the self and the material world. It is a heavenly or divine sphere operating simultaneously to the world occupied by human beings.

confession will be conducted on the two levels outlined above, the personal, spiritual level and the theological, universal realm. I will identify and analyze the confession's spiritual effects upon the dying person and unravel its ramifications in the upper world as well.

Prior to the actual deathbed confession in Ma'avar Yabok, we find prayers intended for the gravely ill. These prayers, when recited by the sick and by those administering to their spiritual needs, call upon God's divine attributes of mercy and healing. Through them, the ill person requests a complete recovery from the sickness, something only God can grant.[18] Of particular importance is the recitation of Saadia Gaon's prayer for recovery. This is to be the last prayer recited before the deathbed confession. In it, a plea for complete healing is made, "Heal me, God, and I shall be healed. Save me, and I shall be saved." In the remainder of the prayer, one praises God, reinforcing God's many Divine attributes.[19] Through this prayer, one not only makes a last attempt to be saved from death, but one affirms faith in God as well. Once the physical condition worsens, however, is and death seems imminent, the patient is advised to confess. Important to

---

18 For a detailed discussion of the prayers for the ill refer to rabbinic thesis by Steven A. Moss, "The Attitude Toward Sickness, Dying, and Death as Expressed in the Liturgical Works Ma'avar Yabok and Sefer Hahayim," 1974, HUC-JIR, New York.

19 Berechiah, p. 86.

note, however, that all critically ill people are advised to confess regularly in order to accustom themselves to confessing. After all, a soul may depart the body without prior warning; if one regularly confesses throughout an illness, there is little chance that a person would die without having first confessed.

Introducing the confession in Ma'avar Yabok is the directive from Shabbat 32a to confess. Typical of Berechiah's style throughout the work is this association of classical, ancient texts with his own. Here, Berechiah reminds those visiting the sick person that it is their duty to instruct the dying person to confess, for "many have confessed and lived, and many who have not confessed, died...by the merit of your confession, you shall live."[20] This last sentence is worthy of further exploration. Is the intention of this phrase literal, suggesting that anyone who confesses will actually be healed, while those who do not confess warrant death? On the other hand, perhaps this phrase is an exhortation, a rhetorical flourish stated to demonstrate the great power confession. Regardless of the exact purpose of this sentence, it is clear that its inclusion in the beginning of the confessional service demonstrates the grave importance of confession.

---

20 ibid., p. 86, from Shabbat 32a.

The following instructions precede the first confessional prayer found Ma'avar Yabok. When a sick person feels death is approaching, that person should wash his or her hands. Following this act of symbolic purification, one should take one's *tzitzit* (tallit) and wrap them around one's hands, weaving the fringes through the fingers. The fringes serve to remind the patient of the commandments and in this instance, the commandment to give *tzedakah*. Thus, as a final physical gesture one gives *tzedakah*, either "with the hand or the mouth," (one may actually give coins to a needy person or simply instruct another to act in one's place).[21]

These three acts of washing the hands, wrapping the fringes of the tallit around the fingers, and giving *tzedakah* help to purify the body and reinforce the centrality of the commandments. Then, one actually performs a commandment by giving away a portion of one's material possessions before death. This act serves as a reminder to the dying person of the transience of life on earth. The ramifications of giving *tzedakah* extend beyond the immediate world of the dying person. The amount of money one is instructed to give, either 26, 91, or 112 *prutot*, all correspond to three configurations of God's names. Therefore, through the act of giving *tzedakah*, the

---

21 **ibid., p. 86.**

dying person also beckons God, seeking Divine attention in these final moments of life.

Further underscoring the dying patients need for God's kindness and mercy is the instruction which comes next. One should confess in the morning because this is the time when the sphere of Kindness, or *chesed*, rules. Therefore, by confessing in the morning, one may appeal more directly, and with greater effectiveness, to the Divine sphere of Kindness. Following this directive, Berechiah asserts, "It is the custom of Israel to gather ten people (a *minyan*) around the dying person because holiness resides within them and within the ten sparks of their souls which keep away Satan and evil."[22] The gathering of ten people around a dying person is significant not only because of the suggestion that the Divine spark within each soul keeps away evil, but also for the simple fact the one should not die alone. A Jew, who lives among a community, should be ushered into the world-to-come in the presence and through the prayers of this community.

In fact, so important is it that one be surrounded by other people at the time of death, that Berechiah contends that this motivated the writing of Ma'avar Yabok. The following is his central goal for compiling and printing prayers and ritual for sickness and death, he says, is "so

22 ibid., p. 86.

that the community can join in song and prayer at the time of the going out of the soul."[23] When a one is too weak or ill to recite the confession, a community member to recites it for that person. Additionally, as the soul of dying person leaves the body, the visitors are instructed to recite various prayers to accompany the soul on this journey.

The actual confessional liturgy in Ma'avar Yabok is divided into three section, the first of which begins with the recitation of Nachmanides' 39 word confession.[24] (For an English translation, refer to page 35 of this thesis. See appendix A-1 for Hebrew text). It is unclear why Berechiah does not include the text of this important confession in the central rubric of this service. Perhaps he assumes that, as the only existing confessional formula to date, this confession is well known and a dying person will naturally recite it. If the dying person is a Torah scholar, then a special prayer is recited for that person. In the prayer, the "student of wisdom" humbly appeals to God, asking the "Revealer of secrets" to reveal the hidden words of Torah. The dying person entreats God, "May I be worthy to hear the words and secrets of the Torah from the heads of the Yeshiva above."[25] (See appendix A-2).

---

23 ibid., p. 19.

24 ibid., while the instruction to recite Nachmanides' confession appears on p. 86, the actual confession is found on p. 134.

25 ibid., p. 87.

The confession begins with the recitation of Psalm 4, in which David makes a plea for God's mercy. David proclaims his faith in God, praising God and entreating others to trust in Adonay. In the final words of the psalm, David makes a moving declaration, particularly profound when spoken moments before one's death; "Safe and sound I lie down and sleep, for You alone, Adonay, keep me secure."[26] Reciting this psalm helps the dying person to turn toward God and to trust that as one prepares for sleep, or death, that God is present, ensuring safety and peace.

The first of the three confessions found in Ma'avar Yabok closely resembles the confession of sins of the Yom Kippur liturgy. The wording of the deathbed confession departs from the Yom Kippur confession in two major ways. First, the dying person recites the confession in the singular. Secondly, whereas the Yom Kippur liturgy includes an alphabetical listing of sins (with one sin corresponding to each letter), the deathbed confession incorporates two words per letter of the alphabet. (See appendix A-3 for the Hebrew text).

In the opening words of the confession, the dying person appeals to God to heed the words he or she is about to utter. One humbles oneself imploring, "Do not be deaf

---

26 **ibid., p. 87.**

to my plea, for I am not so arrogant and stiff-necked in my confession as to say before You, Adonay, God of my ancestors, I am righteous and have not sinned, but rather, I have sinned, I have committed iniquity, and I have rebelled, me, and my ancestors."[27] Interesting to note is Berechiah's inclusion of the feminine form of the opening lines of this confession. In doing so, the confession is made more accessible to a dying female. This inclusion reflects his conviction that confession on the deathbed is not only important for men, but for women as well.

An alphabetical listing of sins follows the general admission of sin as seen above. The list includes ethical misdeeds, transgressions of the commandments, and sins committed against God and other people. Following the mention of the last listed sin is an appeal for God's mercy and forgiveness. After exposing a lifetime of sin, the dying person states, "May it be Your will, Adonay, my God and God of my ancestors, to forgive and pardon me, and in Your abundant mercy, (forgive) all of my transgressions and sins and grant atonement for all of my sins."[28]

This first confession forces one to examine one's deeds and thoughts. That the listing of sins is alphabetical and inclusive of perhaps more sins than the dying person has actually committed, reflects the

---

27 ibid., p. 87.
28 ibid., p. 88.

importance of a thorough accounting of oneself before death. Hence, this confession plays an important role in the dying process in two ways. Through the confession, one affirms God's power and arouses the Divine attributes of mercy and forgiveness. Moreover, in confessing one's sins, one is forced to look inward in contemplative self-examination. This self-examination is an important step in the dying process in that affords one the opportunity to review one's life and to become reconciled with past words and actions.

The second confessional prayer reflects the confession found in Sanhedrin 43b, "May my death be an atonement for my sins" as well as Nachmanides' deathbed confession. (See appendix A-4 for Hebrew text). Furthermore, this confession reinforces the notion that one's fate rests with God, since both life and death are in God's hands. The following powerful words are part of the confession recited on the deathbed,

> May my body be an altar and may my soul be a pure sacrifice. Through my death may I be granted forgiveness, and may my illness be an atonement for all of my transgressions, iniquities, and sins that I have committed before You from the first day of my existence until today. May my lot be among the righteous in *gan eden*. May I merit access to the world-to-come reserved only for the righteous...for Adonay is the God of the heavens and the earth, there is none else [this is a quotation from the *aleynu* prayer].[29]

---

29 ibid., p. 88!

Here, while the body is burned, destroyed, the soul rises like an *olah*. The smoke that leaves the sacrifice goes to God; so too does the soul which departs from the body upon death ascend to God. At death then, the body's purpose is fulfilled as it releases the soul to become a sacrifice to God.

Furthermore, through these poignant words, a dying person expresses an acceptance of death and a desire that this death serve a higher purpose. The dying person no longer asks to be cured, but rather, asks that the death cleanse him or her of past sins. Through death and the atonement which is achieved therein, the dying person hopes to gain entrance to *gan eden* in the world-to-come, and to live among the righteous. Thus, not only is a healthy acceptance of death revealed in this confession, but also, a contention that after death, one reaches a higher plane of existence. In addition, the act of confession protects one from evil and harm, thereby facilitating a more peaceful death.[30]

Important to note is the affirmation of God as Master of both heaven and earth, the homes of the soul and body. The confession is replete with affirmations of *Adonay* as the eternal and sole God:

---

30 ibid., p. 146.

> Adonay is the true God, and Moses is true, and God's Torah is true. Our King and our God, Your name shall be unified in Your world...save us and atone for our sins for the sake of Your name...Hear O Israel, *Adonay* is our God, *Adonay* is one. Blessed is God's glorious sovereignty now and forever. *Adonay* is God, (*Adonay, Hu HaElohim* is repeated twice), God was, God is, God always will be...*Adonay* is the true God.[31]

The repetition of God's names and Divine attributes helps to strengthen the dying person's resolve that *Adonay* is the true and only God. God reigns upon the earth, the domain of the living, as well the heavens, where the soul rests after it departs the body. The parallels to the Yom Kippur *ne'ila* liturgy are clear in this prayer. *Ne'ila* occurs as the gates of repentance begin to close; similarly, the deathbed *vidui* is recited at the threshold of death, as the gates of heaven begin to open.

Praising God in the face of death enables the dying person to accept death in the last moments of life. However, while accepting death is vital to the spiritual well-being of the dying patient, Berechiah contends that one must rejoice in the face of death. "The righteous person should rejoice with great happiness on the day of one's death. For God knows that [the day of death] is the day of perfection and completeness, that one's inheritance will be eternal. And the soul of the *tsaddik* will be the chariot to the *shekhinah* upon death...In Ketubot it is written, 'If one dies smiling, it is a good sign for this

---

31 **ibid., p. 89.**

person. It is a very good death.'"[32] Thus, this confession, as well as Berechiah's views (reflective of kabbalistic theology) foster not only an acceptance of death, but an actual sense of joy as well. One eagerly anticipates encountering the Divine Presence and the restoration of eternal life.

A third confessional prayer may be recited if the dying person is physically and mentally capable. This *vidui al hamitah* resembles the Yom Kippur *al chet* confession. The prayer, recited in the first-person singular, as opposed to the plural form of Yom Kippur, enumerates one's sins and transgressions. (See appendix A-5 for text of the confession). In the prayer, one appeals to God for mercy in one last effort to receive forgiveness from God. In addition to a comprehensive list of sins, the confession adds that through sin, one disrupts God's name, destroying the unity of God;

> May it be Your will, *Adonay*, my God and God of my ancestors, that on the merit of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel Your servant, that this *vidui* will be acceptable and pleasing to You. If I were stoned, or burned, or killed, or choked by Your *bet din*, according to the ordinances of Torah and halakhah, because of the honor of Your great name which I destroyed through my thoughts or words or deeds, whether the first, second, third, or fourth letter of Your great and awesome name...then, I will be deserving of these four deaths...May You accept the troubles and burdens of my body with the sacrifice of my soul as it departs from my body...and may my soul be made holy and pure through Your great name.[33]

---

32 ibid., p. 144.

33 ibid., pp. 90-91.

This section of the confession conveys the kabbalistic notion that sin destroys the harmony of the divine spheres. Confession, as well as other acts of devotional piety, is capable of restoring that harmony. The importance of God's name is central in kabbalistic theology in that God's name represents the highest concentration of divine power.[34] So holy is the great Name of God that Spanish kabbalists contend that the entire Torah is comprised only of variations of God's name. Through confession and repentance, one also purifies the soul, creating a restitution that, according to Lurianic Kabbalah, must be made when one sins.[35] Thus, confession is effective on the highest level of the Divine realm, restoring balance and repairing the destruction of God's name caused by sin.

The concluding section of the confession refers to the three parts of one's soul, the *neshamah*, *ruach*, and *nefesh*. Each of the three parts represents a distinct level of the soul, the highest soul, moral soul, and animalistic soul respectively. Each aspect of the soul performs a distinct function when confessing; the *neshamah* unites with God, the *nefesh* praises God, and the *ruach* seeks God's name while "walking in the light of a pure soul."[36] After confessing, the soul is purified and departs from the body; "the

---

34 Gershom G. Scholem, On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 37.

35 Lawrence Fine, Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, The Beginning of Wisdom (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 63.

36 Berechiah, p. 92.

garment of the body is a kind of imprisonment for the soul; it shackles it and forms a barrier between it and its origin in the upper world. Death frees the holy soul so that it can ascend unhindered to contemplate the radiance of the angels and the divine sefirot."[37] The purified soul rises to heaven like a sacrifice offered to God. After being liberated from the body, the purified soul returns to its origin and encounters the Divine Presence.

Concluding the final confessional prayer of Berechiah's *seder vidui* is a plea to God that the dying person not commit any sins in the future. Incorporated into the prayer is an affirmation of God as the source of mercy and forgiveness. The dying person then recites *yihiyu l'ratson* (from the silent prayer following Amidah) and *oseh shalom*, affirming faith in God. In reciting these words, as well as the psalms following the confession, the dying person nears the end of the dying process. That one speaks of God as the maker of peace in heaven and earth moments only before death reflects not only a faith in God, but an embracing of death as well.

Reflected in the confessional service in Ma'avar Yabok is a two-fold attitude toward death. On the one hand, one attempts to avert death, praying for a complete healing from God. On the other hand, one approaches death joyously with the knowledge that soon, the soul will be set free to

37 Tishby, p. 835.

encounter the Divine Presence and enter the world-to-come.

Tishby summarizes this duality in the following words;

> During these terrible death throes, while the body and soul are experiencing the agonies of separation, visions appear before man's eyes, and images form another world fill the vacant space being created before him...death is not only a time of disintegration and emptiness but also a time of exaltation and supernal vision."[38]

Through the course of the deathbed confessional service, this duality is addressed. The prayers recited by a gravely ill person upon the sickbed include prayers for God's mercy and healing. The ill person then asks for forgiveness for sins which cause sickness. Once the physical condition deteriorates and death seems unavoidable, the prayers shift the focus of the dying person toward an acceptance of death. One awakens the Creator, and affirms faith in God and the divine decree.

Finally, in the very last moments of life, one requests mercy, asking God to guard one's soul from harm. The dying person beseeches God in a final plea for salvation and blessing, "Heal me God and I will be healed. Saved me God and I will be saved."[39] (See appendix A-6 for Hebrew text). The priestly benediction and *yiheyu leratson* close this prayer. The dying person, upon completing the recitation of the prescribed confessional prayers, may recite verses of Torah, *Yigdal*, and *Adon olam* (if the dying

---

38 Tishby, p. 833.

39 Berechiah, p. 93.

person is unable, another may recite the aforementioned prayers). The very last words spoken by a dying person ask that God grant one peace and eternal rest. "Master of the universe, may it be Your will that I achieve peace in my rest"[40] The deathbed is then moved away from the wall and the window opened to facilitate the departure of the soul. A candle is lit as "the life of the dying is like a dripping candle."[41] Like the *olah*, the matter is burned, but a bit of the smoke ascends toward heaven. After the candle is lit and before the dying person breathes the last breath, those present are advised to recite psalms and verses from Torah. One should recite the following words which "Moses said when he was told he had only one moment to live, Blessed is God's name, may God live and endure forever."[42]

The confession and ritual which Berechiah prescribes for a dying person reflects his understanding of death as a process and not a momentary event. Whereas the body undergo a physical transition before death, so too does the soul undergo a spiritual process leading to its departure from the body. The confession guides one through a process of spiritual preparation of the soul in order to fully cleanse oneself before encountering the Divine Presence.

---

40 ibid., p. 94.
41 Marcus, p. 270.
42 Berechiah, p. 104.

The recognition of the spiritual needs of the dying person marks an innovation in Jewish tradition.

Until this point however, only the needs of the survivors were recognized with an elaborate system guiding mourners through the burial and mourning process following the death of a loved one. For example, the *keriah* and throwing of dirt over the casket reinforce the reality of the death. The grieving process too is facilitated by the rituals during *shivah* and *sheloshim*. However, until Ma'avar Yabok, no similar tradition existed for the dying person him/herself. While manuals for death and dying were compiled in the years following the publication of Ma'avar Yabok, none was as comprehensive or innovative.

Chapter Four
The Acharonim of Northern Europe

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the major contribution made by northern European Acharonim to the deathbed confession was in the form of manuals, much like Ma'avar Yabok. Aside from this, apart from one controversial issue, acharonic commentary on the deathbed confession was minimal. At the center of this debate raged one question: when is the appropriate time to confess. The commentators posit two opposing opinions regarding this issue, each of which identifies the role of confession in a completely different way.

Two opposing views exist in determining the time confession takes place. On one side of the debate stands Rabbi Yehoshua Falk Katz, a Polish Acharon who died in 1614. In his commentary to the Tur entitled *Prisha*, Katz suggests that one must confess even before death becomes imminent. Throughout an illness, one must become accustomed to confronting and admitting one's sins. In *Yoreh Deah* 338, Katz explains that through confession, one prepares for one's eventual death. Moreover, one must confess even when one's illness does not appear to be life threatening, for dying without the aid of confession is an avoidable tragedy, simply by confessing early in one's illness.

On the other side of the controversy exists the opinion that confession must take place only in the last moments of life. Supporting this view are two commentators, the first of whom is Rabbi Joel Sirkes, born in Poland in 1561. The *Bach* (the name derived from his commentary to the Tur, *Bayit Chadash*) argues that a sick person should confess only when death is imminent, for if one is not at the threshold of death, confessing can push one over the edge, causing a premature death. The *Bach's* comments underscore the potency of confession. While Katz emphasizes the potential benefits of confession, The *Bach* argues that confession is potentially dangerous. The act of *vidui* may hasten death by breaking one's heart. If one is told to confess, one may think that death is closer than it is and may die prematurely.

In juxtaposition to Katz's view that confession prepares the sick for death, Sirkes claims that reminding the sick of their duty to confess prior to the moment of death is dangerous and must be avoided. Concurring with the *Bach*'s view is *Siftei Cohen* (1561-1640, Lithuania). In his commentary to the *Shulchan Arukh*, the *Shach* states that one should be told to confess only when death is imminent.

Of significance as well are two additional points. First, in his commentary to the Tur, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (died in the Land of Israel in 1571) suggest that if one

wants to lengthen the confession, one may recite the confession of Yom Kippur, *ashamti, bagadti, gazalti.* Isserles supports lengthening the confession by stating that, "It is a good thing to delineate one's sins, to measure these sins carefully, and to consider which sins we have not weighed because we have overlooked them."[1] Only after we recall these forgotten sins can we achieve true peace and atonement. In the *Drisha* to the Tur, Katz adds that we may lengthen the existing confession in any way we choose, not limiting us to a specific formula.

Aside from these issue, the acharonim are relatively silent on the topic of deathbed confession. Thus, while the acharonic commentators do contribute somewhat to the development of the deathbed ritual, the major innovations appear not in their commentaries at all, but in various manuals written specifically for the sick and dying and those who care for them.

As we have seen, Ma'avar Yabok is the most important example of this genre. Influencing this work, as we discovered in the previous chapter, was the influx of Spanish Jews into southern Europe. Alongside these immigrants arrived a rich Jewish tradition of scholarship. Particularly influential to the development of the deathbed confession was Kabbalah and its unique theosophical system

---

[1] Tur, Y.D. 338:2.

of belief. These kabbalistic attitudes formed the foundation of Berechiah's work, Ma'avar Yabok. So too was Isaac Horowitz influenced by kabbalistic theology in the compiling of his *magnum opis*, Shnei Luchot Habrit.

Isaac Horowitz (b. 1560 in Prague) spent the early years of his life in Poland. His reputation as a "saintly" Torah scholar spread throughout Poland and Russia. In 1606, he was invited to become rabbi of Frankfurt-on-Main, where he remained until 1614, when an anti-Semitic uprising forced him out of the Jewish ghetto.[2] Horowitz returned to Prague serving as its chief rabbi, and in 1621, after the death of his wife, emigrated to Israel. So determined to live in Israel was Horowitz that he left Prague without notifying his community or his children. Horowitz did, however, compose an ethical will to leave to his children. In this ethical will, he outlined "the ideal way of life, customs and laws for the whole year, elaborations on the fundamental tenets of Judaism, basic instruction in Kabbalah, a commentary to the Torah, and many miscellaneous matters."[3]

This document, which has come to be known as Shnei Luchot Habrit, grew to monumental proportions. So immense was this work, that Horowitz completed its writing only after he had lived in Israel for a number of years. It was

---

2 Scherman, The Early Acharonim, p. 135.

3 ibid., p. 135.

during this time in Israel that Horowitz devoted himself to the study of Kabbalah. As a student of Chaim Vital, a disciple of Isaac Luria, he became well-versed in Lurianic Kabbalah. The influence of this theological system upon Horowitz's attitudes is clear in Shnei Luchot Habrit.

Furthermore, Horowitz may have been exposed to Lurianic Kabbalah in Italy where he spent time before reaching Israel. He may even have known Berechiah's work, whose influence upon the *Sheloh* is profound.[4] In fact, Horowitz's section on the deathbed confession closely resembles Ma'avar Yabok. Horowitz maintains Berechiah's basic format as well as the confessional formulas, prayers, and rituals prescribed in Ma'avar Yabok. Thus, in order to avoid unnecessary redundancy, we will not conduct an in depth exploration of his treatment of the deathbed *vidui*. Suffice it to note that like Ma'avar Yabok, the *Sheloh* gained wide acceptance among European Jews.[5] Horowitz himself gained renown as well, and "exerted a profound influence on the life of all of central and Eastern European Jewry for the next 150 years."[6]

---

[4] Shnei Luchot Habrit was first printed in Amsterdam in 1649, 19 years after Horowitz's death.

[5] Between 1693 and 1795, 20 Hebrew editions of the Kizzur Shnei Luchot Habrit were produced. Religion of the Heart. (Columbia University of South

[6] Marcus, pp. 230. 1991)

While Horowitz is of North European descent, his work is, for the most part, informed by Kabbalah, stemming from southern European and Palestinian influence. Thus, the factors which led to the compilation of the *Sheloh* are quite different from those which inspired the writing of Sefer Hachayim, a northern European manual on sickness and death written by Simon Frankfurter and published in 1703. Both the religious and political climate of the 17th century created an atmosphere conducive to the publication of this and other manuals of practical rituals for daily life.

An important impetus for increased interest in death and dying was the popularity of the pietistic religious movement in northern Europe. Because of the religious excitation and devotional piety which characterizes this movement, Ted Campbell assigns the name "religion of the heart" to these religious movements.[7] The Jewish pietism closely parallels that of non-Jewish religious groups. Religious communities throughout northern Europe were affected by this "religion of the heart" movement. These movements diverge from older religious forms in their emphasis upon "affective devotion" and inward affects. Religious enthusiasm, as well as a personal experience of God, are central to these movements. Characteristics of these movements as well is a focus on the daily **practice**

---

7 Ted A. Campbell, The Religion of the Heart, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991)

of religion as opposed to the study of its classical texts. This emphasis upon ritual and practice is reflected in the importance assigned to ritual tasks; after all, "even the smallest, commonest acts of life can be hallowed by devotion."[8] That ritual comes to occupy a central place in these pietistic movements initiates an increased interest in the prayers and rites performed on the deathbed.

Contributing to the formation of these religious movements is the political and economic climate of the 17th and 18th centuries. Campbell emphasizes a correlation between the 30 Years War, the English Revolution, and the emergence of pietistic religious movements in particular.[9] The Jews were victimized by the political turbulence and violence that plagued this historical period. During this time, for example, the Jews in Poland in general become a scapegoat for the depressed, weakened economy: 1648 to 1667 was a period of uninterrupted war known as the Deluge.

During this period, Jews were victimized by uncontrolled violence, leading to widespread violence and devastation. The most well-known of these massacres is that named for Bogdan Chmielnicki, a Cossack chief who led the peasantry against the Polish upper class known as the

---

8 ibid., p. 150.

9 ibid., p. 145.

Schlachta and their Jewish agents who had been charged with tax collection for the liquor trade.[10] In May and June of 1948, these Cossack troups advance, killing upper class Poles, their Catholic clergy, allies, and especially, the vulnerable class of Jews. During the massacres, entire Jewish communities were annihilated. Famine only hastened their mass destruction. In the wake of the devastating death toll, Jews were forced to confront the overwhelming reality of death. The need for people who could assist in attending to the sick the dying, and the dead was enormous. Thus, in large part, the increased interest in deathbed confession results from the overwhelming presence of death in this period, for in total, at least 25 per cent of the Jewish population died then.[11]

Many of the Jews who did not perish fled Poland for Germany and Holland. Simon Frankfurter (b.1618 in Schwerin, Poland) was one such Jew. Frankfurter was not spared the anti-Jewish activity which devastated the Jews of the 17th century; and in 1656 was forced to leave his home in the wake of a death decree issued by the government. Arriving in Amsterdam, Frankfurter soon became active in a society which performed acts of *gemilut chasadim* in the Jewish community. In addition, he studied

Behfuss, Andachts-Buch (Frankfurt am Main: Druct und Verlag [illegible] Buchhandlung, 1834), p. xviii, as cited by Moss, p. 6.

[illegible] Hachayim became one of the most popular works of its type, with [illegible] editions published between 1703 and 1800. The second printing was in [illegible] by Simon's son Moses, the third, in 1717. Third edition is the source [illegible] German translation was published in Frankfurt-on-[illegible]

10 Seltzer, pp. 480-481.
11 Seltzer estimates that from 40,000 to 100,000 Jews were killed., p. 482.

the works of the geonim, kabbalists, and the Zohar.[12] His involvement in this society served as the impetus for Frankfurter's study of the writing s of groups of *gemilut chasadim* societies.

Frankfurter compiled these studies in Sefer Hachayim, a manual of customs and prayers for the sick and dying. The first publication of Sefer Hachayim appeared in Amsterdam in 1703.[13] One of Frankfurter's primary objectives in writing this work was to make daily ritual accessible to all Jews, many of whom lived in isolated rural communities. In an effort to achieve this goal, Frankfurter systematically arranges the *halakhah*, midrash, and theological references to sickness and dying. He presents them so that common Jews can properly administer to those in need. Reflecting Frankfurter's devotion to practical considerations is the fact that Sefer Hachayim was published in Hebrew with a Yiddish translation. In the Yiddish, he simplified many of the esoteric notions found in Ma'avar Yabok. Moreover, although Frankfurter was well-versed in Kabbalah and the teachings of the Zohar, he does not cite these views directly in his explanations. However, Frankfurter's familiarity with Berechiah's work is

---

12 C. Rehfuss, Andachts-Buch (Frankfurt am Main: Druct und Verlag Undreaifchen Buchhandlung, 1834), p. xviii, as cited by Moss, p. 6.

13 Sefer Hachayim became one of the most popular works of its type, with 17 editions published between 1703 and 1800. The second printing was in 1716 by Simon's son Moses, the third, in 1717. Third-edition is the source for this chapter. A German translation was published in Frankfurt-on-Main in 1834.

reflected in the structural parallels and liturgical similarities in both their works.

That Frankfurter finds the deathbed confession to be an essential and efficacious ritual is apparent in both the introduction and the actual text of Sefer Hachayim. The following biblical citations, which Frankfurter includes in his introduction, reflect this view: "The prophet Ezekiel says, 'Say unto them, as I live, says the Eternal One, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but, that the wicked may turn from their evil ways and live.'"[14] Through confession and repentance one turns away from evil. Frankfurter goes further, by stating that repentance not only cleanses one, but elevates one to the level of righteousness; "Not only does repentance mend the sinner, but even ranks him amongst the righteous; for Scripture says, 'One who is upright shall surely live.'" (Ezek. 18:19).[15]

Like Ma'avar Yabok, Sefer Hachayim is comprised of a system of prayer and ritual designed to guide those who are sick through their illness, and those who are mortally ill, through the dying process. Additionally, it is intended to instruct others how properly to administer to their spiritual needs. The role of caretakers of the sick and dying is a vital one. It is their duty to encourage the

---

[14] Ezekiel 33:11, as cited in B. H. Ascher, trans., Sefer Hachayim: The Book of Life and Expression of the Tongue (London: B. H. Ascher, 1863), p. 44.

[15] ibid., p. 442.

dying to confess, and to recite this and other prayers when the patient is unable. To elucidate this point, Frankfurter cites R. Simon bar Yochai; "As soon as those who attend the sick perceive that they draw near to the end of all flesh, it becomes their imperative duty to make them aware of it, and inform them that the hour is at hand when they will be called to appear before the throne of the Most High Judge, and that the time has arrived to reconcile themselves with the Heavenly One."[16] Consequently, in order for the caretakers and comforters to attend properly to the spiritual needs of the dying, they need instruction. Providing this guidance in a practical, straight-forward way, is Sefer Hachayim.

While we will focus primarily on the deathbed confession, a brief overview of the entire *seder* will illustrate the comprehensive nature of the system that Frankfurter has compiled. The index from Sefer Hachayim provides such an overview:

1. General confession of sin.
2. Prayer to be repeated by sufferers who feel their illness becoming more serious.
3. Deathbed confession prayer to be recited by rabbi or others who are present, and then, by the sick person.
4. Prayers on behalf of the sick to be repeated by an assembly of at least 10 people.
5. Prayers of thanksgiving upon recovering from an illness.
6. Reflections on death and spiritual assistance.
7. Parental blessing and admonition before death.

16 ibid., p. 162.

8. Prayer of thanksgiving to be said by the patient before death.
9. Prayers said by others after death.
10. *Yigdal* and *Adon Olam*.

Evident through the prayers listed in the index is the important role that confession plays in illness and death. Not only is confession recited in the moments before death, but throughout a serious illness as well. Because one is judged during on one's sickbed (and later, on the deathbed), the role of confession is central; Frankfurter reminds us that through prayer, confession, and repentance, God's judgment may be transformed into mercy, thus averting the evil decree [death]."[17]

While Frankfurter borrows heavily from Berechiah in the arrangement and content of Sefer Hachayim, he also departs from Berechiah's format in significant ways. One striking example of Frankfurter's own innovation is the placement of the service's first confessional prayer. Frankfurter includes a general confession of sins to be recited by the sick person even before death seems imminent. Berechiah, on the other hand, incorporates a similar prayer only into the actual deathbed ritual. But Frankfurter's confession is based on a delineation of sins closely resembling the confession found in Ma'avar Yabok. Naturally, he does not follow Berechiah slavishly. Whereas Berechiah includes two sins corresponding to each letter of

17 ibid., pp. 120-122.

the alphabet, Frankfurter includes only one. Missing from Frankfurter's listing are sins of a strictly ritualistic nature. Instead, in keeping with the pietism of his age, the author of Sefer Hachayim emphasizes general moral transgressions against God and other human beings. (See appendix A-3 for Ma'avar Yabok text, and appendix C-1 for Sefer Hachayim text).

Ma'avar Yabok had included a confession recited on the deathbed after the illness "becomes alarming." In the words of this confession, one requests forgiveness from God for specific sins. Those who recite this prayer first humble themselves before God, "What shall I say in Your presence, O God who dwells on high? What can I declare to You, who resides above the skies? For in truth, all the secrets, as well as the revealed things, only You know."[18] (See appendix C-2 for Hebrew text). Frankfurter however incorporates this confession into the prayers recited by sick people who are not yet dying and may not die. One may only speculate as to why Frankfurter places the confessions so early, long before the actual deathbed confessional *seder*, for he includes no rationale. I suggest that this placement reflects Frankfurter's pragmatic approach to prayer. A sick person should recite these crucial confessions before the physical and mental condition worsens sufficiently to prevent proper recitation.

---

[18] ibid., pp. 120-122.

Frankfurter's emphasis of the efficacy of confession and its curative powers is apparent throughout Sefer Hachayim. Perhaps the placement of these two major confessions reflects his belief that one may be healed from an illness only after reciting confessions. We gain insight into Frankfurter's motives in his assertion that one does not know with certainty the hour of death, for "life and death depend entirely on the will of God." Thus, one must continually pray in order to avert a death decree and instead, to warrant life. Moreover, prayer and confession prepares the sick person for death, if this is God's will. The patient should not be surprised by death, states Frankfurter, and must pray sincerely in order to establish peace with the Creator. "Confession, my brother and pious sister, has never accepted death. On the contrary, prayer and confession very often cause our days to be prolonged, and our sins to be foreign...rely not only on the human physician, and on medical prescriptions, but on God, who causes to die, and who revives."[19]

Thus, for Frankfurter, confession is a tool through which one requests forgiveness and healing for sins which bring about death. If one is forgiven, healing ensues. Yet, if one is not healed, one must continue to prepare oneself for death and for reconciliation with God. This view reflects the healing power of prayer and more

19 ibid., p. 120.

specifically, of confession. While Berechiah upholds the same faith in confession's capacity to heal the sick, he emphasizes explicitly the theurgic grounds of the ability of confession to do so; for him, confession positively influences the sefirotic and realm, creating cosmic harmony in place of sin's disruption. Frankfurter probably believed the same thing, but the nature of his book, as a simple and direct pietistic manual led him to exclude these theurgic references focusing instead on the more practical benefits of confession in illness and death.

When one feels the illness is becoming worse and death is approaching, one recites an elaborate and poignant prayer expressing trust in God. Words of praise of God open the prayer. The critically ill person affirms God's might and infinite ability to heal, soothe, and comfort those in pain. In vivid detail, the sick describe the mortal curse which afflicts them, reflecting an awareness of imminent death.

> O may God grant me a soothing and alleviating help; for all my limbs are heavy on me as lead, crushed and dislocated. My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt as a hearth; my heart is smitten and withered like grass. For Your arrows stick fast in me, and Your hand presses me sore, there is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head...I am feeble and sore and broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. My heart pants, my strength fails. As for the light of my eyes, even this is gone from me. Let my prayer come before You, incline Your

> ear to my cry; for my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws closer to the grave.[20]
> (See appendix C-3 for Hebrew text).

This prayer guides the sick person toward a realization that death is unavoidable.

On the other hand, this prayer also contains a desperate plea for life. In it, the dying person begs for salvation, boldly stating that only the living can praise God, and that God can determine who shall live and who shall die. This threat toward God reflects the dying person's desperate and urgent will to live. The words of this prayer are those of a person hovering between life and death. They reflect a passion for life and an overwhelming will to live, as opposed to a despondent resignation to death. Moreover, these words reflect an unwavering faith that God will, in the final hour, save the patient from death; "I will praise You, for though You have afflicted me, You will become my salvation...the Eternal will deal bountifully with me, for You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Eternal in the land of the living."[21] After this last attempt to renew life, the patient has exhausted every possible resource and must now accept God's decree of death.

---

20 ibid., pp. 122-124.
21 ibid., p. 128.

The actual deathbed confessional service (*seder havidui l'shkhiv me'ra*) begins with Nachmanides' confession. Following this confession we find a prayer of supplication to God, asking that God hear the prayer of the dying. That God possesses power to revive the dead and heal the sick is reinforced. The dying person affirms, "I return to You with all my heart; I sincerely confess all my sins. Please, have mercy upon me according to Your word. One who confesses and turns away from sin will have mercy."[22] (See appendix C-4 for Hebrew text). Not only does this prayer reinforce the importance of confession; it also underscores the need for faith in God at the time of death. While one may confess and repent at the time of death, it is God alone who has the power to bring about death and restore life.

Confession before God alone however, is insufficient. In order to attain complete forgiveness before dying, we also must seek pardon from other people whom we have wronged throughout our lives. We must also forgive others who have injured us, by word or deed. "Let the dying remember that we likewise are sinners before God, whom we ourselves implore for forgiveness."[23] Similarly, Frankfurter advocates the kind treatment of visitors by the dying person. The patient-

---

22 ibid., pp. 130-132.
23 ibid., p. 133.

> should not be indifferent to the prayer offered up to the sick person by other people, however low in rank they may be; for every sympathy, every good feeling emanating from a heart moved by the sufferings of others, ought to be highly appreciated by the sick. Indeed the Eternal hears such prayers, receives such supplications; they are acceptable to God.[24]

Thus, the need for prayer is underscored by the assertion that all prayer on behalf of the dying person is heard by God. Moreover, 10 people must be gathered in order to facilitate recitation of the kaddish prayer and so that the *shechinah* will come forward and make holy the path of the dying.[25]

Following the confessions, the dying person recites prayers which affirm God and testify to one's faith in God. God's many attributes are extolled, "The Eternal is merciful and gracious, slow in anger and abundant in mercy."[26] In the last moments before death, one turns to God humbly and faithfully, resigning oneself to God's decree. While earlier in the confessional service, the dying person turned to God through repentance and confession, now, one turns to God by professing unwavering faith and offering thanks. The dying person must thank God for being allowed to die undisturbed on one's bed. It is

---

24 ibid., p. 133.
25 ibid., pp. 133-168.
26 ibid., p. 134.

important as well, to bear in mind the many mercies received from God throughout one's lifetime.[27]

Frankfurter justifies thanking God at the moment of death through the example of Rabbi Akiba. He explains that Rabbi Akiba, who sacrificed his life as a sign of his faith, maintained his trust in God throughout his bitter torture.

> The dying moments of the Rabbi were peculiarly demonstrative of his unshaken faith in the unity of God, as evidenced by his last breath, in which exclaimed, 'Hear O Israel, the Eternal our God is One and Eternal.' Well might the heavenly voice have resounded at that momentous hour, 'Happy art thou, Rabbi Akiba, whose last breath of life was a full acknowledgment of the unity of God. Thou art prepared for a life of future bliss.'[28]

Thus, even in the face of death, one is encouraged to profess complete faith in God, the Maker of both life and death. Such a person warrants the life of the righteous in the world-to-come. So that one's soul may depart the body and enter the heavenly realm, one recites *pitchu li sna'arei tseddek*, open for me the gates of righteousness, and I will enter there, and I will **thank** the Eternal....Enter into God's gates with thanksgiving and into God's courts with praise; be thankful unto God and bless God's name.[29] (See appendix C-5 for Hebrew text).

---

27 ibid., p. 167.
28 ibid., pp. 167-168.
29 ibid., p. 169.

Psalms of praise and thanksgiving are recited by those attending to the dying person. Through their prayers, one is escorted out of this world in joy, surrounded by words of thanksgiving. This belief that the moment of death warrants rejoicing as opposed to despair is one reflected in both Sefer Hachayim and Ma'avar Yabok. Frankfurter explains the importance of rejoicing on the day of death;

> When one is born, there is nothing but rejoicing, when one dies, nothing but weeping. Yet ought it not to be otherwise? When one enters life, a life pregnant with troubles and sorrows- all ought to be sad, inasmuch as we are not certain whether one will be able to stand up to them; while at one's tranquil exit from life, all ought to rejoice, for we then know that one's mundane sufferings are terminated.[30]

Therefore, upon death, one's burdens remain in the past, while the hope of joy and ultimate peace await one in the world-to-come. Indicative of such joyful anticipation of death are the word of affirmation of faith one pronounces with one's dying breath, *Adonay melekh, Adonay malakh, Adonay yimlokh l'olam va-ed, Adonay* reigns, *Adonay* has reigned, *Adonay* will reign for ever and ever. The words of the *Sh'ma*, are repeated along with, *Adonay, hu ha-Elohim, Adonay* is the only God. This declaration of faith is repeated seven times.

We are struck by the similarity between the affirmation recited at the threshold of death as the gates

---

30 ibid., p. 175.

of heave open, and the words recited at the close of Yom Kippur, as the gates of repentance are closed. At this awesome moment, this "confession" assumes the form of an attestation of trust in God. Thus, this powerful profession of faith in God forms the final piece of the confessional service in Sefer HaChayim. Thus, we see that confession not only facilitates repentance of sin, but an affirmation of God as well.

Chapter Five
Confession Beyond Sin: Being There When it Happens

In the previous two chapters, we examined the dual role that confession plays in death and dying. First, we discovered that through confession, one achieves atonement for ones sins (sins which, incidentally, initially caused the illness) and ultimately, earns a place in the world-to-come. Secondly, not only is one rewarded personally through the confession of sins, but the cosmic sphere benefits as well. As we have seen in Ma'avar Yabok, confession has theurgic effects in that it restores the harmony of the spheres and thus, of God's unity that sin destroys. Throughout Jewish texts and literature, it is the former function of confession which is emphasized, while the theurgic effects of confession appear only in kabbalistic works. For the most part, confession refers to the exposition of one's sins upon the deathbed.

A theological understanding of confession portrays God as the ultimate judge; upon the deathbed, one's destiny is decided. Sincere confession influences God's judgment and invokes Divine mercy. This theology of confession characterizes the day of death as a courtroom drama. Every human being is judged based upon the deeds we have performed throughout our lives. God is the Judge, and we, the dying, are the indicted. Our deeds are the witnesses by sins."

attesting to both our righteousness and our guilt. Confession is our only advocate. The degree to which our confession is sincere and complete will determine the outcome of the trial. Our advocate must examine our thoughts carefully and conduct a comprehensive investigation of our actions in order to render a convincing and accurate defense before the judge. So too must we review our lives so that our confession upon death be truthful and complete, not overlooking even a single transgression. Then, God, the sole Judge, decides our fate and sets our sentence.

This theology has dominated Jewish writings on deathbed confession for almost 2,000 years. The Rabbis and later commentators focus almost exclusively upon confession as a means of atoning for sins before death. In fact, the very first recorded confessional formula views death itself as an atonement for sins.[1] Reinforcing this notion is the association of the deathbed confession with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We have seen also that upon the deathbed one may lengthen one's confession to include the listing of sins typically recited on Yom Kippur. Both the commentaries to the codes and kabbalistic works incorporate Yom Kippur confessions into the deathbed liturgy.

[1] Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:2, one should state, "May my death be an atonement for my sins."

In the previous chapter, we touched briefly upon an additional conceptualization of confession as well. Toward the end of the service in both Ma'avar Yabok and Sefer HaChayim, confession no longer consists of a recitation of sins and longing for mercy: instead, it becomes an affirmation of faith. As the patient replaces the futile struggle with God with an acceptance of the reality of death, the nature of the confession changes. When death seems imminent, the desperate attempts to gain atonement through delineating one's sins cease. In their place confession serves a different purpose: it facilitates both a reconciliation with God and an affirmation of faith. Reciting the *Sh'ma*, for example, is a form of confession in which the dying person affirms faith in God. Such confessions reflect an acceptance of death which the dying person experiences in the last moments of life. Acceptance of the Divine death decree and an anticipation of life in the world-to-come characterize these confessions.

Hence, this chapter, in part, is devoted to an exploration of confession as a profession of faith rather than as an admission of guilt. I contend that, even though confession is known primarily as the admission of sin, it functions also as an affirmation of faith. This second role of confession is distinctly Jewish. It is evident in both Bible and Talmud. Yet, this connotation of confession

has for the most part, been overlooked and overshadowed by its more traditional meaning, as confession of sin. Representative of the dual meaning of confession is Joshua 7:19. The Israelites have sinned, breaking faith with God. In order to be restored to favor, God commands the indicted parties to purify themselves, to rid themselves of guilt. Joshua instructs Achan, who has been singled out, to confess. "My son, pay honor to the Lord, the God of Israel, and make confession to God. Tell me what you have done, do not hold anything back from me."

To be sure, the Rabbis cite this passage to emphasize the injunction to confess one's sins. But equally important for them is the instruction to "pay honor to God." To give glory, or to pay honor to God, is also to affirm one's faith in God, to confess. Hence, in this one biblical verse, both connotations of confession intersect, demonstrating not only the importance of both, but their interdependence as well. For as sin represents a breaking of faith with God, confession facilitates reconciliation with God.

In fact, prior to the destruction of the Temple, confession referred primarily to an affirmation of faith. Hoffman elucidates this point;

> The *vidui* did not always have the connotation of confessing one's sin. A prominent usage of the word in the Mishnah, for example, regards the bringing of the second tithe to Jerusalem and making a *vidui* to

> the priest there, and it is quite clear from what the pilgrim says that he is confessing no sin, but affirming his proper conformance to the Torah. The *vidui* is positive, celebrative, here; and it is intoned to remind God that He too has a covenantal obligation to fulfill. On the other hand, the term also appears with negative connotations, that is to say, the other side of the same coin: admitting one's failings under the term of the covenant.[2]

Thus, an understanding of confession which includes only an admission of sins is incomplete, and represents only half of the coin. Both connotations of *vidui*, the positive and the negative, are needed to express the fullness of our relationship with God. And at no time is this relationship more important than at the moment of death: "This [the deathbed confession] and the recitation of the *Sh'ma* in the last moments before death help to affirm faith in God precisely when it is most challenged...just at the moment when one [sic] enters the most mysterious and unknowable experience of his life."[3]

More feared than any other event in one's lifetime, is the act of dying. This universal fear of death rears itself on countless psychiatrist's couches, in literature, and in a general denial of death that plagues western society. We desperately pursue the fountain of youth in an attempt to prolong life; the dying are connected to life-support machines to postpone death, aging people remove

---

2 Lawrence A. Hoffman, The Canonization of the Synagogue Service (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 102-103.

3 Audrey Gordon, "The Psychological Wisdom of the Law," in Jack Riemer, Jewish Reflection on Death (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 96.

wrinkles from the skin in order to look more youthful. It is possible that our attempts to look younger and live longer reflect a fervor for life. On the other hand, perhaps we are attempting to avoid death, to distance ourselves from the reality of death in our lives, a view reflected by Woody Allen, "I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."[4]

The deathbed confession forces us to "be there when it happens." By forcing us to confront death, the confession enables us to die consciously. Moreover, it facilitates the dying process, guiding us through its various stages until the moment of death is reached. Thus, death is not something that happens to us, but rather, it is a stage of life to be confronted and lived.[5] Judaism supports this notion. Abraham Joshua Heschel states that Judaism "rarely deals with death as a problem...[In the Bible] there is no rebellion against death, no bitterness over its sting, no preoccupation with the afterlife.[6] Death is but the final stage in the journey of life. The very last moments of this journey are not to be avoided or feared, but to be

---

4 D.J. Enright, ed., The Oxford Book of Death (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 39, from "Getting Even."

5 For Kingsley Amis (b. 1922), our task is merely to await death:
"Death has got something to be said for it:
There's no need to get out of bed for it;
Wherever you may be,
They bring it to you free."
Enright, p. 17, from "Delivery Guaranteed."

6 ibid., p. 62.

embraced and exalted. It is through the deathbed confession that we accomplish both of the tasks.

Heschel agrees that we ought to prepare for and confront death so that we may die gracefully. "If life is a pilgrimage, death is an arrival, a celebration. The last words should be neither craving nor bitterness, but peace, gratitude."[7] The peace and gratitude to which Heschel refers is expressed in the words of the deathbed confession. These confessional words enable us to praise God for sanctifying life; we acknowledge God's abundant mercy and kindness; we profess our faith in God, we purify ourselves, and we accept our Divine death decrees. The confession represents not only our faith in God, but an embracing of death as well, for Heschel affirms that "death is not sensed as a defeat but as a summation, an arrival, a conclusion."[8]

Yet, while we confess our faith in God, offering thanks and praise to God, we also experience a very human struggle with death and anger toward God. This too is evident in the confessional prayers, as we plead with God for mercy and beg for a renewal of life. To some extent, the themes which emerge in the deathbed confession (many of which we explored in chapter 3 in the analysis of Ma'avar

---

7 Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Death as Homecoming," in Riemer, p. 72.
8 ibid., p. 64.

Yabok) reflect the stages of death identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. When one dies, according to Kubler-Ross ,and many others since she first identified these stages in 1969, one experiences the following five stages:

1. Denial and isolation
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance[9]

Although not every stage is parallel in the Jewish experience on the deathbed, Kubler-Ross' model is extremely helpful in enabling us to understand the dying process. Providing rich insight into death and dying as well is the rich literary tradition we inherit from the secular world. Thus, both psychological and literary models afford us greater appreciation of the dying process and the role of confession with it. On the other hand, while extolling the importance of accepting and even embracing death, Judaism offers little practical or theological guidance to accomplish such tasks.

The following literary illustrates the various stages of the dying process. Although not following Kubler-Ross's stages exactly, many parallels do exist. In the following 16th century piece, death confronts *Everyman*, representative of the human experience. Here, we witness

---

9 Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying, (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1972).

the universal denial of death, followed by anger, and an attempt to bargain with death:

Death. On thee thou must take a long journey;
Therefore thy book of count with thee thou bring,
For turn again thou cannot by no way.
And look thou be sure of thy reckoning,
For before God thou shalt answer, and show
Thy many bad deeds, and good but a few;
How thou hast spent thy life, and in what wise,
Before the chief Lord of paradise.
Have ado that we were in that way,
For, wit thou well, thou shalt make none attorney.
Everyman. Full unready I am such reckoning to give.
I know thee not. What messenger are thou?
Death. I am Death, that no man dreadeth;
For every man I rest, and no man spareth;
For it is God's commandment
That all to me should be obedient.
Everyman. O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind!
In thy power it lieth me to save;
Yet of my good will I give thee, if thou will be kind-
Yea, a thousand pound shalt thou have-
And defer this matter till another day.
Death. Everyman, it may not be, by no way.
I set not by gold, silver, nor riches,
Ne by pope, emperor, king, duke, ne princes;
For, and I would receive gifts great,
All the world I might get;
But my custom is clean contrary.
I give thee no respite. Come hence and not tarry.

Everyman, c. 1500 [10]

Not only does this dialogue reflect the human denial of and struggle with death, but it portrays death as the Day of Judgment, a notion central to Judaism. *Everyman* is asked to examine his sins and account for them before God. That one's death day is the Day of Judgment is common to Christian theology as well.[11]

---

10 Enright, pp. 53-54.
11 For an in depth discussion, see Philippe Aries, The Hour of our Death, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 99-110.

In this literary passage, *Everyman* never reaches the fifth stage of dying: acceptance of his death. Nor does he make a positive confession; on the contrary, *Everyman* is unprepared for death, and thus, when he meets death, it is in an unsettling confrontation in which death is thrust upon an unwitting victim. On the other hand, the protagonist in the following piece, after struggling with death, finally accepts his death, made evident in his dramatic deathbed confession:

> Contrary to all expectation, he lived over the night; as well from his impatience and disappointment as from his wounds; for he seemed very unwilling to die.
>
> He was delirious at times in the two last hours; and then several times cried out, as if he had seen some frightful spectre, Take her away! take her away! but named nobody...At nine in the morning he was seized with convulsions, and fainted away; and it was a quarter of an hour before he came out of them.
>
> His few last words I must not omit, as they show an ultimate composure; which may administer some consolation to his honourable friends.
>
> *Blessed-* said he, addressing himself no doubt to Heaven; for his dying eyes were lifted up. A strong convulsion prevented him for a few moments saying more, but recovering, he again, with great fervor (lifting up his eyes and spreading his hands), pronounced the word *blessed*. Then, in a seeming ejaculation, he spoke inwardly, so as not to be understood: at last, he distinctly pronounced these three words,
>
> LET THIS EXPIATE!
>
> And then, his head sinking on his pillow, he expired, at about half an hour after ten.
>
> Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)
> *Clarissa Harlowe* (the death of Lovelace)[12]

---

[12] **Enright, p. 64**

Following an initial stage of anger and avoidance, Lovelace finally reconciles himself with his imminent death. Both an acceptance of death and an affirmation of God are reflected in two separate confessions. First, Lovelace cries out, "Blessed," lifting his eyes toward God and the Heavens. This simple word expresses an abounding trust in God. Lovelace then spreads his hands in an apparent attempt to reach God and approach the domain of God, which will soon become his eternal home. Furthermore, the impulsive plea, "Let this expiate" echoes the classic mishnaic confession, "May my death be an atonement for my sins." Thus, in this literary deathbed scene, both forms of confession appear. Lovelace not only expresses a desire to be cleansed of his sins, but he also affirms his faith and praises God.

George Eliot (1819-1880) illustrates this transition from denial to acceptance in the following poetic excerpt from Middlemarch:

> When the commonplace "We must all die" transforms itself suddenly into the acute consciousness "I must die- and soon" then death grapples us, and his fingers are cruel; afterwards, he may come to fold us in his arms as our mother did, and our last moment of dim earthly discerning may be like our first.[13]

Hence, after a period of shock and discomfort with one's own death, we move gradually to an integrative relationship

---

13 ibid., p. 63.

with death. Eliot attributes the transition through stages of dying to the realization that death affects us personally. When we first make this realization, we view death as a cruel enemy to avoid; yet after we make peace with death, it becomes like a parent enveloping us with love. Ultimately then, death is a comfort which escorts us from this world just as we were brought into it.

An exploration of literary models would be incomplete without the inclusion of Shakespeare's words. In "Richard II," Shakespeare notes the gravity of the words spoken on the deathbed.

> O, but they say the tongues of dying men
> Enforce attention like deep harmony.
> Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain,
> For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.[14]

At the moment of death, therefore, even a single word reflects the profundity of the dying experience.

Finally, one can also find examples of deathbed scenes in Jewish literature, most particularly, in Chasidic tales. These tales offer a window into the death scenes of Chasidic rebbes and offer moral lessons on life and death. The first tale reminds us that all of life is a preparation for death:

> When Rabbi Zalman was nigh unto death, his friends came to his bedside and asked him to recite the confession enjoined for the occasion. The Rabbi smiled and said, "Friends, do you really believe a

[14] ibid., p. 330.

> deathbed confession contains much merit? No, friends! One should confess when one is seated at the dining table and eating the good food thereon."[15]

One should confess and thank God when one is alive and performing the daily tasks of a human being. The time to praise God is when we are enjoying the many gifts that God bestows upon us in our lives. Contrary to this view, however, is the deathbed account of Rabbi Elimelech who suggests that the day of death is the very day on which we should rejoice and be thankful for life.

> When Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk perceived that his end was approaching, he made himself master of an extraordinary cheerfulness. One of his disciples inquired the reason for his unusual mood. The rabbi thereupon took the hand of his faithful disciple into his own, and said: "Why should I not rejoice, seeing that I am about to leave this world below and enter into the higher worlds of eternity? Do you not recall the words of the Psalmist (23:4), 'Yea I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me.' Thus does the grace of God display itself."[16]

Rabbi Elimelech's elation and great joy on his deathbed surprises his disciples. They anticipate that their master will fear death and despair his departure from this world. Instead, the Rabbi expresses his great anticipation of the world-to-come as well as his unwavering faith in God. The dark shadows of death are illuminated by the light emanating from God, who accompanies the dying on their journey through death.

---

15 Louis I. Newman, The Hasidic Anthology, (New York: Schocken Books, 1943), pp. 71-72, #14.
16 ibid., p. 70, #18.

Rabbi Elimelech is certainly not alone in rejoicing on the day of his death. His view is central to the Jewish approach to both life and death. Is it too much to imagine that on his deathbed, Rabbi Elimelech glanced through Ma'avar Yabok a book he surely knew well) and read the following words, "The righteous person should rejoice with great happiness on the day of death. For God knows that [the day of death] is the day of perfection and completeness, that one's inheritance will be eternal."[17] Or, maybe the Rabbi was familiar with Frankfurter's conviction that on the day of death we ought to be tranquil and rejoice. The deathbed confession encourages us to embrace death. It gives us words with which to express our deep despair and anger; to struggle with God whose mercy and kindness we seek; and finally, to affirm and praise God, in whose hands we place both our life and death.

Confession compels us to die consciously, to sanctify death in the same way we sanctify life. Throughout a Jew's lifetime, we sanctify both time and space; through blessings, ritual, and prayer, we elevate the level of human experience, acknowledging the Divine influence in our lives. We mark the days, months, and years of our lives in order not to take our lives for granted; "A man's capacity to face up to his death is proportional to his capacity to face up to his life. In the words of that wonderful

---

17 **Berechiah, p. 144.**

Yiddish proverb, *Der vos lebt un takhlis shtarbt un vidui*- He who lives without purpose must die without confession."[18] The way in which we live our lives dictates the way we will "live" our deaths. In fact, some have said that all of life is a rehearsal for death. For example, on his deathbed, Plato was asked to summarize his thought in one statement. He replied, "practice dying."[19] Rabbi Bunam's message upon his deathbed echoes Plato's: "When Rabbi Bunam was lying on the deathbed, his wife wept bitterly. When he noticed it he said to her, 'Why do you cry? All my life has been merely so that I might learn how to die.'"[20] Dying is but the culmination of a lifetime of experience and knowledge.

To prepare for death, one must live with an everpresent awareness of the finitude of life and of our own mortality. Rabbi Eliezar's final words exemplify this message. Asked for a last teaching, Rabbi Eliezar replied, "You should repent the day before you die!" His disciples were confused, "How can we know just when that day comes?" To which the Rabbi answered, "Thus, you should repent every day."[21] According to Rabbi Eliezar's teaching, we should be ready to die at on any given day. This awareness of death is intended neither to be moribund nor to bring

---

18 Abraham Kaplan, "Life and Death as Partners," Riemer, pp. 131-132.
19 Stanley Keleman, Living Your Dying (New York: Random House Inc., 1974), p. 1.
20 Heschel, p. 71.
21 Shabbat 153a.

sadness to the living. On the contrary, when we repent, or confess every day, we confront our mortality, and daily, purify our souls and reconcile ourselves with God and other people.

The Jewish tradition guides us toward a celebration of life. As death is part of this life, it too is celebrated and honored. In the deathbed confession, the dying person celebrates God, praising the Maker of life and joy, of illness and death.

> I know of no faith that loves life, that celebrates life, that values life as much as does the faith of Israel. But I know no faith that sees life as realistically, that sees death as part of life, that sees the sanctity of life overflowing into the acceptance of death, that sees both life an death as coming from the same source and therefore both as blessed, as does the faith of Israel.[22]

Recited on the deathbed, the confession reveals both a love of life and an acceptance of death. Through it, we acknowledge God's abundant kindness and power, both in our lives and in our deaths. We praise and bless God, who has enabled us to live lives worthy of Divine blessing. Confession on the deathbed satisfies the spirit at the time of its utmost need.

---

22 Kaplan, p. 133.

Conclusion

In recent years, a wealth of material on death and dying has been written, making death a new genre of literature. Workshops and lectures are attended in record numbers by those seeking better to understand the phenomenon of death. Yet, during the same period, few Jewish works on this issue have been produced. As we have seen, this trend has persisted throughout Jewish history. Of the lack of Jewish material on dying, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross remarks, "I have always wondered why the Jews as a people have not written more on death and dying. Who, better than they, could contribute to our understanding of the need to face the reality of our own finiteness? It is the Jewish people who have suffered more than any others over the centuries, who have been faced with more threats and attempts at their annihilation."[1]

In recent years, death has received more attention in Jewish literature, But the dying process itself still remains largely untouched there. Similarly, while an extensive system of death, burial, and mourning ritual exists, very few rites are prescribed specifically for the dying person. This thesis has explored one such rite, intended to guide us through the dying process and lead us

---

[1] Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her forward to Riemer, p. 2.

to the gates of death. As we have seen, the deathbed confession, functions on various levels: it guides the dying person through distinctly different stages of death; it forces one to confront and ultimately to accept death; and it enables one to praise God, and affirm faith in God. However, this invaluable and powerful rite is obscured in Jewish tradition. Many Jews are unaware that a Jewish deathbed confession even exists! Even fewer know its content or intent.

That the deathbed confession is veiled behind ignorance and mistaken assumptions is a tragic loss for Jews and Judaism. Within the deathbed confession resides hundreds of years of insight regarding dying. Today, we are in particular need of this wisdom; for in an age where many die alone in impersonal nursing homes and sterile hospitals, the confession offers comfort and renews faith. At a time when AIDs, cancer, and so many deadly diseases plague our society, we desperately need guidance through and understanding of the dying process. While the medical profession can provide expert care to the body, only the deathbed confession can care for the soul.

Given confession's efficacy and our need for spiritual guidance during death, why is its use so rare? First, most people are unaware of the exact moment at which they will die. It is difficult to confess before our death when

we have no foreknowledge of its arrival. Still others are incoherent or incapacitated by pain, preventing them from confessing in the moments before death. However, the Rabbis anticipated these considerations in their assertion that one should not wait until an illness threatens one's life before confessing. On the contrary, one must recite the vidui throughout an illness in case the condition suddenly worsens, thereby preventing one from confessing. Moreover, as we have seen in the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezar instructs us to confess the day before our deaths. How can we confess before we die when we do not know when we are to die? Rabbi Eliezar heeds our concerns, are identical to those of his disciples hundreds of years ago: he instructs us to confess everyday. Thus, we do not need to know our exact day of death in order to confess, for we must consider each day as our last.

Despite the many divine attributes with which we were born, human beings are limited by our mortality. On the other hand, knowledge of our mortality can also be liberating, in that it compels us to savor the fleeting moments of our lives. The deathbed confession enables us to savor and accept, rather than endure and avoid, that sacred moment when our body hovers between life and death and our souls achieve eternal harmony.

Appendix A-1

מודה אני לפניך יהוה אלהי ואלהי אבותי אלהי אברהם יצחק
ויעקב אלהי האלהים וארוני הארונים בי׳ שמים ממעל ועל
הארץ מתחת אין עוד ׳ עושה שמים וארץ ׳ עושה חסד משפט
וצדקה באָרץ ׳ היה והוה ויהיה ׳ מהוה את הכל ׳ שרפואתי בידך
ומיתתי בידך ׳ יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהי ואלהי אבותי
שתרפאני רפואה שלימה כי אתה אל רופא רחמן ׳ ואם בר מינן
אמות תהא מיתתי כפרה על כל חטאתי ועונותי ופשעי שחטאתי
ושעויתי ושפשעתי לפניך ותן חלקי בתורתך ובנן עדן ווכני
לעולם הבא הצפון לצדיקים ואני מודה ומאמין כי אתה נמצא
מציאות נמורד ׳ ואתה אחד ולא כיחד האחדים ׳ וראוש לכל
הנמצאים ׳ ואינך גוף ולא כח בגוף ׳

Appendix A-2

רבון עלמין דאנת הוא מארי מלבין ונלי ניזין : יהא רעוא דילך
לסברא מלין בפומאי : לקימא בי האי קרא ואנכי אהיה
עם פיך דלא אישול בכסופא קדמך וקדם רישי מתיבתא דרקיעא :
ואזכה למשמע מלין ודזין דאורייתא מרישי מתיבתי עילאי :

Appendix A-3

אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי תָּבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי וְאַל תִּתְעַלַּם מִתְּחִנָּתִי
שֶׁא�ין אֲנִי עַז פָּנִים וּקְשֵׁה עֹרֶף (אם היא אשה תאמר) שֶׁאֵין
אֲנַכְנִי עַזַּת פָּנִים וּקְשַׁת עֹרֶף (וכן בכל מקום שיאמר) בַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה שֶׁאוֹמַר
לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי צַדִּיק אֲנִי וְלֹא חָטָאתִי אֲבָל
חָטָאתִי עָוִיתִי מָרַדְתִּי אֲנִי וַאֲבוֹתַי : אָשַׁמְתִּי · אָכַלְתִּי דְּבָרִים
אֲסוּרִים וּכְרוּעָבִים : בָּגַדְתִּי · גָּזַלְתִּי · דִּבַּרְתִּי בְשָׂפָתַי : נָזַלְתִּי · נָבַזְתִּי
לִבִּי רָכְזוּ עֵינַי : הִרַּרְתִּי רוּפִי וּדְבָרִים בְּטֵלִים : הֶעֱוִיתִי · הוֹצֵאתִי
דִּבָּה וְשִׁכְבַת זֶרַע לְבַטָּלָה : וְהִרְשַׁעְתִּי בְּוִעוּד עֲבֵירָה וּבְהֵרְהוּר
רָעָה : זַרְתִּי · זָנִיתִי וְלִזַּלְתִּי מוּרִים וְהוֹרִים : חָמַסְתִּי · הִלַּלְתִּי שֵׁם
יְהוָה בַּסֵּתֶר וּבַגָּלוּי · חִלַּלְתִּי שַׁבָּתוֹת וְיָמִים טוֹבִים : טָפַלְתִּי שֶׁקֶר ·
טִמֵּאתִי רַעְיוֹנַי בְּמַחֲשָׁבוֹת וּבְהֵרְהוּרִים אֲסוּרִים · טִמֵּאתִי בְּרִית
קֹדֶשׁ : יָעַצְתִּי רָע · יִהַרְתִּי בְּתוֹרָתָהּ : כִּזַּבְתִּי · כָּנַסְתִּי כְּנֵסִיוֹת שֶׁלֹּא
לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם : לַצְתִּי לְשׁוֹנִי : הִמְרֵיתִי · מָרַדְתִּי · מָרִיתִי בְּמַשָּׂא
וּבְמַתָּן : נִאַפְתִּי · נָאַפְתִּי · נָשַׂכְתִּי בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וְתַרְבִּית : סָרַרְתִּי ·
סָכַרְתִּי עָיִן : עָוִיתִי · הֶעֱוִיתִי מֵעַז : פָּשַׁעְתִּי · פָּרַקְתִּי עוֹל תּוֹרָה
וְיִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם : צָרַרְתִּי · צָחַקְתִּי כַּעֲשׂ : קִשִּׁיתִי עֹרֶף · קִלְקַלְתִּי
פְּעוּלוֹתָי · קָפַצְתִּי יָדִי מֵאֲחִי הָאֶבְיוֹן : רָשַׁעְתִּי · רָכַלְתִּי עַל רֵעַ
וָעָמִית · רַגְלַי הֵרַצְתִּי לָרָעָה : שִׁחַתִּי · שִׁנֵּאתִי שְׁנֵאַת חִנָּם :
תָּעִיתִי · וְכָפַרְתִּי תִּשּׁוֹמֶת יָד : תִּעְתָּעְתִּי · תּוֹעֵבָה וְתוֹעֵבָה עָשִׂיתִי :
סַרְתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וּמִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים וְלֹא שָׁוָה לִי : וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק
עַל כָּל הַבָּא עָלַי כִּי אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ וַאֲנִי הִרְשָׁעְתִּי : מָה אוֹמַר לְפָנֶיךָ
יוֹשֵׁב מָרוֹם וּמָה אֲסַפֵּר לְפָנֶיךָ שׁוֹכֵן שְׁחָקִים הֲלֹא כָּל הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת
וְהַנִּגְלוֹת אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ : אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ רָזֵי עוֹלָם וְתַעֲלוּמוֹת סִתְרֵי כָּל חָי
אַתָּה חוֹפֵשׂ כָּל חַדְרֵי בָטֶן וּבוֹחֵן כְּלָיוֹת וָלֵב אֵין כָּל דָּבָר נֶעְלָם
מִמֶּךָּ וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִנֶּגֶד עֵינֶיךָ : יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתַי שֶׁתִּסְלַח וְתִמְחוֹל לִי כְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים עַל כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתַי
וּפְשָׁעַי וְחַטֹּאתַי :

Appendix A-5

עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאוֹנֶס : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ
בְּרָצוֹן : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּזָיוֹן : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי
לְפָנֶיךָ בְּגָלוּי : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּיוֹדֵעַ וּבְלֹא יוֹדֵעַ :
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרַמִּיָּה אִבְרִי וְשַׁמָּה גִּידֵי וְעוֹרְקַי :
עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרַמִּיָּה אִבְרִי וְשַׁמָּה גִּידֵי וְעוֹרְקַי
נַפְשִׁי : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרַמִּיָּה אִבְרִי וְשַׁמָּה גִּידֵי וְעוֹרְקַי
רוּחִי : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרַמִּיָּה אִבְרִי וְשַׁמָּה גִּידֵי וְעוֹרְקַי
נִשְׁמָתִי : וְכֵן כַּמָּה שֶׁנִּרְמַזְתִּי לַאֲחֵרִים הַבֵּל הַתַּעֲבִיר וְהִכְהִיל וְהִסְלַה
אֲשֶׁר נוֹאַלְנוּ וַאֲשֶׁר הָבֵאנוּ בְּהַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים וּבַחֲסָדֶיךָ הַגְּדוֹלִים
וּבְכֻלָּם הַמְאִירִים לָאָרֶץ וְלַדָּרִים בָּהּ שֶׁלֹּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מִדּוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר
הִקְדַּמְתָּם עַל שַׁעֲרֵי תְּפִלָּה שֶׁאֵינָם תּוֹרוֹת הֵימֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר וּוַדַּעְתָּ
לְעָנְיוֹ מִקֶּדֶם כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה יְהוָה

אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים
נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנַקֵּה : וּבֵן יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ אֱהִיֶה אֲשֶׁר
אֱהִיֶה שֶׁתּוֹפִיעַ נָא בַּהֲמוֹן רַחֲמֶיךָ עָלַי וְעַל נַפְשִׁי וְרוּחִי וְנִשְׁמָתִי
בְּעַל כָּל הַגִּלְגּוּלִים עִמִּי וְהַלְבֵּן כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִכְתָּם לְפָנֶיךָ מֵעֲוֹנוֹתַי בְּכֹחַ
יְהוֹה אֲדֹנָי חִילִי הַמַּלְבֵּן עֲוֹנוֹת וַחֲטָאוֹת תִּשְׁלַח נָא לִי אֶת הַחֶסֶד
וְאֶת הָרַחֲמִים וּבְכֹחַ זֶה תְּכַפֵּר עַל כָּל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם
כָּל מִינֵי מִיתָה בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם : עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל
מִינֵי מִיתָה בִּידֵי אָדָם ׳ עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל מִינֵי
כָּרֵת : עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל מִינֵי מִיתוֹת מְשׁוּנוֹת :
עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל מִינֵי מִיתוֹת בֵּית דִּין : עַל
חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל מִינֵי מַכַּת מַרְדוּת : עַל חֲטָאִים
שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל מִינֵי מַלְקוּת : עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאתִי בְּבִטּוּל
מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה וּבְלַאו הַבָּא מִכְּלַל עֲשֵׂה וּבְלַאו הַנִּהְנָק לַעֲשֵׂה ׳ וְלַאו
שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ מַעֲשֶׂה : עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּב עֲלֵיהֶם כָּל אַרְבַּע מִיתוֹת
בֵּית דִּין : כָּל מִינֵי סְקִילָה וּתוֹלְדוֹתֶיהָ וְכַדּוֹמֶה לָהּ : כָּל מִינֵי שְׂרֵפָה

Appendix A-6

מִי אֵל כָּמוֹךָ נוֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וְעֹבֵר עַל פֶּשַׁע לִשְׁאֵרִית נַחֲלָתוֹ לֹא הֶחֱזִיק
לָעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא : יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ
וְתַשְׁלִיךְ בִּמְצוּלוֹת יָם כָּל חַטֹּאתָם: תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם : בְּיָהּ אַפְקִיד רוּחִי פָּדִיתָה
אוֹתִי יְהוָה אֵל אֱמֶת : יַסְּרַנִּי יְהוָה אַךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט אַל בְּאַפְּךָ פֶּן
תַּמְעִיטֵנִי : בַּטּוֹב הָלִין וְתָקֵין בְּרַחֲמִים : אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לִי :
רְפָאֵנִי יְהוָה וְאֵרָפֵא הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי וְאִוָּשֵׁעָה כִּי תְהִלָּתִי אָתָּה נ״ן אל
תַּעֲזְבֵנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי אַל תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי: חוּשָׁה לְעֶזְרָתִי יְהוָה תְּשׁוּעָתִי :
לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה : יְהוָה לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי : קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה
לִישׁוּעָתֶךָ : לְפוּרְקָנָךְ סַבְּרִית יְהוָה : יְהוָה לְפוּרְקָנָךְ סַבְּרִית : סַבְּרִית
יְהוָה לְפוּרְקָנָךְ : יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ : יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָ :
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם : יִהְיוּ לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי
לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגוֹאֲלִי :

Appendix C-1

אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי תָּבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי וְאַל תִּתְעַלַּם
מִתְּחִנָּתִי : תְּכַפֵּר לִי עַל כָּל חַטֹּאתַי : שְׁחִטָּאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ
מֵעוֹדִי עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה : הִכְּלַלְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתִי : בִּישְׁתִּי וְגַם
נִכְלַמְתִּי : כִּי הַשְׁאוֹר שְׁבִעִיסָתִי : הוּא הִשִּׂיאֵנִי לִטְרָדָתִי :
קַח נָא עָנְיִי וּכְרִידִי לְכַפָּרָתִי : וּמְחַל לְשׁוּבָתִי : כִּי לְךָ
לְבַדְּךָ חָטָאתִי : אָשַׁמְתִּי ׳ בָּגַדְתִּי ׳ גָּזַלְתִּי ׳ דִּבַּרְתִּי דוֹפִי ׳
הֶעֱוִיתִי ׳ וְהִרְשַׁעְתִּי ׳ זָדִתִי ׳ חָמַסְתִּי ׳ טָפַלְתִּי שֶׁקֶר ׳ יָעַצְתִּי
רַע ׳ כִּזַּבְתִּי ׳ לַצְתִּי ׳ מָרַדְתִּי ׳ נָאַצְתִּי ׳ סָרַרְתִּי ׳ עָוִיתִי ׳
פָּשַׁעְתִּי ׳ צָרַרְתִּי ׳ קָשִׁיתִי עֹרֶף ׳ רָשַׁעְתִּי ׳ שִׁחַתִּי : תִּעַבְתִּי ׳
תָּעִיתִי ׳ הִתְעֵתָעְתִּי : כָּרַתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וּכְמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים וְלֹא
שָׁוָה לִי : וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק עַל כָּל־הַבָּא עָלַי כִּי אֱמֶת עָשִׂיתָ
וַאֲנִי הִרְשָׁעְתִּי :

Appendix C-2

עַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאוֹנֶס וּבְרָצוֹן : וּבְאִכּוּלִין הַלֵּב
וּבְבִלְבּוּלֵי דֵּעָת וּבִבְצוּעֵי שְׂפָתַיִם : וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי
לְפָנֶיךָ בְּגִלּוּי עֲרָיוֹת וּבְגִלּוּי וּבְפֶתֶר וּבְדֵעָת וּבְמִרְמָה וּבְדִבּוּר
פֶּה : וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּהוֹנָאַת רֵעַ וּבְהַרְהוּר
הַלֵּב וּבְוִעִירַת זְנוּת וּבְיוּהּ פֶּה : וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי
לְפָנֶיךָ בְּוִלְוּל הוֹרִים וּמוֹרִים וּבְזָדוֹן וּבִשְׁגָגָה וּבְחוֹזֶק יָד
וּבְהִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם : וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּטָמְאַת
שְׂפָתַיִם וּבְטִפְּשׁוּת פֶּה וּבְיֵצֶר הָרַע וּבְיוֹדְעִים וּבְלֹא יוֹדְעִים ·
וְעַל כֻּלָּם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת סְלַח לִי : מְחַל לִי : כַּפֶּר לִי :

וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁחָטֵאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ בְּכַחַשׁ וּבְכָזָב וּבְכַפַּת־שֹׁחַד
וּבְלָצוֹן וּבְלָשׁוֹן הָרָע וּבְמַשָּׂא וּבְמַתָּן בְּמַאָכָל וּבְמִשְׁתֶּה
וּבְנָשֶׁךְ וּבְמַרְבִּית וּבִנְטִיַּת גָּרוֹן וּבְשִׂיחַ שִׂפְתַי וּבְשִׁקּוּד עַיִן
וּבְעֵינַיִם רָמוֹת וּבְעַזּוּת מֵצַח וּבְפָרִיקַת־עוֹל וּבְפִלּוּלוֹת וּבִצְדִיַּת־
רַיַּע וּבְצָרוּת עַיִן וּבְקַלּוּת רֹאשׁ וּבְקַשְׁיוּת עֹרֶף וּבְרִיצַת רַגְלַיִם
לְהָרַע וּבִרְכִילוּת וּבִשְׁבוּעַת שָׁוְא וּבְשִׂנְאַת חִנָּם וּבְחָשְׁמַת
יָד וּבְתִמְהוֹן לֵב :

וְעַל כֻּלָּם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת סְלַח־לִי · מְחַל לִי : כַּפֶּר לִי :

וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי חַיָּיב עֲלֵיהֶם קָרְבָּן עוֹלָה וְחַטָּאת וְקָרְבָּן
עוֹלָה וְיוֹרֵד : וְקָרְבָּן אָשָׁם וַדַּאי וְתָלוּי : וְעַל חֲטָאִים שֶׁאֲנִי
חַיָּיב עֲלֵיהֶם מַלְקוּת אַרְבָּעִים מַכַּת מַרְדּוּת : וְכָרֵת וַעֲרִירִי
(וערירות) וּמִיתָה בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם וְאַרְבַּע מִיתוֹת בֵּית דִּין : סְקִילָה
שְׂרֵפָה הֶרֶג וְחֶנֶק עַל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה וְעַל מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה :

וְעַל כֻּלָּם אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת סְלַח־לִי · מְחַל־לִי : כַּפֶּר לִי :

Appendix C-3

יִתְבָּרַךְ עֶלְיוֹן ׀ קְדוּשָׁתוֹ בְּחָבְיוֹן ׃ יְשׁוּעָתוֹ כְּעֵין הַיּוֹרֵעַ רַעְיוֹן ׀
שׁוֹכֵעַ בְּעֵיוֹן ׀ כְּכִתְפְּקַדְיוֹן ׀ רוֹפֵא חֶלְיוֹן ׀ כְּחַיַּהמַּחֲיוֹן ׀ וְלוֹ
הַגְּדֻלָּה וְהַגְּבוּרָה ׀ וּבְיָדוֹ לְגַדֵּל ׀ וּלְחַזֵּק וּלְרַפְּאוֹת לַכֹּל ׀ וְהוּא
מֹשֵׁל בַּכֹּל ׃ הָאֵל הַנֶּאֱמָן אָב הָרַחֲמָן הָרוֹפֵא לְתַחֲלוּאֵי עֲבָדָיו ׃
וּמְחַכֵּשׁ לְמַכְאוֹבָיו לְחוֹלֵי יְדִידָיו ׃ וּמֵצִיל כְּמָוֹת נֶפֶשׁ חֲסִידָיו ׃
וּבְרוֹב חֲנִינָתוֹ וַחֲמָלָתוֹ יִשְׁלַח לִי רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה רְפָאוֹת מָזוֹר
וּתְעָלָה ׀ רְפֻדָּה וַהֲבוּשָׁה ׀ כְּהֵרָה חוּשָׁה ׃ כִּי־כָל אַבְרֵי כְּבֵדָה
עָלַי כַּנְחוּשָׁה ׃ כְּמוּשָׁה וּנְמוּשָׁה ׃ כִּי־כָלוּ בְעָשָׁן יָמַי וְעַצְמוֹתַי
כְּמוֹקֵד נִחָרוּ ׃ הוּכָּה כָעֵשֶׂב וַיָּבֵשׁ לִבִּי כִּי שָׁכַחְתִּי מֵאֲכֹל
לַחְמִי ׃ מִקּוֹל אַנְחָתִי דָּבְקָה עַצְמִי לִבְשָׂרִי ׃ יָמַי כְּצֵל נָטוּי
וַאֲנִי כָּעֵשֶׂב אִיבָשׁ ׃ כִּי־חִצֶּיךָ נָחֲתוּ בִּי וַתִּנְחַת עָלַי יָדֶךָ ׃ אֵין־
תָּם בִּבְשָׂרִי מִפְּנֵי זַעְמֶךָ אֵין־שָׁלוֹם בַּעֲצָמַי מִפְּנֵי חַטָּאתִי ׃ כִּי
עֲוֹנֹתַי עָבְרוּ רֹאשִׁי כְּמַשָּׂא כָּבֵד יִכְבְּדוּ מִמֶּנִּי ׃ הִבְאִישׁוּ נָמַקּוּ
חַבּוּרֹתָי מִפְּנֵי אִוַּלְתִּי ׃ נָעֲוֵיתִי שָׁחוֹתִי עַד־מְאֹד כָּל־הַיּוֹם
קֹדֵר הִלָּכְתִּי ׃ כִּי־כְסָלַי מָלְאוּ נִקְלָה וְאֵין תָּם בִּבְשָׂרִי ׃ נְפוּגֹתִי
וְנִדְכֵּיתִי עַד־כְּאֹד שָׁאַגְתִּי מִנַּהֲמַת לִבִּי ׃ לִבִּי סָחַרְחַר עֲזָבַנִי
כֹּחִי וְאוֹר־עֵינַי גַּם־הֵם אֵין אִתִּי ׃ תָּבוֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי הַטֵּה
אָזְנְךָ לְרִנָּתִי ׃ כִּי־שָׂבְעָה בְרָעוֹת נַפְשִׁי וְחַיַּי לִשְׁאוֹל הִגִּיעוּ ׃
נֶחְשַׁבְתִּי עִם־יוֹרְדֵי בוֹר הָיִיתִי כְּגֶבֶר אֵין־אֵיָל ׃ עֵינִי דָאֲבָה
מִנִּי־עֹנִי קָרָאתִיךָ יְיָ כָּל־יוֹם שִׁטַּחְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ כַּפָּי ׃ כִּי אַלֶּיךָ ׀
יְיָ יְיָ עֵינָי בָּכָרוּ חָסְיתִי אַל־תְּעַר נַפְשִׁי ׃ אַל־תִּרְחַק
כִּמְּנִי כִּי־צָרָה קְרוֹבָה כִּי־אֵין עוֹזֵר ׃ כַּמַּיִם נִשְׁפַּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדוּ
כָּל־עַצְמוֹתָי הָיָה לִבִּי כְּדוֹנָג נָמַס בְּתוֹךְ מֵעָי ׃ יָבֵשׁ כַּחֶרֶשׂ ׀
כֹּחִי וּלְשׁוֹנִי מְדֻבָּק מַלְקוֹחָי וְלַעֲפַר־מָוֶת תִּשְׁפְּתֵנִי ׃ עֵינַי תָּמִיד
אֶל־יְיָ כִּי הוּא־יוֹצִיא מֵרֶשֶׁת רַגְלָי ׃ פְּנֵי אֵלַי וְחָנֵּנִי כִּי־
יָחִיד וְעָנִי אָנִי ׃ צָרוֹת לְבָבִי הִרְחִיבוּ מְמֻצוּקוֹתַי הוֹצִיאֵנִי ׃
חָנֵּנִי יְיָ ׀ רְאֵה עָנְיִי מְשָׂנְאִי חָמָס מִשְׂעַרֵי־מָוֶת ׃
הַבִּיטָה עָנְיִי יְיָ אֱלֹהַי הָאִירָה עֵינַי פֶּן־אִישַׁן הַמָּוֶת ׃ פֶּן־
עָנְיִי ׀ יְיָ כָּלְתָה רוּחִי אַל־תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי וְנִמְשַׁלְתִּי עִם־
יֹרְדֵי בוֹר ׃ לְכֶעֱן־שִׁמְךָ יְיָ תְּחַיֵּנִי בְּצִדְקָתְךָ ׀ תּוֹצִיא מִצָּרָה
נַפְשִׁי ׃ נַעֲנֵיתִי עַד מְאֹד יְיָ חַיֵּנִי כִּדְבָרֶךָ ׃ עֵינַי כָּלוּ לִישׁוּעָתֶךָ
וּלְאִמְרַת צִדְקֶךָ ׃ תְּחִי־נַפְשִׁי וּתְהַלָּלֶךָ וּמִשְׁפָּטְךָ יַעְזְרֵנִי ׃ לֹא־
אָמוּת כִּי־אֶחְיֶה וַאֲסַפֵּר מַעֲשֵׂה יָהּ ׃ יַסֹּר יִסְּרַנִּי יָהּ וְלַמָּוֶת
לֹא נְתָנָנִי ׃ כִּי אֵין בַּמָּוֶת זִכְרֶךָ בִּשְׁאוֹל מִי יוֹדֶה־לָּךְ ׃ אֹמַר־
אֵלִי אַל־תַּעֲלֵנִי בַּחֲצִי יָמַי בְּדוֹר דּוֹרִים שְׁנוֹתֶיךָ ׃ אֲלֶיךָ יְיָ
אֶקְרָא וְאֶל־יְיָ אֶתְחַנָּן ׃ מַה־בֶּצַע בְּדָמִי בְּרִדְתִּי אֶל־שַׁחַת
הֲיוֹדְךָ עָפָר הֲיַגִּיד אֲמִתֶּךָ ׃

Appendix C-4

אָנָּא יְיָ שָׁכַעְתָּ תְּחִנָּתִי ׳ וּרְאֵה בְּדַכְיָתִי ׳ כִּי בְיָדְךָ הַכֹּחַ
לְהַחֲיוֹת אֶת הַמֵּתִים ׳ אַף כִּי לְרַפְּאוֹת הַחוֹלִים ׳ וְלֹא תַחְפּוֹץ
בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת ׳ כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ אֵלֶיךָ וְחָיָה ׳ וְהִנֵּה שָׁבְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ
בְּכָל־לִבִּי ׳ לְהִתְוַדּוֹת עַל חַטָּאתַי ׳ וְרַחֵם נָא עָלַי כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתָּ ׳
וְכִידָה וְעָנֵב יְרַחֵם : כְּמוֹ שֶׁרִחַמְתָּ עַל־דָּוִד עַבְדֶּךָ ׳ כִּדְכְתִיב
וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־נָתָן (הַנָּבִיא) חָטָאתִי לַייָ וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל־
דָּוִד גַּם־יְיָ הֶעֱבִיר חַטָּאתְךָ לֹא תָמוּת : וּשְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי וְתוֹסִיף
לִי יָמִים וּשְׁנוֹת חַיִּים : כְּמוֹ שֶׁשָּׁמַעְתָּ תְּפִלוֹת חִזְקִיָּהוּ ׳ כִּדְכְתִיב
שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּפִלָּתֶךָ רָאִיתִי אֶת־דִּמְעָתֶךָ ׳ הִנְנִי יוֹסִף עַל־יָמֶיךָ
חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה : וּבִזְכוּתָם תִּשְׁלַח לִי רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה עִם
כָּל שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֵן :

Appendix C-5

פִּתְחוּ־לִי שַׁעֲרֵי־צֶדֶק אָבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יָהּ : זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר
לַייָ צַדִּיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ : פִּתְחוּ שְׁעָרִים וְיָבֹא גוֹי־צַדִּיק
שֹׁמֵר אֱמוּנִים : בֹּאוּ שְׁעָרָיו ו בְּתוֹדָה חֲצֵרוֹתָיו בִּתְהִלָּה הוֹדוּ לוֹ
בָּרְכוּ שְׁמוֹ : אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֵר קוֹל ו דּוֹדִי דוֹפֵק פִּתְחִי־לִי
אֲחֹתִי רַעְיָתִי יוֹנָתִי תַּמָּתִי שֶׁרֹּאשִׁי נִמְלָא־טָל קְוֻצּוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי
לָיְלָה : וַיוֹלִיכֵנִי אֶל־הַשַּׁעַר שַׁעַר אֲשֶׁר פָּנָה דֶּרֶךְ הַקָּדִים :
וְהִנֵּה כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּא מִדֶּרֶךְ הַקָּדִים וְקוֹלוֹ כְּקוֹל מַיִם
רַבִּים וְהָאָרֶץ הֵאִירָה מִכְּבוֹדוֹ :

Bibliography

Secondary Sources:

Ascher, B.H., trans. The Book of Life and the Expression of the Tongue. 3rd ed. London: B.H. Ascher, 1863.

Aries, Philippe. The Hour of Our Death. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Campbell, Ted A. Religion of the Heart. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992.

Carmell, Aryeh. Aiding Talmud Study Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishing, 1986.

Carroll, Malahy. Conscience and Confession. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965.

Chavel, Chaim David, ed. Kitvei Rabbenu Moshe ben Nachman: Torat Ha'adam. Jerusalem: *Mossad Ha Rav Kook*, 1963.

Enright, D.J., ed. The Oxford Book of Death. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Fine, Lawrence, trans. Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, The Beginning of Wisdom. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.

Frank, Yitzchak. The Practical Talmud Dictionary. Jerusalem: Ariel United Israel Institutes, 1991.

Goldberg, Rabbi Chaim Binyamin. Mourning in Halachah. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1991.

Goldwurm, Rabbi Hersh, Editor. The Rishonim. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1982.

------, The Early Acharonim. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1989.

Gordon, Audrey. "The Psychological Wisdom of the Law." In Jewish Reflections on Death, edited by Jack Riemer. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Death as Homecoming." In Jewish Reflections on Death, edited by Jack Riemer. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. Canonization of the Synagogue Service. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Jastrow, Marcus. A Dictionary. New York: Pardes Publishing House, Inc., 1950.

Kaplan, Abraham. "Life and Death as Partners." In Jewish Reflections on Death, edited by Jack Riemer. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

Keleman, Stanley, Living Your Dying. New York: Random House, 1975.

Kramer, Kenneth. The Sacred Art of Dying. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. On Death and Dying. London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1972.

Levine, Stephen. Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying. New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1982.

------. Meetings at the Edge. New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1984.

Marcus, Ivan G. Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany. Leiden: E.J. Brill, The Netherlands, 1981.

Marcus, Jacob R. Communal Sick-Care in the German Ghetto. Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1947.

Newman, Louis I. The Hasidic Anthology. New York: Schocken Books, 1943.

Saldarini, Anthony. "Last Words and Deathbed Scenes in Rabbinic Literature." In The Jewish Quarterly Review, 68 (1977): 28-45.

Scholem, Gershom. On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. New York: Schocken Books, 1965.

------. Kabbalah. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1974.

Seltzer, Robert M. Jewish People, Jewish Thought. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980.

Snoech, Andrea. Confession and Psychoanalysis. Westminster, Md.: The Newmand Press, 1964.

Steinsaltz, Adin. The Talmud: A Reference Guide. New York: Random House, 1989.

Tishby, Isaiah, ed. The Wisdom of the Zohar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Von Sperber, Adrienne. Confession. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1958.

Zuckermandel, Moses Samuel. Tosefta. Jerusalem: Bamburger and Wahram, 1938.

Primary Sources:

Harokeach. Rokeach, Elazar. Fano: 1505.

Kizzur Shulchan Arukh. Ganzfried, Shlomo. Touger, Eliyahu, trans. Jerusalem: Moznayim Publishing Corp., 1956.

Ma'avar Yabok. Berechiah, Aaron b. Moses of Modena, 1626; Reprint. B'nei B'rak: Yashfeh, 1927.

Midrash Sifre on Numbers. Neusner, Jacob, ed., Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.

Mishnah Torah, Touger, Eliyahu, ed., Jerusalem: Moznayim, 1987.

Minor Tractates of the Talmud. Zlotnick, Dov, trans. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Sefer Gesher Hachayim. Toktsinski, Aaron. Jerusalem: 1953.

Sefer Hachayim. Frankfurter, Simon. Amsterdam: Israel ben Avraham, 1717.

Sh'nei Luchot HaBrit. Horowitz, Israel. Amsterdam: 1649.

Shulchan Arukh. Caro, Joseph. 1565; Reprint. New York: Shulsinger Bros., 1953.

The Mishnah. Blackman, Phillip, tr. and ed.New York: Judaica Press, 1963.

The Babylonian Talmud. Epstein, Isidore, tr. and ed. London: Soncino Press, 1972.

The Tur. Ben Asher, Jacob. 1st ed., Pieve de Sachi: 1475.

The Zohar. Simon, Maurice and Sperling, Harry, trans. London: Soncino Press, 1934.