Zichronam Livracha:
Old and New Ways of Honoring the Dead

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"Death ends a life, not a relationship."

-Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays With Morrie*

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Introduction

For thousands of years, Jews have memorialized their loved ones in various ways. From *matzevot,* to reciting *Kaddish Yatom* on a *Yahrtzeit,* to *Yizkor* services and *memorbikher,* Jewish tradition places an emphasis on memory and the need to honor our loved ones once they have died. As in the past, new ways of memorializing our dead are being developed. A growing number of Jews are tattooing their loved one's name, birth and death date, pictures, or other reminders of that individual on their body. In addition, an increasing number of family members of Holocaust survivors have begun tattooing their loved one's concentration camp number on their bodies as a way to remember the pain and suffering he or she went through so many years ago. I initially became interested in researching traditional Jewish forms of memorializing the dead and the contemporary modalities that have evolved over the past few decades. After reading an article in the New York Times entitled, "Proudly Bearing Elders' Scars, Their Skin Says 'Never Forget,'" which tells the story of several families who have tattooed their survivor-relatives' concentration camp number to their skin, I wanted to research this emerging phenomenon.

I use traditional texts such as Torah and Shulkhan Aruch as the foundation for my research about Jewish forms of memorializing the dead. Specifically, this thesis will focus on *matztevot* and the social isolation of the mourners examining how these customs have changed from the Toraitic period until the contemporary period. There are many different rituals and customs that exist in the Torah. The *matzevah* and social isolation of the mourner received much attention in the biblical and post-biblical era. I chose to focus on these two rituals because they showcase the establishment of Jewish mourning

traditions and the changes in meaning that have occurred over time to Jewish mourning customs. In addition, this thesis will examine why we choose to memorialize the dead, who we choose to memorialize, and why remembering the dead is both challenging and important. This includes a close study of the use of memorials and monuments for individuals, as well as collective groups. Finally, this thesis will explore new modalities of memorializing the dead that are problematic and challenging for contemporary society. I will use recent responsa from the Orthodox and Reform movements to understand contemporary attitudes toward mourning rituals and how they relate to tattooing.

Chapter One of this thesis focuses on specific examples of the *matzevah* in the Torah and post-Toraitic period. By examining numerous stories of death from the Torah, we gain a deeper understanding of burial and mourning traditions from Judaism's earliest roots. Chapter One also focuses on burial and mourning rituals from the post-Toraitic period, specifically the social isolation of the mourner and the actual space in which a corpse is buried. By exploring the changes that occurred in Jewish tradition over this period of time, we begin to see a shift in belief and evolving understandings of life after death.

Chapter Two delves into the change in mourning rituals during the Early Rabbinic Period. This chapter looks at the meaning behind the rituals related to *matzevot* and social isolation from a legal standpoint (*halakhah*), and how beliefs about death and the after life change Jewish mourning customs and evolve. This chapter also explores contemporary responsa from the Reform movement to better understand the liberal Jewish stand on mourning rituals.

Chapter Three examines the reasons we choose to memorialize the dead. It begins by explaining the significance of memory in Judaism, as well as what the human need to remember the dead provides to the living. In addition, this chapter explores the difference between memorializing an individual and memorializing a collective group. This chapter utilizes scientific as well as religious-based sources to understand why we memorialize and what we gain from doing so.

Chapter Four has two parts. Part One explains why memorializing the dead presents challenges to mourners. This chapter explores the issue of memorializing the dead when emotions interfere with a mourner's ability to function and properly honor the dead. Part Two examines new modalities of memorializing the dead that have proven problematic. By comparing the custom of erecting monuments and memorials for deceased groups, a now common practice that was not always customary, to tattooing, we gain a deeper understanding of why these new modalities have been established.

Chapter 1: Biblical Mourning Rituals and Customs

Throughout the course of Jewish history, few burial and mourning practices have remained consistent. While many different customs and traditions existed at the time of the Torah and the Early Rabbinic period, the *kever* and *matzevah* showcase the depths to which people went to remember the dead and memorialize them for generations to come. By tracing changes related to these two customs, I will clarify ways memorializing the dead have been transformed throughout history and why it remains a significant part of our lives today.[1] I will also explain how these modifications have aided our own beliefs with regard to the afterlife and how we view death. The texts I will focus on do offer some practices, but no specific reasons for these customs. I will provide some possible explanations for these rituals when it seems appropriate. Additionally, I will focus on the practice of isolating the mourner from society during the early mourning period. By taking a close look at this practice, we can better understand the social position of the mourner and why the necessity to memorialize the dead becomes valuable for individuals and groups.

David Kraemer explains:

> … I came to appreciate that, even if death-practices did change, *and even if practices recorded in a later document reflect earlier practices*, this does not mean that a given tradition- in the form we now preserve- can be dated to an earlier time. It is equally as reasonable to suppose that a particular tradition originated in an earlier period- and thus partially portrays an earlier practice- and was then transmitted *and transformed* from one generation to the next. Only the archaeological record itself permits more definitive dating, and this only with a

[1] The use of "we" or "our" conveys the opinions of Liberal Jews of North America.

> minimalist interpretation. We should not naively assume that possibly later rabbinic interpretations or enhancements accurately reflect an earlier practice. [2]

Kraemer states that the transformation of mourning practices occurred because of changing historical circumstances. Burying the dead is a tradition mentioned in the biblical era. This and other rituals associated with death and mourning have changed throughout time, based on the evolving historical circumstances. In addition, our beliefs about death and the burial practices associated with death have changed. Because our beliefs about death and the after-life have transformed, the question remains, did our beliefs change as our customs changed, or did our customs change because our beliefs changed?

The first death we read about in a Jewish sacred text is found in the Torah in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 4:8-16, Cain kills his brother Abel while in a field.[3] In response to the killing, God turns to Cain and says, *"Ma asitah, kol d'mi achicha tzoakim ayli min ha'adama*, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" Genesis 4:10 implies that beyond death, a person can still communicate with the living. The verse indicates that although a body may no longer live, the soul or being of the person lives on. This implication informs the living about what happens after death. Interestingly, following his brother's death, Cain attempts to hide the murder from God and implores God to make his punishment more bearable. He also does nothing to bury the body in a particular place and does not perform any mourning rituals or customs. It is also unclear whether Adam and Chava mourned the

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[2] David Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) 9.
[3] This and all Biblical translations from Jewish Publications Society, *Hebrew English Tanakh.* The Jewish Publications Society, 2000.

loss of their son, indicating that either such customs did not yet exist during that time, or perhaps later generations did not see these practices as worthy of such recording. Abel's body is swallowed into the ground, not necessarily buried. In addition, we do not know where his body entered the earth.

Following the death of Abel, we read about the death of Sarah, in Genesis 23:1-9. Unlike Abel, Sarah receives much ceremony and ritual after she dies. This is also the first time we see a particular burial place, as well as a particular ritual associated with death in the Torah. In verse 23:2, we read, *"V'yavo Avraham lispod l'Sarah v'livkotah,* Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to cry for her." This verse suggests the first emotional response to death, indicating that following the death of a loved one, people might mourn and cry. However, it does not explicitly state what "mourning" requires. In the following verse, we also read of another possible custom: *"Vayakom Avraham meyal p'ney meyto,* Abraham got up from the presence of his wife."[4] This verse implies that our earliest ancestors might have sat with the dead after the body had expired. The reasons for watching the dead might include: to protect the body from external sources (such as animals), to assure that the soul of the body has left and has safe passage to the next world, or to allow the mourner time to wail and cry before moving to the next stage of mourning.

As soon as Abraham gets up from mourning for Sarah, he proceeds to the local landowners, the Hittites, to purchase a burial spot.[5] Abraham insists on buying not just an *achuzah* (estate, property), but an *achuzat-kever* (burial plot). This suggests Abraham's

[4] Genesis 23:3
[5] Genesis 23:4

intention that the land, specifically the cave of Machpelah, a large plot, be one that could house all of the descendents of Abraham after death. This section of Torah also gives the exact location and place of Sarah's burial plot, which differs greatly from Abel's final resting place. Abraham buries Sarah, facing Mamre (which is now Hebron). It is unclear whether he places a marker on the grave, indicating that this cave is a burial site. Isaac also mourns the loss of Sarah, suggesting that a spouse and a child grieve for a loved one. Isaac does not receive comfort until Genesis 24:67, when Rebekah becomes his wife. Perhaps, mourning for a parent requires a greater length of time than mourning for a spouse.

Later in this *Parashah,* we read of Abraham's death. He, too, is buried in the cave of Machpelah, also facing Mamre. This perhaps implies that the position in which a body is buried affects the soul or being of the individual, post death. His two sons, who previously were estranged from one another, bury Abraham. The death of Abraham became a unifying event for his sons, which allowed Isaac and Ishmael to reunite as they mourned for their father. Of additional significance is the Torah's explanation that Abraham died at a "good, ripe age."[6] This suggests that a person might live until 175 years old (Abraham's age when he died), which is considered a good age at the time of death.

The next biblical death differs greatly from Abel, Sarah, and Abraham. In Genesis 35:18-20, we read of Rachel's death during a difficult childbirth. The family was traveling, away from the cave of Machpelah, so Jacob buried Rachel, *"Vatikaver b'derech Efratah he Beit Lechem,* on the way to Efrat, that is Bethlehem." Rachel's burial

[6] Genesis 25:8

indicates that Jacob has a choice, to either bury Rachel with his grandparents in the cave of Machpelah, or bury her where she died. Interestingly, Jacob does place a marker on Rachel's grave. This is the first instance we read about a marker being placed on a grave. Before this moment, the text suggests that burial sites did not necessarily require a marker, but it begs the question: How did individuals or groups differentiate burial grounds from non-burial grounds? More specifically, was it important to differentiate these lands for any particular reason during the biblical era?

Following Rachel's death, we read about Isaac, Jacob's father and Rachel's father-in-law. The accounts of his death, as well as his wife Rebecca's death, contain little to no details. In Genesis 35:27-29, Jacob returns to his father in Mamre and Isaac breathes his last breath. The text states that Jacob and Esau bury their father, but it does not indicate where the burial took place. Was Isaac buried with his father and mother in the cave of Machpelah? Perhaps by stating that Jacob came to his father's home in Mamre, the text suggests that Isaac, too, was buried in the cave. However, this information is not stated clearly.[7] Similarly, the Torah does not provide any details regarding Rebecca's death. The text does not mention her after she sends Jacob to her homeland, subsequent to Jacob stealing the blessing from Esau.

The next noteworthy death in the Book of Genesis is Jacob's death. Because the family resided in Egypt at the time, they appear to have adopted the Egyptian custom of embalming the dead. Joseph embalms his father, following his death. Jacob requests that he be buried among his fathers. The tradition assumes this implies the cave of

[7] Tradition assumes that Isaac was buried in the cave of Machpelah.

Machpelah.[8] At this point, the cave might be considered like a modern day Mausoleum, a burial plot for the entire family. If his body had not been embalmed, Joseph and his brothers could not have returned to the cave with Jacob's body in tact. We also read of a new tradition associated with death in Genesis 50:3: "*Vayivku otoh Mitzrayim shivim yom,* Egypt cried for him for seventy days." This is the first time we read about a set number of days in which a person or persons mourned the death of someone. In addition, the Egyptians mourned for Jacob, as well as his family. Because of Jacob's request that his burial take place in the cave of Machpelah, Joseph receives special permission to carry his father's remains to Canaan and takes with him a very large entourage.[9] In Genesis 50:10, we read that before the burial, Joseph observes a mourning period of seven days. This differs greatly from the previous stories, as mourning typically took place after the burial of the dead. This is also the first time we see seven days, a specific number associated with mourning rituals.

Many deaths occur between Joseph and Moses, but the most significant are those of Miriam and Aaron. In Numbers 20:1, we learn that the Israelites travel to Kadesh, and then we read of Miriam's death and burial. No other information is provided in regards to Miriam's death or her burial. Soon after Miriam dies, Aaron meets his death on Mount Hor.[10] Not only do we know where Aaron dies, but we also know that the Israelites mourned for him a period of thirty days. This specific number of days is the first mention of this enduring Jewish mourning tradition.

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[8] Genesis 49:29-32
[9] Genesis 50:7-9
[10] Numbers 20:29

In the Book of Deuteronomy, we read of Moses' death. Again, the people mourn for thirty days, which seems to establish a pattern for mourning. In addition, this section showcases a new type of mourning. Aaron and Moses were not mourned by their family, but by *B'nai Yisrael*, the people of Israel. This suggests the importance of mourning public figures, not just family. While it is nearly impossible to determine why thirty days became the official set of mourning days, we can state that the deaths of Aaron and Moses became the foundation of how we mourn in Jewish tradition.

The Torah includes several examples of death and mourning practices, but other books of the Tanakh provide information about a multitude of practices. The various customs described throughout the books of *Nivi'im* and *Ketuvim* show a change of practice, specifically in regards to public mourning following a major destruction, individual deaths, and other types of death. In his book, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions*, Saul Olyan explains the four categories of mourning: mourning the dead, penitent and petitioner mourning, mourning during or after a disaster, and discrete mourning (specifically about a disease).[11] For the purposes of this chapter, I will only focus on Olyan's examples of mourning the dead. Olyan explains that many different mourning rituals took place during the biblical era:

> Mourners may tear their garments, put on sackcloth, weep, wail, toss ashes or dust on their heads, roll in ashes or dust, and sit or lie on the ground. They may fast, groan or sigh, move their bodies back and forth (נוד), utter dirges or mourning cries, avoid anointing with oil, lacerate themselves, and manipulate head and beard hair by means of shaving or depilation.[12]

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[11] This theme runs throughout Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2004).
[12] Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2004) 30.

By showcasing these particular mourning behaviors, Olyan suggests that the mourning practices contained in Tanakh changed significantly over time.

While the texts do not explain why these particular customs came about, Olyan offers one possibility:"…mourning rites as a series stand in opposition to rites of rejoicing. Thus, mourning practices function to separate the individual mourner of the group from the sanctuary's rejoicing rites."[13] He explains that wearing sackcloth, vocalizing emotions, and ceasing to participate in other rituals symbolically cuts the mourner off from the community. In his introduction, Olyan explains this concept through a sociological study presented by Emile Durkheim's student, Robert Hertz. Hertz explains a society that cuts off a mourner from society, does so because, "…[they] view the mourner as a socially dead individual."[14] However, tradition also explains that a dead body is no longer clean and those who come in contact with a corpse are deemed impure, which is derived directly from Torah.[15] Because the mourners are viewed as unclean, they cannot come in contact with those who are clean, and therefore must be cut off from society. Burial sites and graves are also considered places of impurity, so a grave essentially becomes one of the only locations a mourner may visit without causing another person to become unclean.

Although this study examined non-Jewish cultures, the concept of separating the mourner from society during the mourning period occurs in Judaism as well. However, as Olyan explains in the introduction, "The mourner for the dead is obligated to mourn part

[13] Ibid., 33.
[14] Ibid., 7.
[15] Numbers 19:14-15 (When a person dies, whoever comes in contact with that person is unclean- *JPS*); Numbers 19:22 (Whatever an unclean person touches shall be unclean-*JPS*)

of a day, one day, seven days, or thirty days, depending on the text. In all cases, there is a set terminus beyond which such mourning may not continue."[16] Because of the allotted time for mourning, a mourner is isolated from society for only a short period of time. This is perhaps why *matzevot* and *kevarim* become a place for the isolated mourner to visit during the mourning period in later generations.

The practice of isolating the mourner during the mourning period in Jewish tradition did not begin until later generations, perhaps during the Early Rabbinic era. "…mourning functions to underscore or bring into relief the mourner's social relationships. Far from being isolated, the biblical mourner is portrayed as surrounded by comforters, both family and friends."[17]

As he analyzes the prophetic texts, Olyan offers another possibility for why mourners must remain isolated from the larger society:

> No matter what the cultural context, death disrupts the social relationships that existed among the dead and the survivors, and these must be reworked. The socially sanctioned and normative temporary separation of mourners from quotidian social life followed by their aggregation allows mourners and others to recast their social world as one without the dead person as a living member and in which the survivors take on new social roles.[18]

By returning to quotidian life, the mourners can identify with the greater society and less as a member of the dead community. However, this new life will never be as it once was. Olyan describes that struggle throughout his book, suggesting that the mourning period

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[16] Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2004) 27.
[17] Ibid., 57.
[18] Ibid., 43.

allows mourners the opportunity to embrace the time after death in a new and comforting way.

Beyond the biblical texts, both written and archaeological sources provide information about Jewish mourning rituals from the Early Rabbinic Period. Throughout his book, David Kraemer identifies various customs and traditions from the Early Rabbinic Period, as well as through a thorough exploration of the burial sites from that time period. Again, I will focus only on the rituals concerning burial and social isolation. These two elements of mourning are intrinsically linked to one another, which Kraemer showcases throughout the book. By bringing in rabbinic texts and information about the burial sites, Kraemer creates a deeper understanding of mourning rituals from that time period and how change in these customs represents the changing historical circumstances. His in-depth look at ancient burial sites in Israel not only suggests how and why people were buried, but also how the mourners adjusted to the death of his or her loved one during the period of mourning.

According to Kraemer, many of our sources about the culture of the Early Rabbinic Era come from literature written in the early centuries of the Common Era: "…including the New Testament, the writings of Josephus, and various apocryphal works"(pg. 5).[19] By understanding the world in which the rabbis lived, we better understand why the rabbis wove these rituals into the fabric of our tradition. As Kraemer explains, "Of all ancient religious and social practices, death customs leave perhaps the

[19] David Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000) 5.

richest permanent record" (pg. 5).[20] Because of this, we can begin to answer WHY these rituals began.

As we read in the Torah, most burials took place with family, in a non-specified location, and rarely was a marker placed on the grave. The time in which the earliest rabbis lived, however, differed greatly. Kraemer uses a text from Maccabees to describe the burial site of Jonathan [Maccabee], which took place immediately before the Early Rabbinic Era:

> …all Israel bewailed him with great lamentation, and mourned for him many days. And Simon built a monument over the tomb of his father and his brothers; he made it high…with polished stone at the front and back. He also erected seven pyramids… erecting about them great columns, and on the columns he put suits of armor for a permanent memorial, and… he carved ships, so that they could be seen by all who sail the sea.[21]

This burial site differs greatly from the cave of Machpelah. Ornate decorations grace the *kever*, and many markers indicate this is the burial site of many individuals. There is no doubt that people are buried in this spot, unlike the unmarked graves of many of our biblical ancestors. Kraemer explains the extravagance of this monument, suggesting that such tombs were erected for warriors, future High Priests, and kings.[22] These and other monuments contained many depictions, such as ships and pyramids, which signify Jewish beliefs about death from this time period. As for the grandeur of the monument, Kraemer explains that individuals such as the Maccabees merit ornate tombs. This is a significant change from Toraitic burial practices to this time period.

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[20] Ibid., 5.
[21] Ibid., 17.
[22] Ibid., 17.

Kraemer also explains what burial sites looked like for those who were not considered warriors and future High Priests: "…The tombs show that the deceased were mostly laid into body-sized niches (loculi) in the walls of the caves or placed on shelves carved into the sides of the caves (arcoslia), over which were arched ceilings."[23] While these burial sites certainly did not contain the same ornate decorations and carvings as the Maccabees' monument, they did include many artifacts and various depictions that suggest how important and significant these sites were for the mourners. "Various personal effects, found at burial sites around Jerusalem from this period, provide evidence that the deceased would be visited and gifts left behind."[24] According to Kraemer, leaving gifts for the dead was a common practice of that time, and most likely done in order to remain connected to the dead and assure their soul safe passage to the world beyond.[25]

In addition to leaving gifts, visitors often came to eat with the dead and continued preparing the deceased's soul for safe passage. While it is unknown as to how often or at which particular times these visits took place, I propose that mourners came to the burial site for themselves, as much as they did for the deceased. During this time, mourners were considered "socially dead," cut off from the rest of society. They could not participate in community functions, as Saul Olyan suggested in his book. Because of this, the burial site and subsequently the deceased might have become the mourner's new community, for the time being. The grave, therefore, gained significance as a place for the mourner to visit, as well as a place in which the mourner was not viewed as "cut off"

[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] Ibid., 21.
[25] Ibid., 16.

or impure. The *kever* became the site for mourners before they officially reentered society, a place that allowed them to remember their dead.

In addition to bringing gifts to the deceased, mourners included depictions and carvings of various elements in burial caves. Kraemer asks the questions about these depictions: "Are these 'mere' decorations, intended to recall the structures and decorations found outside the tomb, in the world of the living? Or do these decorations represent some mysterious symbolic vocabulary, commenting on the fate of the deceased when he or she has come to the state of final rest?"[26] While it is nearly impossible to know precisely the purpose of these depictions, we can determine that whether for decoration or to assist the dead individual into the next world, these pictures and carvings suggest the possible beliefs of the people during the Early Rabbinic Era.[27] The various carvings and paintings found within the burial sites often showcase beliefs about what will happen to the soul of a dead body. This allows the mourner to assist the dead, by drawing encouraging pictures (such as a ship sailing away), or writing messages that provide comfort to the deceased.[28]

The final addition to a burial site, which we saw only once in the Torah, is a grave marker. Kraemer explains the significance of the marker:

> If the graves of the dead are to be visited, markers will designate the exact places they may be found. If the concern is the ritual impurity of the dead, markers will serve equally as pragmatic a purpose: to direct the individual who wants to

[26] Ibid., 49.
[27] Ibid., 50.
[28] Ibid., 50-52.

> preserve his purity where not to tread. Whichever the more immediate purpose, the final 'resting place' is identified.[29]

Although it is unclear why Jacob placed a marker on Rachel's grave, Kraemer's explanation suggests that Jacob, too, wanted to indicate Rachel's final resting place. However, because no other story from Torah specifies that a marker was used, we can only assume the significance of Rachel's marker, in conjunction with customs from later generations (such as the Early Rabbinic Era).

Whether Jacob intended to visit Rachel's grave or not, the people who lived during the beginning of Rabbinic Judaism did indeed intend to visit their dead. As socially isolated members of society, the grave and burial site allowed mourners a place to remember their dead, help assist the deceased's transition to the next world by drawing, carving, and painting on the walls of the tomb, and carry out the newly minted mourning rituals. The use of *keverim* and *matzevot* changed significantly from biblical times to the Early Rabbinic Period, suggesting that beliefs about the after life and how we support the dead and the mourners also changed.

The Torah leaves much room for interpretation, while the Early Rabbinic Period provides literature and archaeological findings that explain and elaborate on these mourning and death rituals. However, we still do not know precisely why mourners visited the dead, leaving gifts and pictures on the walls, and why they felt the need to be near their deceased. This implies a certain level of emotional need, which I will explore in the next chapter.

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[29] Ibid., 35.

Chapter Two: Contemporary Extensions of Biblical and Ancient Practices

Torah and the Early Rabbinic Period offered many examples of mourning rituals, particularly with regards to the *matzevah* and the social isolation of the mourner following the burial of the deceased. Many texts beyond the Mishnah, Talmud, and other early rabbinic literature provide customs associated with mourning. Legal codes, such as the Shulkhan Aruch written by Joseph Caro in the Sixteenth Century, and Otzar Dinim U'Minhagim, written by Julius Eisenstein and published in 1917, while rooted in Mishnah, Talmud, and Tanakh, illuminate the changes in mourning rituals that have occurred over time.

In this chapter, I will trace these changes, again focusing on the *matzevah* and social isolation of the mourner. I will use material from Mishnah, Talmud, responsa from R. Asher ben Yehiel, Shulkhan Aruch, and Otzar Dinim U'Minhagim to describe the mourning customs of Jews from the pre and post-Medieval era. As well, I will use contemporary Reform Responsa to address liberal Jewish practices. These responsa refer to earlier legal codes as well, but do not rely as heavily on *halakah*, to determine the best course of action for mourners. By comparing these various texts, we can better understand the importance of placing a *matzevah* on a *kever* (grave) and why mourners remain isolated during the first period of mourning.

The change in mourning customs from the Early Rabbinic Era to the Medieval Period is not as dramatic as the one we noted from Toraitic rituals to the Early Rabbinic Era. Much of the literature from the Medieval Period establishes *halakhah* and explains the specifications for the observance of each custom. These laws primarily focus on

mourning rituals as they relate to purity and impurity, and specified amounts of time for mourning.

In regards to the *matzevah,* the first literature to discuss the obligation of erecting a tombstone is from the Mishnah. In Mishnah Shekalim 1:1, the Sanhedrin[30] declared on the first day of Adar that each individual must make a payment of half a shekel.[31] The collection of Shekalim provided funds for attending to public needs, which included the marking of graves. Among the concerns was the impact of heavy winter rains, which destroyed *matzevot* and left graves without proper markings. Later generations, when commenting on this text, including Rav and Rambam emphasize that graves must be marked, lest an individual become *tamei.* Graves were sources of impurity because of the proximity to a corpse. As noted in the previous chapter, a body is deemed impure upon death.

The Mishnah explains that *matzevot* became mandatory because of the need for purity. Shekalim 1:1 becomes the proof text for many later legal codes. The Talmud expounds on this verse in Moed Katan 5a: "[The Mishnah says] One may mark the graves. R. Shimon ben Pazi said, 'Where do we find an allusion that the marking of graves is required by the Torah?' Scripture states, '…and when one sees a human bone he will build a marker near it.'"[32] This quote from Ezekiel 39:15 becomes the prooftext for this custom from the Biblical Era of marking graves. However, it did not become mandatory until the Early Rabbinic Era as *halakhah* was established and these customs became law.

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[30] The local assembly of rabbis in each community who ruled on religious matters.
[31] Mishnah, Shekalim 1:1
[32] Talmud, Moed Katan 5a (translation from The Schottenstein Edition).

The Mishnah and Talmud both explain the obligations of erecting a tombstone to assure that no person would accidently become *tamei.* Unlike archaeological findings from the Early Rabbinic Period, which indicates the use of a *matzevah* as a reminder to visit and honor the dead, the Talmud clearly states that a *matzevah* actually designates impurity, nothing else. The tradition of visiting the dead, bringing gifts and food for the deceased appears to have dissipated, probably because of the emphasis rabbinic law placed on purity and avoiding *tumah.* By visiting the burial site, a person comes in direct contact with impurity[33], which contradicts the rabbinic laws put in place in the early part of the Common Era.

In his personal responsa, R. Asher ben Yehiel (also known as the Rosh)[34] further explains the requirement of a *matzevah.* In 13:19 in his She'eilot U'Teshuvot L'HaRav Rebeinu Asher Z"L, the following question is asked: Is it required that a stone be placed on the grave? The Rosh replies: An *even* (stone) is needed on a grave and it is customary that the children of the family fulfill this need for burial [which includes placing a *matzevah* on the grave].[35] The Rosh explains that a marker is indeed necessary, but does not offer a reason. He also indicates that the custom obligates the family to place a marker on the grave, but merely suggests that the family fulfill this particular aspect of burial.

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[33] Maurice Lamm explains that a Kohen may not come within 6 feet of the grave, or in some instances 4 and ½ feet. The casket, which contains a corpse, causes the ground in which the casket is interred to become impure. Therefore, the grounds of a cemetery are considered *tumah.* While Lamm explains this through the lens of *halakhah* regarding Kohanim, all people who come in contact with a corpse are deemed *tamei.* Therefore, this law can be applied to all people in a cemetery. Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969) 214.

[34] b. 1250-d. 1327

[35] Asher ben Yehiel, She'eilot U'Teshuvot L'HaRav Rebeinu Asher Z"L.

Another section of Mishnah Shekalim does obligate the family to place a marker on the grave as part of the burial ritual:

> The remainder of [funds set aside for] the half shekels is unconsecrated…The remainder of [funds contributed for the burial] of the dead is [to be used] for [the burial of] the dead; [but] the remainder of [funds contributed for the burial of] a [specific] dead person is [to be given] to his heirs. R. Meir says: The remainder of [funds contributed for the burial of] a [specific] dead person is to be held in escrow until Elijah shall come. R. Natan says: [With] the remainder of [funds contributed for the burial of] a [specific] dead person they build a monument for him on his grave.[36]

This Mishnah clearly obligates the family to place a *nefesh* (in this case *nefesh* means *matzevah*)[37] on the deceased's grave. Further commentary from Rav in Sanhedrin 48a explains R. Natan's view. Although the deceased suffered an indignity when money was collected for his burial, he would likely prefer to have this money bestowed upon his living heirs than have it used to further enhance his own burial. Therefore, all of the money must be used for his burial and related expenses.[38]

Joseph Caro[39] further explained the *halakhah* of mourning rituals in the Shulkhan Aruch. The Shulkhan Aruch focuses on the customs and obligations of the mourner in Yoreh Deah and Even HaEzer. In Even HaEzer 89:1, Caro explains that a husband who remains alive after his wife's death is obligated to fulfill all aspects of his wife's burial,

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[36] Mishnah Shekalim 2.5

[37] According to Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, (NY: Putnam and Sons, 1903) 927, *nefesh* in this Mishnaic usage means *matzevah*, while in later uses it refers to soul. Mishnah is the first place in which *nefesh* is used to describe a grave marker.

[38] Talmud Sanhedrin 48a, translation from *ArtScroll Mishnah Series*, (NY: Mesorah Publications, 1981) 50.

[39] b. 1488- d. 1575

including placing a *matzevah* on her grave.[40] Just as the Rosh did not offer an explanation, neither does Caro.

A more recent work of literature provides yet another reason for placing a *matzevah* on a grave. Julius Eisenstein's Otzer Dinim U'Minhagim extrapolates from past sources and includes a more contemporary, but still traditional, view of the importance of mandating *matzevot.* Eisenstein cites many traditional sources and explains them in contemporary language and presents a new perspective of mourning rituals that weave past customs with modernity. Eisenstein begins by explaining why a *matzevah* is necessary: "A pillar of stone on the grave of the deceased is to remember him."[41] Using Genesis 35:2 (Jacob placed a marker on Rachel's grave), and II Samuel 18:18 (Abshalom placed his own *matzevah* on his grave because he had no child to carry on his name),[42] Eisenstein traces the use of *matzevot* back to the Biblical Era.

Eisenstein further explains that in the past, it was customary to write on the *matzevah* to remember the deceased, which gave honor to the dead.[43] He continues: "According to the Sages, the essence or most important aspect of the *matzevah* is to remember the dead and not forget them in your heart."[44] Eisenstein goes beyond the Mishnah and the Talmud, and even the medieval commentators. According to his explanation, by placing a *matzevah* on a grave, we do more than remind the living not to contaminate themselves by stepping on a grave, we remind the living of the dead who is

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[40] Shulkhan Aruch, Even HaEzer 89:1.
[41] Julius Eisenstein, Otzer Dinim U'Minhagim: Matzevah*.* 1917, 246.
[42] This specific event is noteworthy, as this is the first Biblical instance in which a person places a marker on his or her own grave, before death.
[43] Julius Eisenstein, Otzer Dinim U'Minhagim: Matzevah*.* 1917, 246.
[44] Julius Eisenstein, Otzer Dinim U'Minhagim: Matzevah*.* 1917, 246 (translated by author).

buried in this place. This gives the deceased honor and helps keep his or her memory alive. This drastic shift of reasoning alludes to the changing historical circumstances in which Eisenstein lived.

In addition to Eisenstein's work, the Reform Movement provides responsa about mourning rituals and customs, including the necessity of having a *matzevah.* In a responsum from 1980, a rabbi from Louisiana raised the question, "Are tombstones mandatory?"[45] The responsum, written by the Central Conference of American Rabbi's Responsa Committee, cites sources spanning nearly three thousand years, beginning with Torah and ending with Sefer Katav Sofer by Abraham Benjamin Sofer.

The responsum begins by citing Torah: Genesis 38:20 in which Jacob places a marker on Rachel's grave; II Kings 23:17 when King Josiah recalls seeing a marker on a prophet's grave; and Ezekiel 39:15, when following a war, officials were required to place a marker on any body or bones visible.[46] The responsum cites Mishnah Shekalim, Masekhet Moed Katan from the Talmud, responsa from the Rosh (Asher ben Yehiel), commentary on Arbah Turim: Yoreh Deah, and Caro's Shulkhan Aruch: Yoreh Deah.

The responsum utilizes each of these sources in various ways, all of which lead to the final conclusion, which states:

> The tombstone serves many purposes. One scholar (Isaac bar Sheshes, 421) says that the name is to be remembered thereby. Another, that it is an honor to the dead to come to pray there, and therefore we must know where the dead is buried. Also (as Abraham Sofer adds), if all other graves are provided with tombstones and this one grave were deprived of one, it would shame the dead who is buried there. It is for

[45] Solomon Freehof, *New Reform Responsa* (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis Press, 1980) 147.
[46] Ibid., 147.

> these reasons that the tombstone has become an established custom, and to the large extent to which it is true that *Minhag Yisrael Torah Hi*- i.e., that an established worthy custom of Israel is to be considered as law- we may say in our age and in our communities, the tombstone with the name of the departed has indeed grown to be law and is mandatory.[47]

The responsum clarifies the Reform Movement's position: a *matzevah* honors the dead and provides the living a place in which to honor the deceased. The responsum's conclusion does not mention that a grave could contaminate an individual or cause a person to be defiled in the event that they step on an unmarked grave. The Reform Movement has chosen to focus on the importance of honoring the dead. Although earlier sources, such as Otzar Dinim U'Minhagim also state the importance of honoring the dead with a *matzevah*, the significant shift in rationale for placing a tombstone on a grave, from ancient times to contemporary liberal Jewish society, suggests a change in beliefs about death and the afterlife.

The Reform belief of the afterlife showcases these changes. Rabbi Howard Jaffe, a Reform rabbi, explains that our understanding of the afterlife (Sheol) comes from Torah.[48] Once in Sheol, we will wait for the Messiah to come and resurrect our bodies.[49] Rabbi Jaffe explains that Reform Judaism no longer subscribes to these beliefs, indicating that our beliefs in the afterlife have shifted. Or, perhaps our beliefs have not shifted, but our practices relating to the afterlife have changed.

In additional responsa regarding *matzevot*, the Reform Movement also addressed the issue of unmarked graves. In a responsum from 1987, a North Carolina community

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[47] Ibid., 151.
[48] Howard Jaffe, "In Judaism, What is Believed to Happen to Someone After They Die?," *ReformJudaism.org: Jewish Life in Your Life,* www.reformjudaism.org (accessed March 11, 2014).
[49] Ibid.

discovered an unmarked grave in the local cemetery. Concerned about the grave, the community needed to know how to properly handle the situation. The CCAR's responsa committee pulled heavily from the 1980 responsum. When it addressed the issues unique to the case brought before it, the committee concluded:

> In this instance there has been an interment, but the deceased is now unknown, therefore, a simple tombstone should be erected with a traditional inscription. This would be appropriate even though we do not know whether the grave is that of a Jew or a Christian. The fact that the individual is unknown should not disturb us. After all, names on many older tombstones have become illegible. The stone, itself, reminds us that someone is buried there and that we should treat this area with respect.[50]

The Reform Movement clearly errs on the side of honor, assuring that the deceased receives the respect due to one who has died. This, too, alludes to a change in belief of the afterlife. In the previous chapter, I explained that families would visit the deceased after burial to eat meals, bring gifts, and pray. Later legal codes do not emphasize the importance of honoring the dead or bringing gifts to assist in the safe passage of the deceased's soul to the next world. They merely explain that a grave must be avoided so that an individual does not become *tamei*, impure. This suggests that the Reform Movement has reverted back to ancient beliefs, similar to those of the Early Rabbinic Era. This is not about impurity anymore, but about honoring the dead.

In addition to considering the *matzevah*, legal codes and the Reform Movement discussed how a mourner exists within the community following the death of a loved one. As we saw in the biblical period and the Early Rabbinic Era, mourners were cut off from

[50] Walter Jacob, *New American Reform Responsa,* # 189, www.ccarnet.org/responsa/narr-301-303/ (accessed March 12, 2014).

society. By visiting the burial site, the mourners could exist within a society, although isolated from the broader community.

Many sources explain the various stages a mourner must experience before reentering society. We read in Masekhet Moed Katan of the Bavli that during the first three days [of mourning], the mourner weeps and cries, in the first seven he laments, and in the first thirty he [refrains] from pressing his clothes or cutting his hair.[51] The first three days following the burial isolate the mourner in the most extreme manner, specifically preventing him or her from responding to certain greetings or acknowledging an attempt at consolation. Eisenstein, in Otzar Dinim U'Minhagim, cites Bar Kaparah in the Talmud Yerushalmi, explaining that the mourner does not have any power until the third day [of mourning].[52] Although he does not explain this point further, I propose that a mourner does not have any strength or power to do more than weep for the deceased, and this ritual allows the mourner time to properly grieve for his or her loved one.

Eisenstein continues by describing how the mourner physically appears, based on commentary from Rashi and Ran:

> R. Levi said: For all of the first three days [of mourning], he should see himself as if a sword is between his shoulders. Rashi commentary: One whose family has suffered a bereavement should hold his head low, as though the sword is suspended over him, ready to pierce him should he raise his head. Ran: [This means] to carry himself humbly.[53]

A mourner not only must follow specific customs in regards to mourning, but also must appear to be mourning. This, too, isolates a mourner as his physical appearance prevents

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[51] Schottenstein Edition, Talmud Bavli: Masekhet Moed Katan 27b.
[52] Julius Eisenstein, Otzer Dinim U'Minhagim, Avelut (Shloshah Yamim HaRishonim). 1917, 4.
[53] Ibid., 4

him from participating fully in certain community events, as he must remain bent with a low head, looking humble.

The Shulkhan Aruch offers another particular way to isolate a mourner during the first three days of mourning. In Yoreh Deah 385, Caro presents reasoning for not greeting a mourner with the word "shalom" during the first stages of mourning:

> The mourner cannot answer "shalom" for the first three days of mourning or respond with "shalom." If a person does not know he is a mourner and greets with "shalom", he [the mourner] does not reply to them, so they know he is a mourner. After seven days, do not greet [the mourner] with "shalom," but after, if someone does not know he is a mourner and greets with "shalom," he may answer with "shalom." From the seventh day until the 30th [the mourner] may reply with "shalom" after if he is in a certain state of mind. …if mourning for his father or mother, [the mourner] cannot reply with "shalom" until the 12th month.[54]

The Shulkhan Aruch clarifies the status of the mourner by explaining that he or she may not use the word "shalom" when greeted or upon reply during the first three days of mourning. Again, no reason is given for this custom. However, in the Reform Movement's responsum to this question, it becomes clear why "shalom" is such a challenging phrase for a mourner.

In a responsum from 1969, the CCAR Responsa committee answered the question regarding greeting a mourner with a traditional greeting of "Shalom Aleichem."[55] The responsum offers many sources, beginning with Rashi's commentary in the Talmud. Rashi explains that "Shalom" is one of the many names for God and these names may not be uttered in an unclean place, such as a house of mourning.[56] The responsum also offers

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[54] Joseph Caro, Shulkhan Aruch: Yoreh Deah (translated by author).
[55] Solomon Freehof, *Current Reform Responsa* (New York, NY: Hebrew Union College Press, 1969) 125.

[56] Ibid., 126.

a second reason for not greeting a mourner with "shalom." Mishnah Taanith I:7 explains that someone suffering (such as a mourner) would be considered under God's rebuke and it would be considered inappropriate to ask him or her whether they are at peace.[57] Although the Reform Movement would not consider a mourner as suffering under God's rebuke, it would be appropriate to assume that a person suffering from bereavement is indeed not at peace and therefore should not be greeted in such a manner. Rashi's first comment reflects the rabbinic concerns regarding purity and impurity.

The responsum offers a third reason, a citation from Talmud Masekhet Moed Katan, 21b. This section quotes Ezekiel 24:17, in which God tells Ezekiel to "mourn silently."[58] According to the responsum, this particular custom resonates with many mourners, as many individuals do not even respond with more than a nod during the first three days of mourning. The responsum also offers other sources that describe various customs and traditions, including more recent legal codes, which state that this tradition is no longer strictly practiced. Because "shalom" is no longer considered an invocation of God's name, and because we do not see the mourner's suffering as a rebuke, many people who greet mourners do not shy away from using this phrase.

The responsum concludes by stating that this custom is not strictly observed. Although the committee does not mandate any particular way in which a mourner must be greeted, we can assume that the Reform Movement does not limit the phrases or greetings for those who recently lost a loved one. The responsum is rooted in traditional

[57] Ibid., 126.

[58] Ibid., 127.

legal codes and other sources, but adheres to contemporary custom, which does not obligate a friend to refrain from consoling a mourner with the word “shalom.”

Our traditional sources for mourning rituals, and the shift in contemporary mourning customs from those traditional rituals, speak to an ever-changing belief in death and the afterlife. Historically, mourners did not reenter society until they had properly cleansed themselves from the impurity that comes from being in contact with the dead, assuring that no other person would become *tamei,* impure. As opposed to comforting a mourner with words of consolation, traditional Jewish law ruled that society abstain from using specific terms and words that might bring relief to a grieving individual, because they understood the mourner’s suffering as a punishment from God. Tombstones placed on graves served as a reminder that the deceased lay in a specific place, and one misstep would cause an individual to become impure. Mourners may have received baskets of food, hugs from friends and distant relatives, but did not return immediately to society.

Today, death and mourning rituals in liberal Jewish circles differ greatly from many earlier Jewish rituals. As Kaufman Kohler and David Neumark stated in their responsum regarding mourning customs, Reform Judaism views mourning with an entirely different perspective:

> Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the respect and pious regard we owe to the departed, and of the true sentiment of tender love and affection that must find its proper expression at the loss of the beloved. Here the customs of each land and age prescribe certain forms to honor him whose life work is done, and also to guard the sorrowing against any intrusion that may encroach upon their feelings. And religion, above all, must step in to offer its balm of comfort to the bruised heart and to hallow the grief by special hours of devotion and prayer, by abstention from the daily pursuit of business for a certain period, and by some expression of sympathy on the part of friends and fellow-

members of the congregation. Only the particulars as to time and form are better left to the individuals or to local customs.[59]

Kohler and Neumark are clear; the Reform Movement holds the deceased and those mourning that individual in high regard, offering custom and ritual that both honor and comfort. Although many streams of Judaism outside of Reform Judaism also offer rituals that provide comfort, the Reform Movement established long ago that mourning rituals should not increase discomfort and isolation; these customs should reach out a steady hand that supports the grieving and strengthen the mourner.

The change in mourning rituals over time clearly suggests a change in belief. So, too, has a change occurred in the way we memorialize the dead. Although the use of a *matzevah* became customary and later mandatory over the last several thousand years, the meanings ascribed to erecting a *matzevah* has been transformed. Some new modalities for memorializing the dead have arisen over the past few decades. So, we now must ask why we continue to memorialize the dead? With the obvious changes in mourning rituals over time, has our reasoning for memorializing the dead also changed? In the next chapter, I will examine these questions and explore the various ways memorializing the dead add to our own lives, while honoring those who have come before us.

[59] Walter Jacob, ed., *American Reform Responsa: Jewish Questions, Rabbinic Answers* (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983) 301-303.

Chapter Three: Why Do We Memorialize The Dead?

As the previous chapters explained, we have a lot of material to help us explore mourning rituals from the Toraitic period to the contemporary era. We know which rituals became customary, which rituals changed or became altered over time, and how these rituals became engrained in Jewish tradition. However, the questions we continuously attempt to answer are, *why* do we fulfill these rituals and *why* do we memorialize the dead? This chapter will focus on these questions, as well as the following additional ones: What human need is met by memorializing? Who and what do we choose to memorialize? By using contemporary sources that respond to these questions, we can better understand the needs that are fulfilled by memorializing the dead and how mourning rituals and customs assist mourners. In addition, this chapter will further suggest answers to these questions by clarifying the differences between memorializing an individual and a group or event. This will establish the various modalities used to memorialize the dead and why they have become significant in contemporary society.

To understand why we memorialize the dead, we must first understand the importance and complexities associated with memory. Memory can be understood through the lenses of psychology, neuroscience, religion, and many other disciplines. Various scholars and researchers focus on the need to remember events, places, and most importantly, relationships with people, even after they have died. Judaism emphasizes the importance of memory, especially the memory of those who have died in years past.

Yahrtzeit lists, *Yizkor* services, and memorial plaques exist in every synagogue around the world, showcasing how important it is to remember past generations.

In a recent publication edited by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, PhD., several Jewish scholars explain the significance of the Yom Kippur *Yizkor* service, which is the most well-known memorial service in the Reform movement. The *Yizkor* service gives mourners and those who may not be in the mourning process, but have been in the past, an opportunity to remember their deceased loved ones. "At its most elemental level, remembering has evolutionary value: it allows us to recognize threats to survival (that we can avoid) and pathways to food, sex, and safety (which we can pursue)."[60] Dr. Hoffman states that at the most fundamental level, memory provides human beings with a basic need, one that allows us to continue living life, using our past experiences as guides. However, what purpose does remembering the dead serve?

Dr. Therese Rando offers one possible answer for this question:

> Realistically remembering the deceased and your relationship, plus obsessively reviewing your memories and the feelings associated with them, will be necessary processes in your grief. Only in this way can you withdraw your emotional investment in your lost loved one, form a new relationship with him that reflects the reality of his death, and build new relationships in the new world without him.[61]

As Dr. Rando states, remembering the dead is a necessary part of the grieving process. Although we continue to feel the loss of an individual, remembering that person (or persons) will allow the mourner to move on with life and reconnect with the world.

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[60] Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013) 22.
[61] Therese Rando, *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 250.

Remembering the dead gives mourners an opportunity to simultaneously continue the grieving process and reenter society.

Dr. Hoffman also provides an explanation as to the purpose of remembering the dead: "It is essential to the passing on of culture, which is, perhaps, the most consequential achievement of the human race."[62] By passing on the memory of the dead, we ensure that their lives leave a mark on society and history, which enables the human race to continue living. Perhaps Dr. Hoffman is suggesting that remembering the dead gives meaning to life. Without the memories of the deceased, we would have no record of humanity. Additionally, we can understand the purpose of remembering the dead by looking at the question through a Jewish lens: "Our ancestors who passed on the obligation to remember our dead rarely spoke at all about the benefit it might have for worshipers who do it. The point was not the worshiper, but God, who had commanded the act in the first place, whether or not personal benefit (to the worshiper or the deceased) flowed from it."[63] Dr. Hoffman proposes that the Jewish obligation to remember the dead is based on God's command to continue our loved ones' memory after death.

Why do we remember our dead? Why do we grieve and mourn, year after year for those who have gone before us? Dr. Hoffman suggests we remember because we are commanded to do so. As well, we remember because memory allows culture to be passed from one generation to the next. We remember so we can keep a record of our lives

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[62]Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013) 22.

[63] Ibid., 23.

through other human beings. But at the most basic, elemental level, we remember because we are wired to. Our brains store memories and connections to those memories deep inside the complexity of our minds. Dr. Daniel Siegel, a neuro-psychiatrist, explains how strongly memory can affect our behavior:

> Memories shape our current perceptions by creating a filter through which we automatically anticipate what will happen next. In this way the patterns we encode in memory actually bias our ongoing perceptions and change the way we interact with the world.[64]

Based on Dr. Siegel's research, memory has the ability to draw us out of the present and into a past experience or relationship. Perhaps we remember the dead and our relationship with that individual so we can feel the same emotions we once felt or re-experience that relationship.

Other scholars also offer insight into the significance of remembering the dead, as well as how and why Jews continue this tradition. Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand explains another aspect of memory, again specifying why Judaism places such an emphasis on memory. She uses the words of Joshua Foer, a 2009 USA Memory Champion candidate: "In Judaism, observance and remembering are interchangeable concepts, two words that are really one… For Jews, remembering is not merely a cognitive process, but one that is necessarily active. Other people remember by thinking. Jews remember by doing" (p. 148).[65] Memory in Judaism is active; therefore

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[64] Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York, NY: Random House LLC, 2010) Chapter 8.
[65] Shoshana Gelfand, "Remembering Through Forgetting," *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*, ed. Hoffman,148-151 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2013) 148.

remembering the dead is also active. By completing Jewish mourning rituals, we are actively remembering the dead and keeping his or her memory alive.

Rabbi Boyd Gelfand also explains the impact memorializing the dead has on our own lives, beyond the command and obligation to do so: "Our collective memories create a composite of the person who has recently disappeared from our midst. The psychological logic behind this memorializing practice is unmistakable: having just experienced a loss, we seize whatever precious imprint we have of the person who has died as a treasure to hang onto."[66] Rabbi Boyd Gelfand explains how memorializing the dead provides yet another answer to the question, why do we memorialize the dead? By remembering our loved ones and the generations that have come before us, we seemingly recreate that individual's or group's presence in our memories.

As well, memorializing the dead allows a mourner to remain connected to the person for whom he or she is mourning. A relationship severed by death leaves raw emotions that most individuals cannot fully recover from without support. When an individual or group memorializes the deceased, the severity of the loss can become more bearable. As Dr. Rando explains, "…the ultimate purpose of grief and mourning is to help you recognize that your loved one has gone and ultimately to adapt to the reality of that loss and live healthily in the new world without the deceased."[67] Dr. Rando's words suggest that memorializing the dead allows mourners to remember their loved one, remain connected to his or her memory, but also find a way to reenter the community.

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[66] Ibid., 149-150.
[67] Therese Rando, *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 225.

We now have a better understanding of why we choose to memorialize the dead, but a subsequent question must also be answered: what human need is met by memorializing the dead? The book *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, edited by Jack Reimer, seeks to answer this question. Rabbi Shamai Kanter shares his own experience with reciting *Kaddish*, the prayer most commonly associated with death, following the death of his father. Rabbi Kanter explains the power of reciting *Kaddish* and the basic human needs that he discovered by remembering his father in a loving way:

> Over the decades, as a rabbi, I'd always encouraged people to be regular in joining the daily worship and in reciting the *Kaddish* during their year of grieving for a parent. I assured them it would bring them comfort on many levels: the religious plane of closeness to God and the human plane of mutual support from other mourners. And of course this was true. What I didn't expect was the form my own progress would take from the darkness of mourning to the dawning of consolation.[68]

Rabbi Kanter's need for comfort and support was met while he shared his grief with the community. Reciting *Kaddish* each day, surrounded by others sharing the same need, allowed him to find comfort during a distressing time. Memorializing the dead gives mourners an opportunity to grieve, to find comfort, and to feel supported by the community.

These are basic needs that each human experiences on some level in order to survive. Dr. Rando explains the significance of remembering a deceased loved one, and how this allows mourners to continue living: "One of the problems in our society is that people fail to recognize the importance of a continued relationship with the person we have loved and lost. Many think that to deal with the loss you have to forget the person

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[68] Shamai Kanter, "A Year of Grieving, A Year of Growing," in *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*, ed. Reimer, 174-177 (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995) 174-175.

who has died. Usually grievers are devastated to hear this, with many refusing to grieve as a result."[69] Clearly, remembering a loved one allows you to both grieve and continue living.

Dr. Rando also explains the human need for comfort following the death of a loved one, specifically through memorializing the deceased: "Bereavement rituals can be very helpful to you in your grief… They have remarkable therapeutic properties to assist you in confronting the death of your loved one and coping with the loss" (p. 261).[70] According to Dr. Rando, "Rituals give form, structure, and meaning to our feelings. They are unique opportunities for communication, ventilation, and appropriate acting out" (p. 261).[71] Through ritual, mourners can express feelings of grief and sadness, remember their loved one, receive comfort, as well as transition from sorrow to contentedness.

Jewish tradition teaches that we mourn for specific individuals in our lives, including parents, siblings, spouses, and children.[72] These seven close relatives were originally enumerated in Leviticus 21:1-3, based on the relationship of these individuals to a *kohen*, priest.[73] Purity laws prohibited *kohanim* from coming in contact with the deceased, but exceptions were made when a *kohen* needed to bury one of the above-mentioned relatives. The tradition generalized from these kinship laws related to the *Kohanim* and identified these seven relatives as those for whom all people mourn.

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[69] Therese Rando, *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 233.
[70] Ibid., 261.
[71] Ibid., 261.
[72] Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969) 79.
[73] Ibid., 79.

However, we mourn for many other people beyond these seven relatives. Friends, distant family members, public figures, and many others are often included on *Yahrzeit* lists and shared before the recitation of *Kaddish*. Jewish tradition provides guidelines and laws for mourning, which stipulate the length of mourning depending on one's relationship to the deceased. These laws give the mourner an opportunity to seek comfort and cope with the loss of a loved one. Many communities recognize that these established mourning periods do not reflect the actual mourning, internal and external, that a mourner experiences.

As well as memorializing individuals, we also choose to memorialize groups of people. Often, groups or events are remembered with a memorial or monument that does not necessarily include the graves of those who died. We most often memorialize our individual loved ones by visiting his or her grave, placing a stone on the *matzevah*, and reciting *Kaddish* on his or her *Yahrzeit*. Remembering a group or specific event is a much more public process. In the United States for example, as a collective, we remember those who fought and died during the Vietnam War with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This black granite wall, located in Washington D.C. contains the names of nearly 2.7 million military men and women who served during the war.[74] The memorial does not include any graves for those who were killed, but does provide a space for friends, families, and anyone else who is choosing to remember a loved one lost during the war, to remember and memorialize their dead.

In addition to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, other monuments and memorials exist throughout the world for various wars, tragic events in history (such as shootings,

[74] *Wall Information Page,* thewall-usa.com (accessed January 22, 2014).

explosions, etc.), natural disasters, or accidents, all of which provide mourners a place to remember those who died. Most of these monuments are public, open to those who want to commemorate the lives of those who were lost. Unlike a private cemetery, public monuments allow visitation from all people. Additionally, those who choose to visit these monuments are not always mourning the loss of a specific person or group; rather, they choose to commemorate the event or group because they wish to honor those who have died. In contrast, those who visit the grave of an individual often knew that person and want to remember him or her apart from a tragedy or separately from a group of people.

Jewish history is rife with events that we collectively choose to memorialize. For millennia, we tended to do this through ceremonies rather than with physical memorials. Of great significance is the Holocaust. In recent decades, Jews have gathered to commemorate and remember the deaths of the millions who perished during the years of the Holocaust on Yom HaShoa, Holocaust Remembrance Day. In addition, we have constructed monuments to those who were killed, those who fought to save the lives of millions, and those who put their own lives in danger to prevent the deaths of Jews. We have erected museums that clearly showcase the horrors of the Holocaust and provide solid evidence of the terror Jews and non-Jews experienced in Europe. Why? As John Silber shares in his essay from *Obliged by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*, " We recognize the central importance of memory by the horror of its absence."[75] Our human need to remember the utter destruction and almost complete loss of a people demands that we memorialize the Holocaust.

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[75] John Silber, "Memory, History, and Ethics," in *Obliged by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*, ed. Katz, 55-65 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006) 55.

Monuments, museums, days of remembrance, and other traditions have given way to new modalities of memorializing groups and events. Some of these modalities have proven somewhat controversial. As Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider explain in their book, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age:*

> Such ongoing debates about appropriate ways to remember the Holocaust contribute substantially to shaping a self-reflexive and ultimately cosmopolitan form of memory. For some time now, Israeli, German, and American debates have not revolved exclusively around the origins and nature of the Holocaust. Instead, they have focused on how the Holocaust was remembered in the past, how it should be remembered, and, consequently, how it can be remembered in the future. Such controversies are not merely academic. Films, documentation, speeches, museum exhibits, and other media highlight these issues. In fact, it is precisely those popular representations of the Holocaust that have made the political and malleable nature of memories apparent to the broad public.[76]

As Levy and Sznaider explain, memorializing those who died in the Holocaust has become more challenging and problematic in recent years. Their observation applies to other deaths as well. Whether memorializing an event, such as the Holocaust, or an individual, new Jewish rituals and customs have emerged. Many of these new customs have been met with some resistance and have also been surprising to those familiar with our inherited customs. The next chapter of the thesis will focus on what makes remembering and memorializing the dead challenging, as well as how we Jews can blend tradition and modernity to honor the deceased.

[76] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006) 23.

Chapter Four: Emerging Trends for Memorializing the Dead

Part I

Memorializing the dead presents many challenges. Various modalities of remembering loved ones have become established mourning rituals and traditions over time. Some newer contemporary customs address issues for some of those who attempt to memorialize the deceased. Mourners must address issues and conflicts between themselves and the deceased, as well as find appropriate ways to memorialize the dead. Additionally, memorial customs often remind the living of their own mortality, which proves difficult for some. Death already presents challenges because of the extreme emotions involved when a loved one dies. While new customs associated with death may address these emotions, they also present new challenges. The first part of this chapter will delve into the challenges and issues associated with remembering and memorializing the dead. The second part of the chapter discusses the new, problematic mourning rituals and why they have become important modalities for many to remember their dead.

One of the first major challenges associated with memorializing the dead stems from the emotions related to death. As Dr. Rando explains, "Almost any emotion can be part of grief. What makes these emotions hard to handle, though, is their unusual intensity. You also may experience emotions that are not common for you or that seem strange in the context of your loss."[77] These emotions can, in some cases, prevent us from memorializing our loved ones. Dr. Rando explains how guilt can sometimes interfere in the mourning process:

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[77] Therese Rando, *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 25.

> ...Our relationships, as ourselves, are not perfect. Consequently, there always will be occasions when you can feel guilty for things that you did or failed to do. No matter how good, patient, and loving you consistently have been to someone, you can always remember the *one* time you were not so good, the *one* time you weren't as patient, or loving, or forgiving as you could have been. It is a cruel trick of human nature, but in the early phases of grief, people tend to recall everything that was negative in their relationship with the deceased while failing to remember the positives equally as well.[78]

The guilt associated with these conflicted and problematic relationships can attribute to greater conflicts when attempting to memorialize a deceased loved one.

Conflicted relationship or not, we often have difficulties with memorializing the dead due to the other intense emotions experienced following the death of a loved one. The death of any individual can remind us of our own mortality; we will all eventually succumb to death. Whether the person's death was sudden or anticipated, painful or peaceful, slow or fast, we constantly worry about what our own deaths will look like. This intense focus on our own mortality might prevent us from directing our attention to properly memorializing the deceased.

Additionally, mourners can sometimes feel they must memorialize their loved ones in a particular way. Jewish tradition provides many rituals and customs that allow mourners to honor the dead, including funerals, *shiva*, *shloshim*, *Yahrtzeit*, donations in the form of *tzedakah*, and many others.[79] But, the emotions Dr. Rando identifies in her book, such as guilt, anger, sorrow, longing, and despair, can cause mourners to feel that

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[78] Ibid., 32.

[79] Details about these and other common Jewish practices can be found in Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969).

they have not properly memorialized the dead.[80] Guilt can most prominently affect the mourner's confidence and assurance that he or she has chosen the "right" way to memorialize their dead: "[Guilt] is the natural consequence of a relationship that lacks perfection and contains ambivalence. The guilt comes from your unrealistic expectations and standards."[81] As Dr. Rando states, guilt can cloud the mourner's mind and prevent the mourner from feeling that the choices made for memorializing the dead give honor to the deceased.

Emotions can cause many issues for mourners when attempting to remember the dead. As well, the public versus private mourning processes causes problems for some. What mourners portray in the public setting can be quite different from what is expressed in private. Mourners who have conflicted or complicated relationships with the deceased may not wish to share those difficulties with the public. During the funeral, a *hesped*, eulogy, is offered aloud for those who have come to say good-bye to the deceased.[82] When a family chooses to have a *hesped* share only the positive life story, characteristics, and qualities of the deceased, they run the risk of causing those who knew other sides of the deceased to feel disoriented or confused. Nonetheless, the family may wish to portray the deceased in a loving manner, despite the person's challenging personality. Such a decision can also prevent mourners from feeling confident in the way they have chosen to remember their dead.

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[80] Therese Rando, *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 32.
[81] Ibid., 34.
[82] Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969) 50.

In recent years, some new rituals and forms of memorialization have emerged in the Jewish community. Perhaps this is one means of addressing conflicted relationships with both the deceased and inherited rituals and modes of memorializing the dead. While they are finding acceptance in some circles, they often prove problematic and difficult for many in the Jewish community. The next part of this chapter will focus on these contemporary problematic mourning customs.

Part II

We will now look at two new forms of memorializing: monuments for groups of deceased (as opposed to an individual, typically memorialized with a personal *matzevah*) and tattooing. While collective monuments and memorials, which seek to remember certain events that took place prior to the 20th century, do exist, most Jewish monuments of this type that currently exist throughout the world were erected to commemorate victims of the Holocaust.[83] Similarly, we have no record of tattooing being a mode of remembering individuals until the last few decades. These two distinct customs of memorializing the dead reflect both the changes and challenges presented to Jews in the contemporary period.

Jewish monuments and memorials for collective groups have become common practice throughout the world since the Holocaust. The YIVO Encyclopedia explains the importance of and the distinction between a monument and other forms of memorials:

> A further distinction can be made between memorials and monuments: there are memorial books, memorial activities, memorial days, memorial festivals, memorial sculptures, and memorial museums. Some of these evoke mourning,

[83] James E. Young, "Monuments and Memorials," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe,* 2010 (accessed March 12, 2014).

> some celebration. Monuments, on the other hand, refer to a subset of memorials: the material objects, sculptures, and installations used to memorialize a person, a community, or a set of events. A memorial may be a day, a conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial.[84]

As the article states, a memorial provides a fixed and seemingly permanent construct for remembering the dead and past events. Monuments and memorials are not always erected for the sole purpose of remembering the dead. Some monuments that exist in Europe today were formerly synagogues or other structures that have since become memorials for the deceased.[85]

Monuments and memorials for collective groups have rarely been found in Jewish history prior to the Holocaust. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a memorial for the Maccabee family was erected thousands of years ago.[86] But other than the Maccabee memorial, no other notable Jewish memorials have been erected for the purpose of remembering a collective group of deceased people, until the Holocaust. The YIVO Encyclopedia does state that other memorials for individuals can be found throughout Europe: "Those territories are marked by hundreds of memorials and monuments throughout what are now Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Belarus. These monuments and memorials range from shrines honoring Hasidic rabbis and teachers to the ruins of ancient synagogues and cemeteries and the remains of concentration camps and other killing fields from the Nazi era and World War II."[87]

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Saul Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York, NY: Oxford Publishers, 2004) 17.

[87] James E. Young, "Monuments and Memorials," YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. 2010.

Today, memorials constructed with the purpose of memorializing those who perished in the Holocaust have become common practice. Prior to the Holocaust, there was no precedent in Jewish tradition to build monuments for collective groups. Memorials certainly exist, but only for individuals or in the form of ancient ruins. So, why have memorials, especially for the Holocaust, become the common practice for memorializing this particular group?

As explained in the previous section of this chapter, those who attempt to memorialize the dead often feel guilt. Dr. Rando explains the concept of "survival guilt," which can occur following a loved one's death: "You may feel guilty that you are still alive while your loved one has died."[88] It is possible that Jews have constructed Holocaust memorials and monuments because of survivor guilt, knowing that so many perished during the Holocaust, while they remained alive. In addition, these memorials may in fact represent another type of guilt. Other countries might feel guilt for having allowed the mass murder of Jews and other groups of people during the Holocaust. These two types of guilt could explain why these memorials have become so common.

Although erecting memorials and monuments for collective groups has become common practice in the contemporary period, not all of the emerging means of memorializing the dead have been readily accepted. In the past few decades, tattooing has become a new form of memorializing and honoring the dead. However, Judaism has much to say about tattooing, whether the tattoo is for decoration, for conveying a special story, or for honoring and remembering a deceased loved one. One Reform responsum on

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[88] Therese Rando, *How to Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988) 33.

tattooing speaks specifically to the question of whether tattooing for reconstructive surgery is permissible, but also whether tattooing in general is allowed:

> Tattooing is certainly permissible as an element of reconstructive surgery. Yet Judaism requires that our bodies be treated with honor and respect. Therefore, while we recognize the importance of personal adornment, as Jews we must pursue it in the light of the historical Jewish emphasis on the integrity and holiness of the human form. Tattooing and body-piercing, when not part of a legitimate medical procedure, are most difficult to reconcile with that emphasis. They are *chavalah*, pointless destruction of the human form; we do not and cannot regard them as "adornments." Unless and until we are otherwise persuaded, we should continue to teach that Judaism forbids these practices as the negation of holiness, the pointless and unacceptable disfigurement of the human body.[89]

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This Reform responsum explains Judaism's view on tattooing based on the verse in Leviticus 19:28, which reads: "You shall not make cuts in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves; I am the Eternal." Clearly, the Torah states that an intentional marking (tattoo) or cutting made to the body is prohibited. However, the Reform movement has stated that tattooing in specific situations can be permitted. The Reform responsum explains that tattooing for reconstructive surgery and other forms of tattooing that are not meant to dishonor God's creation are permissible.[90] This raises a question: Although tattooing is forbidden in Jewish tradition, if one wants to receive a tattoo that is not for adornment (in that individual's opinion), but for the sole purpose of remembering and honoring a deceased loved one, may they still receive this tattoo?

Rabbi Marshal Klaven's 2009 rabbinic thesis discusses the status of tattooing in Judaism today. Rabbi Klaven states, "Judaism frames the classic rabbinic prohibition with its modern implications by applying the traditional language to contemporary

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[89] Mark Washofsky, ed. *Reform Responsa for the Twenty-First Century*, Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2010) 361.
[90] Ibid., 361.

circumstances. Although approaches to the traditional material vary, the contemporary applicability of the prohibition is upheld by all three major movements of American Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform."[91] As Rabbi Klaven explains, tattooing is prohibited in Judaism, regardless of movement, but due to the increasing number of Jews who receive tattoos, each movement must address this growing trend. Rabbi Klaven continues:

> Jews in the modern era, from all walks of life, are not only contemplating being tattooed, they are tattooed and even excel as tattoo artists. …the image of the tattoo has shifted. No longer are tattoos earmarks of idolatry or of an idolater, as was understood by the classic rabbinic authorities. Rather, the tattoo with which the modern Jew engages is most often perceived as a decal on the vehicle of the human body, placed there for the purposes of self-expression and adornment. Detached from its traditional context, this modern tattoo presents a challenge to the basic rabbinic understanding of tattooing as defined by the classic rabbinic authorities and the eternal deal set on its prohibition: "it is in effect everywhere, at all times."[92]

Because the image and meaning behind tattoos have shifted, perhaps Jews may now receive tattoos that are permitted by the rabbis.

A recent article in the New York Times describes a few families with something in common: each family has one Auschwitz survivor and one or more family members who have tattooed the survivor's camp number to a place on their body.[93] This article, which was first published October 7, 2012, showcases the stories of several families who felt that tattooing their loved ones' concentration camp number on their own body both

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[91] Marshal Klaven, "Full Exposure: The Revealing Picture of Jewish Engagement With Tattooing" (Cincinnati : Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Unpublished Thesis, June 6, 2009) 123.
[92] Ibid., 124.
[93] Jodi Rudoren, "Proudly Bearing Elders' Scars, Their Skin Says "Never Forget"," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2012.

honored and preserved the memory of that individual and the Holocaust.[94] One contributor to the article, Michael Berenbaum, explains this phenomenon: "'We are moving from lived memory to historical memory…We're at that transition, and this is sort of a brazen, in-your-face way of bridging it.'"[95] As Professor Berenbaum suggests, the Jewish community is in a state of transition, which is why certain members of younger generations have found new modalities of remembering the dead and honoring their loved ones' memory.

Another contributor, Ayal Gelles, explains why he tattooed his grandfather's camp number to his own forearm: "'I find it kind of hard to relate to people I don't know and places I haven't been to and this thing called the Holocaust. The thing I relate to more is my grandfather.'"[96] Mr. Gelles' relationship to his grandfather has allowed him to understand the Holocaust and, in addition, preserve the collective memory of the Holocaust. His grandfather's tattoo will forever be branded on his own arm, a constant reminder to himself and those around him what millions endured for years.

The article concludes by explaining the survivors' descendents' inspiration for receiving these tattoos: "The 10 tattooed descendents interviewed for this article echoed one another's motivations: they want to be intimately, eternally bonded to their survivor-relative. And they want to live the mantra "Never forget" with something that would constantly provoke questions and conversations."[97] These tattoos remind the individuals, as well as those who see them, that this event occurred and we all have a responsibility to remember and honor those who died and survived.

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

These tattoos, however, are seemingly problematic, even among liberal Jews. As mentioned above, Jewish law and tradition strictly prohibits tattooing. The Reform movement makes exceptions, such as in the case of reconstructive surgery and for those forced (such as Holocaust survivors) to receive tattoos, but tattooing for adornment is excluded.[98] Although it is unclear if the survivor-relatives view these tattoos as adornment, these tattoos are meant to serve as memorials and reminders to people everywhere, a goal they share with other Holocaust memorials found around the world. The survivor-relatives' tattoos, however, are not as permanent as a building, museum, or other material structures erected to honor and remember those who died in the Holocaust. The generations, who are currently tattooing themselves in order to showcase and explain their tattoos, have not yet shared their thoughts about whether they see this as an ongoing custom to be passed down to future generations.

The memorials mentioned in the first section of this part of the chapter do not represent a centuries-old, recognized Jewish mourning practice. Yet, today, Jews around the world recognize Holocaust memorials as important means for remembering the event and those who died. Those who have received tattoos of a loved one's camp number share a motivation with those who create collective Holocaust memorials: to honor and remember our deceased. Tattooing has its own unique issues: it is not permanent like a monument, because the tattoo will no longer exist after that individual dies; it defies the laws established in the Torah. However, the new meaning ascribed to this specific kind of tattooing may prove to be among the Jewish mourning rituals and customs that change

[98]Mark Washofsky, ed. *Reform Responsa for the Twenty-First Century,* Vol. I (New York, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2010) 361.

over time. Monuments and memorials became common practice; perhaps tattooing for the sake of memorializing the dead will, one day, also become common practice.

Conclusion

In a short essay Jack Reimer tells a story about his personal anger with God following his sister-in-law's death, which succeeded his brother and parent's deaths. He pleads with God to end all death, which God agrees to, but all births would also cease. For a time, this was enjoyable. However, Reimer comes to realize that death must occur for life to continue. Death reminds us that, "…without death you don't really have life, you only have existence. It is only the fact that life has an end that makes each day precious."[99] Death and the feelings associated with it, make life worth living.

But, we must take time to remember those who have died. Mourning rituals and customs provide mourners an opportunity to honor and memorialize their deceased loved ones for generations to come. According to Jewish tradition, we cannot properly memorialize the dead without a *matzevah*, lest we dishonor the dead. Through *matzevot* and monuments, mourners can remember the deceased and honor a person or group of people. As this thesis has noted, many Jewish rituals and customs have remained consistent throughout time, in particular the practice of placing a *matzevah* on the burial site of an individual. However, the meaning behind this custom has changed. A *matzevah* previously indicated a contaminated area, a space that would cause someone to become impure if he or she entered into close proximity to the grave. Today, a *matzevah* brings honor to the deceased. For most Jews, the tombstone has become a necessary and required element when burying a loved one.

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[99] Jack Reimer, "What Do We Need Death For?," in *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning* (New York, New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 357.

We do not know why the meaning behind these rituals has changed over the centuries; we can however, hypothesize why these changes occurred. My research has shown that later generations have hypothesized about why earlier changes in practice and meaning had taken place. Further research will be necessary in this area to help determine possible reasons for the shift in meaning behind these rituals. More extensive research will also help explain why changes continue to take place and perhaps predict future trends in memorializing the dead.

This thesis has also explained how little we actually know about death and the afterlife. We understand what happens to a body following death, but not the essence and the soul of an individual after a person dies. This remains one of the greatest mysteries in life, and our lack of knowledge about the subject makes it challenging to memorialize the dead. Once a person has died, they have no say in what happens. The deceased can make their wishes known, but once they have died, there is little they can do. While Judaism provides many different modalities for remembering and honoring the dead, the meaning behind each of the rituals and each ritual itself may not provide a mourner with the mourning process he or she needs. Every person's mourning process is unique and what works for one individual may not work for another.

For these reasons, new practices for memorializing the dead have emerged in recent years. Whether these customs have been established for the purpose of remembering a loved one or a specific group, some of these new practices are challenging and problematic. Physical monuments and memorials, while not traditional Jewish means associated with remembering the dead, have become common practice and customary when recalling the memory of collective groups of Jews. Although the custom

of erecting monuments and memorials only became common practice in the post-Holocaust era, is it possible that other emerging forms of memorializing the dead will also become common practice and customary?

Tattooing a survivor-relative's concentration camp number to one's body is among the newest and most challenging of these emerging modalities. Unlike the common practice of erecting monuments and memorials for individuals, it is unclear whether this new mode of memorializing the dead will be sustained in future generations. Tattooing has certainly proven to be a growing trend amongst Jews, whether the tattoo showcases the concentration camp number of a loved one, or represents the memory of another. Today, all major movements in Judaism must reexamine the previous rabbinic authorities legal codes to determine whether tattooing that represents the memory of a deceased loved one falls under the traditional prohibition of tattooing.

In addition, more research is needed to determine the sustainability of this emerging practice. It will be necessary to follow the families who have already chosen to get these tattoos and track whether future generations continue this practice. At this time, tattooing a Holocaust survivor's number is not considered common practice, but just as monuments and memorials for collective losses have become more common-place mourning customs, perhaps tattooing will as well.

Many forms of Jewish rituals and customs may not change, but the meanings ascribed to them do. For those who want to understand contemporary Jewish burial and mourning practices, it is necessary to pay attention to what new and evolving meanings are ascribed practices and rituals. New rituals give mourners an opportunity to remember

their dead in a meaningful way that traditional rituals do not necessarily provide. Although death remains a mystery, the lives of the living continue after the death of a loved one. Memorializing the dead may or may not affect the deceased, but it certainly allows the living to honor an individual's or a group's memory and remind others of their legacy and the impact that a person or a group had during life. Following the death of a loved one, we might participate in daily activities and attend public functions, but once we have lost a loved one, we will always feel a hole inside of ourselves. Even though the hole gets smaller over time, it remains. Because of this, memorializing the dead and remembering our deceased loved ones becomes a vital part of life.

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