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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted

by

Deborah Pipe-Mazo

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

"A Guide for Rabbis: Pastoral Care of the Jewish Bereaved Parent"

Despite the many years of rabbinic concern with pastoral care in general and the experience of grief in particular, very little has been written about the specific theme of the pastoral care of the bereaved parent. There has been very little research into the guidance of rabbinic tradition in this tragic situation, nor creative responses to it by liberal rabbis. As a result of her year's work as a chaplain at the Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, Deborah decided to devote her thesis to this pioneering topic.

After an introduction of the problem and the presentation of a summary of the varying Biblical attitudes toward death, her research proceeds through five stages and is brought to a climax in "A Guide for Rabbis: Pastoral Care of the Jewish Bereaved Parent." She begins by surveying rabbinic attitudes toward death. Some rabbis dealt with it as simply part of creation, others as a result of God's judgment either of Adam and Eve or of people's sin generally. The rabbinic efforts to justify child death instrumentally are also detailed. This forms the backdrop of a discussion of the rabbinic laws of mourning with particular

attention to the likely psychological correlations of the various laws.

She next moves on to the specific issue of child death and parental mourning. Again God's will or God's justice seem to be the major motifs for the rabbis' interpretation of the tragedy. The special rabbinic concern for parents of what they considered non-viable infants is manifest in the dispensation they gave such parents from the normal mourning rites, ones they were obligated to carry out with viable infants. The stated reason for the dispensation is not psychological but economic.

She then focusses on the contemporary psychological understanding of the uniqueness of child death and the unparalleled trauma this inflicts on the parents. Special attention is given to the particular way these mourners pass through the five common stages of grief to the reestablishment of their lives.

When she then turns to what contemporary rabbis have to tell us about their experience and guidance on this issue, she found a dearth of written material. She boldly compensated for this by seeking out and personally interviewing rabbis who have had first hand experience in this area, either as pastoral guides or as parents who have undergone this dreadful experience. One important aspect of her pioneering research is manifest in this thoughtful survey.

Another aspect of her unique effort is found in her survey of rabbinic families who have lost a child. The data she has gathered in the conversations she has had with some of these families are not only extraordinarily informative but often deeply touching. Based on all this data, she then concludes her study with recommendations for rabbis seeking to help bereaved parents and those cover both psychological, theological and specific ritual suggestions.

A sensitive, caring heart lies behind these many pages of study and a wisdom both simply human as well as religious, that belies her young years is strongly manifest. Her work, when made available to colleagues, will be of considerable help to them. Each area she has touched indicates the need for further research and extended analysis, a fruitful outcome to an initial venture in a difficult field. Deborah is particularly to be commended for finding a way to adapt herself and her project to a change of advisors and life-locale carried out in mid-project. I am therefore pleased to recommend the acceptance of this thesis.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz

WHEN A JEWISH CHILD DIES: PASTORAL CARE OF THE BEREAVED PARENT

Deborah L. Pipe-Mazo

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institue of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
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Referee: Dr. Eugene Borowitz

There are several people I would like to acknowledge for their help in completeing this thesis:

Dr. Edward Goldman, with whose profound sensitivity and guidance this thesis was started, and Dr. Eugene Borowitz, whose wisdom and insight enabled me to realize the fruits of my labor;

The thirteen rabbinic families, whose vision of helping others allowed them to share with me the pain and anguish of child death;

The Reverend Thomas Mozley III, my kindred spirit, whose qualities of deep faith and steadfast commitment to serving those in need model the kind of rabbi I would like to be;

My beautiful Ari, whose health, smile and charm are daily reminders of my manifold blessings;

Gary, whose love and support sustain my every moment.

Debbi

For Gary,

whose care and gentle wisdom
help me to keep peace in my soul.
Thank you.

"I betroth myself to you - forever."

Debbi

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In my third year of rabbinic school, I took the year off to volunteer, on a full-time basis, as a chaplain at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati. During this year, I was with many parents as their children died and they began the long and intensely painful process of parental grieving. These children's deaths, as well as their parents' anger, excruciating pain and questions, commanded a theological and spiritual response from me that I was unprepared to offer.

Why do children suffer and die? How can a parent appropriately mourn his loss? What impact does a child's death have upon a parent's spiritual foundation? What can I, a rabbi, offer and how can I serve a bereaved parent?

There exists a plethora of secular literature which addresses the first two questions. Contemporary psychologists and social workers whose expertise is in the field of thanatology have authored many works on the uniqueness of child death and its consequent impact on parental bereavement. In addition, there are four national bereavement organizations for parents which publish informational newsletters and pamphlets.

In stark contrast to the vast secular and psychological

resources, guidance with regard to the origins of child death and spiritual care, much less rabbinic care, of bereaved parents is not available. Despite a growing awareness of the importance of rabbinic counseling in times of crisis, and the number of books written on this subject, little scholarship exists which records the impact of a child's death on a Jewish parent's spiritual beliefs and identity.[1]

The goal of this thesis is to begin filling the void. This work presents a basic understanding of the nature of parental mourning, insight into the spiritual concerns of bereaved parents, and a response to this grief and spiritual chaos from within the Jewish tradition. The response, which is detailed in the last chapter of this work as a guide for rabbis, is based upon three important sources: first, a study of the rabbinic perspective on child death, why children die and how they should (or should not) be mourned; second, contemporary psychological thought concerning the nature and process of parental grief; and, third, responses to a survey

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[1]There is, of course, Rabbi Kushner's book When Bad Things Happen to Good People (New York: Avon Books, 1981). In addition, two books by Jewish authors describe a Jewish bereaved parent's grief experience, yet there is very little mention of the impact of their child's death on their spirituality, beliefs and religious practice. These books do comment, however, on the benefit of some of the Jewish mourning tradition. Please see Harriet Sarnoff Schiff's The Bereaved Parent (New York: Penguin Press, 1977), and Sharon Grollman's Shira: A Legacy of Courage (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1988). A third book on infertility and still birth echoes a need voiced by bereaved parents for Judaism to view these loses as real and to offer grieving opportunities. Please see Michael Gold's And Hannah Wept: Infertility, Adoption and the Jewish Couple (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

of rabbinic bereaved parents which solicited information on if and how they mourned for their child and the impact their child's death had upon their spiritual foundation.

This thesis involves two different kinds of research: study of the history of rabbinic thought concerning death in general and child death in particular; and, a contemporary exploration into the psychology of parental grief and its concurrent spiritual issues.

Compilation of *aggadot* which illustrate the rabbinic understanding of death's origins and purpose was accomplished through the task of reading two rabbinic theses written through the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. One was "*Selected Aggadic References to Death and Dying and Their Significance for the Counseling Role of the Rabbi*" by Sol Goodman (1980), and the other was "*An Analysis of Death and Mourning in Talmudic Literature and Related Materials*" by Leonard Helman (1955). From these texts I extracted relevant talmudic citations which were investigated and studied.

I selected for use those texts which seemed to most clearly represent a rabbinic understanding of adult and child death.

A close examination of Masechet Semachot, Masechet Moed Katan of the *Talmud Bavli*, and the relevant sections on dying, death, *aninut*, *tahara*, burial and *avelut* in *HaMadrikch:* A

Rabbi's Manual yielded a fairly comprehensive list of the rabbinic mourning legislation. The entry entitled *avelut* in *Encyclopedia Talmudit* was helpful in detailing other significant laws of mourning scattered throughout the *Talmud*. This source is limited in that, currently, there are no volumes beyond the letter *tet*. Thus, it was not possible to read concerning the *nefel*. *Sefer Zichron Meir*, the work of the contemporary *posek* Aharon Levine ben Rabbi Meir, was consulted to investigate what changes, if any, have occurred within the laws concerning parental mourning. Every entry under the heading *nefel* was studied.

The second type of research required a very different methodology. To learn as much as I could about child death, parental mourning and spiritual crisis, I perused through the card catalogue of Children's Hospital, Cincinnati, Department of Pastoral Care and Counseling's library and from its content compiled a preliminary bibliography. I then contacted the national office of The Compassionate Friends and requested their list of recommended reading. Those books which were not listed in the preliminary bibliography were added.

I also ordered subscriptions to parental bereavement newsletters. One edition of a newsletter published by the Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) mentioned a 1989 survey on the effectiveness of various community support systems in the aftermath of child death. I requested and received photo copies of the seventy-five responses pertaining to clergy

involvement. This data was studied and analyzed.

The survey material, as well as the above-mentioned books, presented either a secular or Christian perspective on the subject of child death and parental grief. As there exists no data base from which one can evaluate the spiritual impact of a Jewish child's death upon his parents, it was necessary to select a population of Jewish bereaved parents and invite them to participate in this research. Reform and Conservative rabbinic bereaved parents were chosen for two practical reasons: first, preliminary contact could easily be made through each movement's respective professional newsletters; and, second, the financial and time constraints of a rabbinic thesis required work with a limited population.

A description of this thesis and a request for participation was placed in each rabbinic newsletter for two consecutive months - February and March, 1990. When a response was received, a survey[2] and cover letter were sent out. Personal communication continued for each individual family. When all of the surveys and materials were collected, this data was analyzed, organized and documented.

Throughout the year, I met and/or spoke with several rabbis who work with bereaved parents in a professional capacity. Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, chaplain at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, Rabbi Robert Marx, of Congregation

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[2]A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A.

Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois, and leader of a chapter of The Compassionate Friends, and Rabbi Richard Address, UAHC Regional Director of the Pennsylvania Council and Jewish chaplain for Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, were most helpful and generous with their time.

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter I examines the history of rabbinic thought on (adult) death. Aggadot illustrate rabbinic belief that death was created as one of God's acts of creation, as the result of Adam and Eve's transgression, or decreed as the natural consequence of mortality and sin. Regardless of origin, however, death is necessary to both remind man of his limitations and to instill within him a fear of God. Following this presentation of *aggada*, the text details how the rabbis' belief in God's justice and their concern for the mourner's relationship with God influenced the formation of mourning legislation. This legislation's primary concern is with re-establishing a proper relationship between the mourner and God. A side, yet quite valuable, quality of this legislation is the great psychological benefit it possesses.

In Chapter II, the origins of child death and the laws concerning parental mourning are presented. It was believed that children died either as a result of a parent's sins (child death was atonement for such sins), or due to God's willing a return of the soul which he had bestowed at

conception. In consideration of the high infant mortality rates and the financial burden of burial and mourning, the rabbis decreed that parents were not obligated to formally mourn a child who died before reaching an age of viability. A child who dies at a viable age is buried in a fashion according to his age and his parents mourn his death as they would mourn for an adult.

Chapter III places the issue of child death into a modern context in its detail of what a modern parent experiences after the death of his child. It presents the uniqueness of child death and how this unparalleled trauma effects the parental mourner in a way unlike any other kind of bereavement. Parental mourning is characterized as a passage, not always progressive, between five phases of grief. Relief and re-establishment is the goal of this process.

Insight into the impact a child's death has on a parent's spirituality - his faith, his relationship with God and his ability to find meaning in daily life - is the focus of Chapter IV. It is in this chapter that eclectic resources are brought together to begin a response to the spiritual needs and concerns of bereaved parents.

Chapter V presents results and analysis of the survey material sent in by thirteen rabbinic bereaved parents within the Conservative and Reform movements. After detailing the circumstances surrounding their child's death and how the child was buried and mourned, parents commented upon the

impact their child's death had upon their beliefs, practices and relationship with God. They were asked: What were your spiritual needs and the time of your child's illness/death and were these needs met? How and by whom? Each parent's response is fascinating and insightful.

The thesis culminates with Chapter VI's guide for the rabbi who seeks to offer spiritual care to a bereaved parent. This guide acknowledges a tension which exists within the modern rabbi who seeks to conserve the legacy of rabbinic thought and practice while establishing new rituals whose purpose is to meet the mourning and spiritual needs of the today's bereaved parent. The modern rabbi must work at this dilemma, for bereaved parents need rituals which reflect the unique circumstance of child death. Spiritual, rabbinic presence is just as important to the Jewish bereaved parent. This parent looks to the rabbi for that which he can not receive from any other source: expertise in spirituality and in spiritual healing.

Although it is not the primary subject of this thesis, a biblical perspective on death would provide essential background to understanding the legacy upon which the rabbis based their conceptions of death and formulated its accompanying ritual and practice.

The Bible presents us with a mortal image of humanity. It is apparent from its text that each and every human being

will die, marking an end to that individual's life. Rabbinic sages developed laws and customs pertaining to dying and death which reflect the legacy of biblical attitudes towards death which they inherited. This legacy contains not only the bible's presentation of death's origin, but also biblical attitudes concerning death: death as the normal end of life, death as the opposite of life, death as a force of destruction, and death as a state in which God is not present.[3] A brief examination of these biblical attitudes will facilitate an understanding of those beliefs which influenced the rabbinic legal process.

It is unclear exactly how death became a part of the human condition - as a natural part of the human life cycle, or as a reflection of man's imperfection and propensity to sin? God tells Adam that he will return to the ground from which he was taken, *"for dust thou art and unto dust you shall return."*[4] This text teaches God's divine intention for human life to represent a natural cycle through which man, at the time of death, is reduced into the very matter from which he was formed.

Yet, only four verses later, the text seems to imply that death's presence within the human condition was due to sin. Prior to their eating from the Tree of Knowledge, every other

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[3]E. Jacob, "Death," in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 802.

[4]Genesis 3:19

tree's fruit, including that of the Tree of Life which grants immortality, was available to them. After disobeying God's command, God said: "*Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever?*" Thus, God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and placed a cherub and the fiery ever-turning sword at the east of the garden in order to protect the Tree of Life.[5] Adam and Eve lost their only chance at immortality.

Death and sin are similarly linked in Deuteronomy 30:17-18. Moses, speaking in God's behalf, says: "But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, or are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish."

Regardless of origin, the Bible presents death as a reality for every human being. Yet, in which manner death arrives and when a life ends certainly influences a person's approach to, and beliefs concerning, death. God promised Abram that he "*shall go to his (your) fathers in peace, he (you) shall be buried at a ripe old age.*"[6] Similarly, Isaac's death, Gideon's death, as well as King David's death are described as coming at a ripe age.[7] Within these descriptions, the

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[5]Genesis 3:22-24

[6]Genesis 15:15

[7]Genesis 35:29, Judges 8:2, and I Chronicles 29:28

Bible presents us with an image of human life as full and long, with plenty of time for the individual to meet and fulfill his expectations. This positive attitude toward death is conveyed by the honest manner in which many biblical leaders faced the end of their lives. Models such as Jacob, Joseph, Joshua and King David exemplify an acceptance of death as a natural part of each man's life. In Joshua's last words to his people he said: "*I am now going the way of all the earth.*"[8]

In addition to displaying an acceptance of death, many biblical leaders imaged death as a re-connection with previous generations. Thus, an element of honor is connected with death; it is a privilege to be buried with one's ancestors, to be gathered unto one's people. When Isaac died, "he was gathered unto his kin."[9] After Jacob had called his children into his presence and foretold what the future would bring to each of them, he said: "I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my forefathers."[10] Joseph, upon his deathbed, asked his brothers to promise that when they left Egypt to journey to the Promised Land, they would bring his remains along with them and place them in the cave where his forefathers are buried.

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[8]Joshua 23:14

[9]Genesis 35:29

[10]Genesis 49:29

Not every biblical perspective of death is positive or imaged as an honor, however. In fact, aside from the above examples of death as a normal end to life, the Bible - specifically the later documents - presents an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards death. Death, the opposite of life, is marked when the soul, the *nefesh*, leaves the body. Death as the absence of soul is inferred from when Rachel died during childbirth. She named her son *Ben-oni, son of my suffering*, as her soul left her, and she died.[11]

In addition to being life's source, the soul is seen as a conduit of purity, for the biblical text portrays the absence of soul - death - as a state of impurity. Numbers 19:11 teaches that *"he who touches the corpse of any human being shall be unclean for seven days."* Thus, someone who dies undergoes a transformation from normal ritual purity to becoming a corpse whose status reflects the most profound state of ritual defilement.

This clear distinction between life/purity and death/defilement correlates the absence of soul with the absence of God. Death is portrayed as separate from God, as a potent force of evil. Every aspect of death is a terror before humanity: "For the breakers of Death encompassed me, the torrents of Belial terrified me, the snares of Sheol

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[11]Genesis 35:18

encircled me, the toils of Death engulfed me."[12] Death is a gluttonous monster which knows no satiation,[13] a murderous demon which climbs through windows and enters fortresses in order to kill young men and women.[14]

The most prevalent biblical view of existence after death is in a great depth, usually referred to as *Sheol* or as a pit, out of which one is not capable of ascent. *Sheol* is not a positive biblical place; within this Land of the Dead, praise of God is impossible.[15] "The dead cannot praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence."[16] Death, in fact, has its own ministering angels, plague and pestilence, into whose hands the dead are prey.[17] King Hezekiah, in his sickbed prayer, uttered this wide-spread belief that God's rule is only in the Land of the Living.[18]

Amos believed, however, that *YHWH's* influence and power does extend to *Sheol*. Unable to yield in his belief that God is omnipotent and, thus, controls even death, he visioned God as saying: "If they burrow down to *Sheol*, from there my hand

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[12]II Samuel 22:5-6

[13]Habakkuk 2:5

[14]Jeremiah 9:20

[15]Isaiah 38:18

[16]Psalm 115:17

[17]Hosea 14:14

[18]Isaiah 38:11

shall take them."[19] This belief echoes a faint biblical whisper that death's miserable existence in *Sheol* is not, necessarily, permanent. There is a thread of hope that God can and will redeem his chosen from *Sheol*: "But God will redeem my life from the clutches of *Sheol*, for he will take me."[20] This redemption is *carries the soul* into God's protective, peaceful shelter - a heaven, of sorts.

There is, however, a biblical hint of resurrection of the dead in the Book of Ezekiel. This prophet prophesied concerning dry bones which become infused with life's breath.[21] In addition, Daniel's messianic vision presents a judgement of the soul taking place at a time long after death. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence."[22] Within this image lies, too, the hope that God's power is not limited to the Land of the Living.

The Bible also reveals a tradition of substantial mourning for the death of someone with whom the living were closely tied. Joseph mourned profusely for his father, the Children of Israel mourned Moses for thirty days, and, King David grieved deeply for Jonathan. These profound expressions

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[19]Amos 9:2

[20]Psalm 49:16

[21]Ezekiel 37:1-14

[22]Daniel 12:2

of pain and suffering naturally correlate with the wide-spread belief that death is an evil and miserable state. In addition to grieving their loss, the mourners bewail their loved ones' impure and tortured state.

It is possible, too, that this profound mourning served as a watch over the dead, as a means of soliciting God to take note of the one who has died. II Samuel 18:18 tells of a pillar which Absalom had erected in the Valley of the King because he had no son to keep his name alive, to remember him after his death. Perhaps it was a biblical belief that mourning, "watching over" the dead, could impact upon God's willingness to redeem the dead's status from *Sheol*. Thus, a mourner's prayers and supplication might influence their loved one's existence after death.

CHAPTER I

Our sages' beliefs concerning and attitudes towards death are founded upon the biblical legacy they inherited. While reinforcing the legacy's main-stays, they shaped and formed this foundation into their own perspective on mortality, amplifying and expanding upon certain biblical views while forging new directions with regard to others. This growth process of ideas and thoughts provided the rabbis with an opportunity to develop their own views of what happens at life's end as they, unilaterally, confronted and interacted with death.

This chapter seeks to explore rabbinic attitudes towards death: death's origin and necessity, the relationship of the dying with God, the ritual state of the dead and the role and obligations of mourning. Once examined, these attitudes will illumine the beliefs behind the rabbi's very detailed and specific laws dealing with dying and death.

Concerning the origins of death, the rabbis elaborated upon the two biblical proposals that death is either a part of the natural human condition, or that human sin causes death's decree.

One rabbinic tradition states that death is a part of the world's natural order, that it came into existence during God's acts of creation. This view is reflected in a midrash from Bereshit Rabbah 9:5 which recalls that the text of Rabbi Meir's Torah for Genesis 1:31 is markedly different from other manuscripts: בתורתו של רבי מאיר כתוב:

והנה טוב מאד, והנה טוב מות

In Rabbi Meir's Torah the text reads: *and behold! death is good*, instead of: and behold! it was very good – a response found within most texts which denotes God's pleasure with the day's creations. This text raises the question of "Why is death good?" Death is good because it is a potent force for repentance.[1]

Deuteronomy Rabbah teaches that Adam and Eve's transgression caused not only their deaths, but it also caused future generations' privilege of immortality to be revoked.

כך אומר משה: רבש"ע, ל"ו בריות הן
שאם יעבור אדם על אחד מהן חייב מיתה.
שמא עברתי על אחת מהן - למה אתה גוזר עלי
מיתה? א"ל: בחטאו של אדם הראשון אתה מת -
שהביא מיתה לעולם.

The text depicts Moses arguing before God as he feels death approach: "Why do you decree death upon me?" God responds: "You are to die because of the sin of the first man who

[1]Midrash Rabbah, trans. H. Freedman, (London: The Soncino Press, 1983), vol. I, p. 66.

brought death into the world."[2]

As an expansion of this theme, the rabbis taught that each human being brings about his own death through his natural capacity for sin. The text of Ezekiel 18:20 states: "The soul which sins shall die." Commenting upon this verse, Rabbi Ammi states: "There is no death without sin."[3] Thus, a man can place responsibility for his death upon only himself. This thought reflects the rabbinic concept of justice: one receives that which one merits.

The origins of death are important in teaching about <u>how</u> death became a part of the human condition. Important, too, is the rabbinic perspective of <u>why</u> death is necessary. A study of various rabbinic works yields the belief that death holds a special purpose within man's relationship with God and man's relationship with himself.

Kohelet Rabbah 3:14,1 teaches that death is present in order to instill within man a fear of God:

ידעתי כי כל אשר יעשה האלהים הוא יהיה
לעולם, וגו': א"ר יהודה ברב סימון: ראוי היה אדם
הראשון שיהיה חי וקים לעולם, ומפני מה נקנסה עליו
מיתה? אלא האלהים עשה שייראו מלפניו.

Commenting upon Ecclesiastes 3:14, *"I know that whatever God shall do, it*

[2]Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:8

[3]Shabbat 55a

will be forever," Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Simon said: "By rights the first man should have lived and endured forever; why, then, was the penalty of death imposed upon him? God hath made it so, that men should fear before him." One of the ways in which man must recognize God's greatness and superiority is in God's divine ability to create life and cause death. Within the constraints of mortality, man is powerless before God.

Following upon the belief that death is a medium for instilling within man the fear of God is the notion, found in the 16th Chapter of Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, that death acts as an impetus for man to serve God:

אלמלא מלאך המות, מה היינו עושין לאבינו שבשמים?

"...were there no Angel of Death, what would we do for our Father in heaven?" To offset the prophetic depiction of a miserable after-life existence in *Sheol*, the rabbis conceived of an *olam haba* after death, a world of great reward within God's sheltering embrace. They believed that if one faithfully served God during his lifetime, merit could influence one's path to avoid *Sheol* and carry the soul to *olam haba*, the world-to-come filled with pleasure, reward and God's presence.

Death was also presented as a reminder to man of his mortality. The rabbis sensed that people will forever test their limits, yearning to reach beyond every possible thought and deed. Death's presence compels one to view himself within human constraints, reminding him that he is not, nor ever will be, divine - one who knows no boundaries. The text of Bereshit

Rabbah 9:5 illustrates this point:

רבי חמא בר חנינא אמר: ראוי היה אדם הראשון
שלא לטעום טעם מיתה, ולמה נקנסה בו מיתה? אלא צפה
הקב"ה שנבוכדנצר וחירם מלך צור עתידין לעשות
עצמן אלוהות, לפיכך נקנסה בו מיתה, הה"ד - בעדן גן אלהים
היית. וכי בעדן היה חירם? אתמהא! אלא אמר לו: אתה
הוא שגרמת לאותו שבעדן שימות.

"Rabbi Hama ben Rabbi Hanina said: Adam deserved to be spared the experience of death. Why then was the penalty of death decreed against him? Because the Holy One, Blessed Be He, foresaw that Nebuchadnezzar and Hiram would declare themselves gods; therefore was death decreed against him. Thus was it written, *thou was in Eden the garden of God* (Ezekiel 28:13). Was Hiram in Eden? Surely not! But He said thus to him: it is you who caused him who was in Eden (Adam) to die."

Sin, and fear of and service to God are intertwined within the rabbinic attitudes towards death. That which a mortal does and believes while alive very strongly impacts upon him after death. Thus, when developing death and dying ritual, the rabbis were concerned with two closely related issues: maintaining a respectful relationship with God and ensuring a peaceful death when one's time comes to die.

Jewish tradition mandates that one recite a confession upon sensing that his death is near.[4] Through the recitation of selected penitential and God-affirming prayers, the one

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[4] Shabbat 32a

who is about to die acknowledges his shortcomings and asks forgiveness from God for the harm which may have resulted from these weaknesses. The act of confession compels the one who is dying to confront the reality of his immanent death; it forces him to realize that his death brings with it God's judgement of his human, fallible, life span. The underlying power of confession is the belief that even as one lays dying, one has the potential to affect his post-death existence. One does not have to dwell forever in *Sheol*; faith in God's desire to forgive and redeem can influence, for the good, God's ultimate judgement.

The notion of acceptance of immanent death, along with the consequences of one's living, was quite important to our sages. A belief in this final chance for redemption compelled them to prescribe that if anyone should perceive that an invalid is dying, he should tactfully turn the conversation to the subject of confession:[9]

חולה שרואים בו שהוא נוטה למות, מסבירים
שאנו מבקרים ואומרים לו התודה.

A visitor's responsibility to direct a dying person to recite the confession also compels those who are with the dying person to acknowledge that death is near. This act of acknowledgement, the first step in a long process of Jewish mourning tradition, directs the mourners to confront death's

[9]Yoreh Deah 338:1

reality and significance.

Death threatens a mourner's relationship with God. The pain of loss has the potential to cause doubt and questions about God's goodness to rise to the surface and plague a mourner's thoughts. Thus, the rabbis created ritual obligations, to be fulfilled by a mourner at the time of a loved one's death, which seek to gain control over wandering thoughts concerning theodicy and theology. The intention of these obligations is to re-establish a proper trust and relationship between the mourner and God.

After reminding the dying one to recite a confession, those mourners who are present are obligated to confirm their faith in God's goodness, affirm their belief that God will protect the dying one's soul, and express their confidence in the divine attribute of justice. These expressions of affirmation and confirmation begin with the words through which a mourner urges the one who is dying to let go of life and to trust that his soul will go with God: לך! כי שלחך

ה' לך ויי יהיה עמך! "אלהיו עמו, ויעל.

"Go! for the Lord has sent you. Go! and the Lord will be with you. The Lord his God is with him and he will ascend." Once their loved one has died, the next of kin who are obligated to observe mourning recite the following prayer as they rend their clothes:

ברוך אתה " אלהינו מלך העולם, צ' המת.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who is

the Judge of Truth.[10] This prayer articulates two basic tenets of Jewish belief: first, God, as Judge, decides when a life begins and ends, and, second, it is God who, ultimately, determines the soul's future path. The mourners can only hope that their prayers will have some influence.[11]

The above mentioned prayers force a mourner to articulate the reality which lies before him: a close relative has died. Even a mourner who is thousands of miles away from the person at the time of death must confront the fact of what has occurred; upon receiving the news, he is obligated to affirm God's justice and to rend his garment.[12]

The rabbis learned from the Bible that death causes a body to enter into the most potent state of ritual defilement. This state of profound impurity prepared the body for descent into the nether-world of *Sheol*. The rabbis, however, consistently sought to guide their followers towards the belief that ascent to God after death is possible. Thus, they

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[10] Hyman Goldin, Hamadrikch: A Manual of Jewish Religious Rituals, Ceremonials and Customs, pp. 107-109.

[11] The traditional Jewish funeral service contains a section of prayer entitled צדוק הדין, the righteousness of judgement. In this section, the officiant praises God, "all of whose ways are justice." The text also mentions the two beliefs reflected in the צדוק הדין prayer. It states: צדיק אתה ה' להמית ולהחיות, אשר בידך פקדון כל רוחות. Praised be the True Judge who takes away and gives life, and נפש כל חי בידך, צדק מלאה ימינך, רחם על פליטת צאן ידיך, ותאמר למלאך - הרף ידך! The soul of every living creature is in thy hand, for there is justice in thy command. O have mercy on the remnant of thy flock, and say to the angel of destruction: "Withdraw thy hand!"

[12] Moed Katan 20a

mandated that a corpse be thoroughly cleansed, every inch of the body washed and dried, before burial.[13] This cleansing is called *tahara* - purification -the act of bringing the dead into a state of godliness; it elevates death from the impurity of decay and restores the corpse to a status of ritual purity.

The rabbis were also concerned with the dead's impure status within the community. In an effort not to dishonor the one who died by keeping him in this state of defilement, it was ordained that the community support a group of individuals, called the *chevra kadisha*, to engage in this process of purification. Purification is, thus, ,
a way in which those who are living honor the dead.

After purification, the deceased is clothed in white shrouds[14] and placed upon a bier. The rabbis decreed that the body should be constantly watched, never left alone.[15] Although it is possible that this practice echoes the biblical notion that the living can still influence the dead's course, it would be more consistent with rabbinic thinking to view this vigil as a reflection of the rabbinic attitudes prevalent throughout the entirety of their mourning legislation: first, the one who has died deserves to be treated with honor and respect, and second, the need for a mourner to accept death's

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[13]Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 370:4

[14]Moed Katan 27b

[15]Berakchot 18a

presence and impact. Thus, someone must watch over the corpse at all times. In addition, the corpse is not hidden or placed under blankets; the body is in full view, preventing any wishful delusions that the person is not really dead.

A mourner is not obligated to perform this vigil himself; he may ask volunteers or employ professionals to complete this task. Yet, seeing his loved one's lifeless body with his own eyes aides his acceptance of the death and grants him permission to grieve and receive consolation. Bereshit Rabbah teaches that Jacob's refusal to be comforted after Joseph's "death" is related to the lack of a corpse which would confirm the reality of his son's death:

וימאן להתנחם: מטרונה שאלה את רבי יוסי: אומרת לו:
כתוב - וינחם יהודה ויעל על גוזזי צאנו. וזה אביהם של
כולם וימאן להתנחם! אומר לה: מתנחמים על המתים ואין
מתנחמים על החיים.

"*But he refused to be comforted* (Gen. 37:35). A matron asked Rabbi Jose: it is written: *for Judah prevailed above his brothers* (I Chron. 5:2) and yet we read: *and Judah was comforted* (Gen. 38:12); while this man (Jacob) was the father of them all, yet he refused to be comforted! He answered: You can be comforted for the dead, but not for the living."[16]

The rabbis understood that grief and mourning possess great value for the living. It grants the mourner an opportunity to bewail the unknown destiny of his loved one's

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[16]Bereshit Rabbah 84:21. Without a corpse before him, Jacob held a flicker of a hope that his beloved son was still alive.

soul, as well as structured time to confront the pain and intensity of his loss. They, thus, legislated an obligation to formally mourn a loved one's death. This obligation, while certainly an outgrowth of rabbinic thought and process, is also based upon biblical examples of substantial mourning, as well as from two biblical cases.

The first scenario is that of the High Priest who was permitted to defile himself by approaching a corpse for only the deaths of one of his seven closest relatives: mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and wife.[17] The rabbis concluded that if mourning was important enough for the High Priest to, thus, defile himself, then all Jews must mourn when they experience a similar loss. The Talmud, in Moed Katan 20b, states that for all mentioned in the Priest's section for whom a priest can defile himself, a mourner is to observe formal mourning: ת"ר: כל האמור בפרשת כהנים שכהן מיטמא להן, אבל מתאבל עליהן: ואלו הן: אשתו, אביו, ואמו, אחיו ואחותו בנו ובתו.

A second basis for the obligation to mourn is from a lesson the rabbis learned concerning Aaron who did not eat from the sin offering on the day his sons, Nadab and Abihu, died. Moses questioned Aaron about his abstention and Aaron responded, "*and if I had eaten the sin offering today, would*

[17] Leviticus 21:2-3

this have been pleasing before God?"[18]

(There are a few select instances where one is not obligated to formally mourn a death: the case of a non-viable child who dies,[19] a suicide, an apostate or arrogant sinner, cremated dead or an executed criminal.)

Our sages are, thus, in agreement that one must formally mourn the death of one's mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter or spouse. The length of formal mourning, however, does not follow from a unified thought. Masechet Semachot 4:19 records Rabbi Meir's belief that the period of grieving should extend from the day of death until the day of burial. In that same passage, anonymous sages, referred to as the *chakchamim*, say that formal grieving should last for only one day. Further on, there exists a simple statement that "thirty are the days of mourning."[20] From where did the rabbis select these numbers of days and what exactly is the law concerning the length of time that one formally mourns?

The Torah records two examples of extended mourning, one of seven days' duration and the other lasting for thirty days. Concerning the length of time Joseph mourned for his father,

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[18]Leviticus 10:19. From Aaron's answer to Moses we learn that one is not permitted to continue with normal functioning immediately after a loved one's death. One's behavior must change to indicate respect for the dead, grief and mourning.

[19]The prohibition of mourning a non-viable child will be discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this work.

[20]Simachot 7:8

Genesis 50:10 states: "*and he made a mourning for his father seven days.*" In Deuteronomy it was recorded that "*the Children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days.*"[21]

In the Talmud - a body of literature which represents the rabbis' earliest works and thought - the mourning process of seven days, thirty days and twelve months, to which we adhere today, is already assumed within the statements of *halakcha*. Only two texts mention an explanation of a certain period of time with regard to mourning. Concerning the time frame of a full year of mourning, Shabbat 152b-153a discusses the length of time it takes for a dead person's soul to be at peace:

כל י"ב חדש גופו קיים ונשמתו עולה ויורדת.
לאחר י"ב חדש הגוף בטל ונשמתו עולה ושוב אינה
יורדת.

"For twelve months the body is in existence and the soul ascends and descends; after twelve months the body ceases to exist and the soul ascends but descends nevermore." The rabbis believed that one's prayer on behalf of the deceased could expiate whatever sins taint that being. Prayer, thus, can cause a soul to permanently ascend from the depths of *Sheol*. Children, the only mourners who must observe the full year period, were given the responsibility, by the rabbis, to

[21]Deuteronomy 34:8

"watch" over the destiny of their parents' souls.[22]

Moed Katan 19b offers an explanation for a thirty day period of modified mourning once the *shiva*, the seven days of intense grief, have ended:

באבל שלושים יום מנלן? יליף פרע. פרע מנזיר כתיב
הכא: ראשיכם אל תפרעו, וכתיב התם גדל פרע שער ראשו.
מה להלן שלושים, אף כאן שלושים. והתם מנלן? אמר רב
מתנה - סתם נזירות שלושים יום. מאי טעמא? אמר קרא:
קדוש יהיה - יהיה בגימטריא תלתין.

"From where is it derived that there are thirty days of mourning? We learn it from an analogy between two Scripture verses which have in common the verb *pera*, one which refers to mourning and the other to the Nazarite. Concerning the case of mourning, it is written: Let not the hair of your heads grow long,[23] and concerning the Nazarite it is written: He shall let the hair of his head grow long.[24] Just as in the latter case the specified period of time is thirty days, so, too, in the former case is the period of time thirty days. How is this known? Rabbi Matena said: An unspecified Nazarite vow is binding for thirty days. What is the reason? The text there (Numbers 6:5) says: you shall be (YHYH)

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[22] It is common for traditional Jewish parents who have experienced the death of a child to grieve, also, the loss of their "*kaddish*."

[23] Leviticus 10:6 After Nadab and Abihu die, Aaron and his remaining sons were commanded not to let their hair grow long

[24] Numbers 6:5

holy; the letter value of YHYH is thirty."[25] With the use of analogy, our sages explain a period of mourning lasting thirty days.

While it is not possible to establish a definite link between the periods of mourning as stated in the Pentateuch and the rabbi's working assumptions of defined periods of time, there certainly exist commonality in time and purpose. The image of the mourning soul, coupled with the extent to which the rabbis went in order to justify a thirty day continuation of expressed grief and abstention, indicates rabbinic acknowledgement that honor of and prayer for the dead - in addition to grief-work -involve both a process and a general time frame during which that process takes place.

The question to be asked is, "Did the rabbis intend for the mourning chronology of seven days, thirty days and twelve months to address, in part, the psycho-spiritual needs of a recently bereaved person?" While it is impossible to directly answer "yes" or "no" to this question, Esther Rabbah 8:2 offers insight into the issue:

וכי יש אבל לגדול ויש אבל לקטן - אלא כמנהג
שבעולם, כל האבלים אבלין מתחלה והולך עד שבעת
הימים. תקפו יום הראשון וכל שהוא הולך והוא שש עד שהוא
י"ב חדש.

[25]Gematriya - the assignment of numeric value to the consonants - yields that this law of Nazarite purity shall be in effect for thirty days.

The text states that the greatest intensity of grief lasts three days. The next four days are of lesser intensity. "Is some mourning great and some mourning small? The fact is that in the ordinary course of things the grief of mourning goes on diminishing for seven days. It is strongest on the first day, and it grows weaker and weaker until after twelve months (it disappears)." It is, at least, possible to say that the psycho-spiritual benefits of the mourning process were not lost upon our sages.

The rabbis created laws concerning five different stages within the mourning process. They are: aninut, the period of time between death and burial; avelut, the first three days after burial; the next four days (which, with the first three days, comprise what we know today as *shiva*); *sheloshim*, the first thirty days after burial; and, twelve months after death. Each of these stages are replete with rituals which enable the grieving process.

Our sages distinguished between internal (aninut) and external manifestations (avelut) of grief, indicating their sensitivity to the various psychological processes which the mourner undergoes. One who has just experienced a loss is overwrought with strong emotions, a mingling of pain and, perhaps, relief, and is, thus, incapable of organized thought and activity. Moed Katan 23b states that "one who has his dead laid before him is exempt from observing all precepts." He is

not to be confronted with religious duties for two reasons: one, because his mind is focused on death and not on hope and life - that which the *mitzvot* affirm; in addition, at his own personal moment of loss, an *onan* is more likely to blaspheme than to praise God. The only prayer which he is obligated to recite is that which affirms God's justice (see above).

A well-channeled expression of grief tames the wild fears and attitudes of destruction associated with death. An *onan*, overcome by grief, often feels self-destructive impulses. It is apparent from the multiple prophetic denunciations against the practice of self-mutilation, of slashing and scarring oneself, that these practices were common in Ancient Israel. Rending grants permission for an *onan* to express these feelings in a more constructive manner.

An onan may not bathe,[26] cut his hair or groom himself in any way; his physical uncleanliness parallels the corpse's decomposition which begins immediately after death. This identification with the corpse is an important part of the mourner's acceptance of death and letting go. Oftentimes, however, initial grief is so overwhelming that an *onan* is unable to distinguish between life and death, between himself and his loved one who has died; he needs time alone with his loss to concentrate on nothing else but his loss. Thus, an *onan* should not receive visitors or words of consolation.

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[26]Moed Katan 15b

Jewish law grants this time for closure.

Only after the dead is buried, and the mourner has parted with his loved one's physical remains, does external mourning - *avelut* - find its place. This mourning is less private and more public, although the rabbis have stated that during the first three days after burial one should still not receive unnecessary visitors. Some interaction with others is in order, however, for Rav Judah said that "a mourner is forbidden to eat of his own bread on the first day of mourning."[27] Food is brought to the mourner in his home; he is not permitted to go outdoors unless it is Shabbat or a Festival.[28] By staying at home, concerned with neither his meals nor his appearance, the mourner is granted an extended period of time to release pent-up grief and to begin to heal.

The mourner's only organized activity during *shiva* is participation in a public prayer service offered three times a day at his home. Late rabbinic tradition, found in the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 276:3, stipulates that at this time a mourner is obligated to recite the *Kaddish*, a prayer which praises God's greatness and thanks God for the gift of life.

In response to an *avel's* necessary interaction with people before and after the service, as well as when food is

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[27]Moed Katan 27b

[28]Moed Katan 23a, Yoreh Deah 393: 1,2

brought to his home, the rabbis developed laws which deal with greetings exchanged between a mourner and his companions. They seem eager to protect the mourner's feelings, space and need for privacy. Moed 15a states that an *avel* is forbidden to ask after another's well-being. This prohibition guards the mourner from hearing a friend's happy response; he does not need to be reminded of another's joy in the midst of his profound sadness. A distinction in made, however, between the first three and the last four days of *shiva* when less rigid standards for communication are acceptable:

אנו תנן: אבל ג' ימים הראשונים אסור בשאלת שלום. משלשה ועד שבעה משיב ואינו שואל. מכאן ואילך שואל ומשיב כדרכו.

During the first three days a mourner may neither greet nor respond to a greeting, while during the latter four days the mourner is still prohibited from greeting, he may respond to another's query. The rabbis decreed, however, that during the seven days of mourning, laughter and any kind of rejoicing is forbidden.[29]

Once *shiva* has ended, the mourner is encouraged to leave his home and to slowly reinvolve himself in his regular activities. He is still not permitted to cut his hair or to participate in joyous celebrations;[30] he must also continue to

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[29]Moed Katan 26b; also, Mishneh Torah Hilkchot Avel 5:20

[30]Moed Katan 22b

recite *Kaddish* for his obligated period of time.[31] During the periods of *sheloshim* and twelve months the rabbis continue to protect the mourner's fragile spirit. Rabbi Meir was quoted as saying: "One who sees a mourner within the thirty days speaks to him words of consolation and then inquires after his welfare; after thirty days but within twelve months he inquires after his welfare and then speaks to him words of consolation; after twelve months he makes no reference at all."[32] The Talmud likens words of consolation after twelve months to one who has broken a leg and healed - only to, then, have the doctor re-break it.

It is clear that the rabbinic mourning legislation reflects our sages' belief that both the dying person and his mourners are capable of ensuring the soul's peaceful rest through prayer and trust in God. In addition, this legislation aims to re-establish trust and a good relationship between the mourner and God. Although these laws and rituals do not represent an overtly intentional concern for the mourner's pain and grief, there is no doubt that, in addition to spiritual affirmation, the mourning process does possess great psychological benefit. Within a framework of Jewish ritual and

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[31]A mourner is obligated to recite *Kaddish* over a period of thirty days for all deaths except that of a parent; a child is obligated to recite *Kaddish* and exhibit mourning behavior for a one year period.

[32]Semachot 12b, Moed Katan 21b

custom, the mourner is encouraged to privately confront the reality of a loved one's death, and then to journey through the intensity of grief until he reaches a level of comfort and capability to re-enter society.

The rabbis recognized a fine balance between a mourner's need for privacy in order to come to terms with his loss and his subsequent need to receive visitors who will help him to reinvest his spirit with hope and life. Hope is not only present in his companions, however; the rabbis provided, within their mourning laws, that the mourner will return to a life a prayer after the burial. During shiva a mourner's only responsibilities are to think and to pray. Thus, a mourner's soul heals along with his heart.

Can a mourner's soul heal without the benefit of this Jewish mourning tradition? As mentioned above, there are certain cases in which a mourner is not permitted to engage in this process of grief ritual. The following chapter will examine one of these cases: a child who dies before attaining the status of viability. The chapter will also detail rabbinic thought concerning why children die, interment rituals for children who die at an age older than thirty days, and aggada concerning certain rabbis who are, themselves, bereaved parents.

CHAPTER II

At the beginning of the previous chapter this thesis examined why death is a part of the human condition. The explanations which were tendered - Adam and Eve's punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge brought death to them and to every future generation, death is a part of nature which has existed since the first days of creation, and, one's own sins decree his death - presume a death which comes at the end of a full and long life. It is known, however, that death sometimes curtails the life of the very young. Why does this happen? Why do children die?

The rabbis address this question with a focus on two sources of children's death: parents and God. Most texts, however, seek to place blame for a child's death on a parent; a child's death is the consequence of a parent's flaw or failure. Kohelet Rabbah states:

"*But I returned and considered all the oppressions that are under the sun (Ecclesiastes 10:1)*. Rav Judah, Rav Nehemiah and our sages (comment): Rav Judah says: this verse refers to the children who are buried early in life due to the sin of

their fathers in this world."[1] The rabbis deduced this correlation from selected biblical verses. Although they differ as to exactly what sin, of omission or commission, it is that causes one's children to die, they learn from the biblical text that a parent is at fault for his child's death. Shabbat 32b teaches that Rabbi connects the death of a child to his parent's failure to fulfill a vow: "For the sin of (unfulfilled) vows one's children die young, for it is said: *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin, neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error; wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*"[2] On that same page Rav Judah the Nasi makes a connection between a child's death and neglect of Torah. "...on the view that it is for the sin of neglect of Torah, what verse (teaches this)? It is written: *Have I smitten your children for nought? They received no instruction!*"[3]

Other sages attribute child death to a failure to put up a *mezuza* or to wear *tzitzit*,[4] a parent's lack of commitment to completing a *mitzvah* already begun,[5] or to a one's lack of

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[1]Kohelet Rabbah 4:1,1

[2]Ecclesiastes 5:5 *The work of thine hands* refers to a man's sons or daughters.

[3]Jeremiah 2:30

[4]Shabbat 32b

[5]Yalkut Shimoni, Genesis 144

respect for a worthy man who has died.[6] Numbers Rabbah 9:47 teaches that Nadab and Abihu died as a result of the sin Aaron committed by encouraging and helping the Children of Israel to make the Golden Calf.

Moed Katan 27b suggests another parental flaw which is linked to the death of one's children. In this case, Rav Judah asserts that excessive grief over one dead child will cause the death of that parent's other children:

אמר רבי יהודה אמר רב: כל המתקשה על מתו יותר מדאי,
על מת אחר הוא בוכה. ההיא איתתא דהואי בשיבבותיה דרב
הונא. הוו לה שבעה בני - מת חד מינייהו. הוה קא בכיא
ביתירתא עליה. שלח לה רב הונא: לא תעבדי הכי. לא אשגחה
ביה. שלח לה: אי צייתת מוטב ואי לא צבית לצוודתא?! לאידך
מית ומיתו כולהו.

"Rav Judah said, speaking for Rav: Whoever exhibits excessive grief for his dead, he weeps (i.e. will weep) for another dead. There was a certain woman who lived in Rav Huna's neighborhood. She had seven sons, one of whom died; she wept for him excessively. Rav Huna sent (word) to her: Do not act this way! She did not heed him. He sent (word) to her: If you heed my word it is well; but if not, are you anxious to make provision[7] for yet another? The next son died and they all died."

There are some texts, however, that look not to parents for understanding why a child has died; rather, these texts

[6] Shabbat 105b

[7] referring to provisions for burial (shroud, casket, etc...)

focus on God's divine discretion. The texts explain that person's soul, his life, belongs to God. It is within God's power to take any person's soul without reason or explanation. In fact, the rabbis state that it is not for human beings to question why God takes one person's soul early in life, yet God waits to take another's soul until that person has lived well. The soul is God's to do with as God deems proper:

תני: בזמן שהולד נוצר במעי אמו, שלשה הם שותפין בו: הקב"ה
ואביו ואמו. אביו מזריע בו לובן שממנו הלובנים והמוח והצפרנים
ולובן שבעין והעצמות והגידין. אמו מזריעה אודם שממנו הדמים
והעור והבשר והשער ושחור שבעין. והקב"ה יתברך שמו ויתרומם
זכרו נותן בו עשרה דברים, ואלו הן: רוח ונשמה, וקלסתר פנים
ומראית עינים, ושמיעת אזנים, ודבור שפתים, ונשיאות ידים והילוך
רגלים, וחכמה, ובינה, ועצה ודעת וגבורה. וכשמגיע שעת פטירתו,
הקב"ה נוטל חלקו ומניח אביו ואמו לפניהם.

"It was taught: At the time a child is formed in its mother's womb, three entities act as partners: the Holy One Blessed Be He, the father and the mother. The father contributes the white semen from which are formed the white substances (of the embryo), the brain, the fingernails, the whites of the eyes, and the bones and sinews. The mother contributes the red elements from which are formed blood, the skin and flesh, the hair and the black of the eyes. And the Holy One Blessed Be He, may His name be blessed and His memory exalted, gives to it ten things which are: spirit and soul, beauty of appearance, sight of the eyes, hearing of the ears, speech of the lips, the ability to raise his hands and walk with his legs, wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge and strength.

When the time comes for it to die, the Holy One Blessed Be He takes his portion and leaves the father's and mother's portion before them."[8]

This line of rabbinic thinking attributes life, as well as death, to God. God bestows a soul upon each human being, a soul which is for the human to guard until that time when God desires it once again. The soul is a trust from God. Parents agree to become guardians of this trust when they decide to create and raise children. If this child dies, if the soul is taken early in life, no explanation is needed other than God desired the return of that trust.

The story of Rabbi Meir's two sons[9] articulates this rabbinic thought that one's soul is a precious gift on loan from God. Before Rabbi Meir knew that his two sons had died, his wife, Bruria, asked him: "If someone who had entrusted a jewel with me has now returned to claim it, should I give it back to him?" Upon Rabbi Meir's response of "certainly," Bruria took him by the hand and led him into the other room where his two sons lay dead. Bruria understood her sons' deaths to indicate that God desired the return of the souls which had been entrusted in her care.

Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak similarly explained the death of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakki's son with the intention of offering

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[8]Kohelet Rabbah 5:10, 2

[9]Midrash Mishle 31:10

comfort to the grief-stricken man.[10] He said to him:

משל למה הדבר דומה: לאדם שהפקיד אצלו המלך פקדון.
בכל יום ויום היה בוכה וצועק ואומר: אוי לי! אימתי אצא
מן הפקדון הזה בשלום? אף אתה, רבי, היה לך בן קרא תורה,
מקרא, נביאים וכתובים, משנה הלכות ואגדות, ונפטר מן העולם
בלא חטא. ויש לך לקבל עליך תנחומים כשהחזרת פקדונך שלם.

"Let me tell you a parable. To what is the matter like? To a man to whom the king entrusted a precious jewel. Every day the man would weep, cry out and say: Woe is me! When will I be free from keeping this precious jewel in tact? You, too, my master, had a son versed in Torah, who had studied Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa, Mishna, halakchot and aggadot. He has departed sinless from this world. Surely you should derive comfort from having returned your trust in tact!" Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakki, who had been unable to receive any consolation until this point, was comforted.

The rabbis believed that a child's death can act as an atonement for his parents' sins. "Just as a man may be punished by the death of his children, so may he receive atonement through his children's death."[11]

The rabbis were clear, however, that a child's death could atone only for deeds that took place while the child was alive. Kohelet Rabbah tells a story about children whose

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[10]Avot de Rabbi Natan 14:6

[11]Berakchot 5a-b

parents continued to sin after their deaths. When their fathers died, the children spoke before God and said: "Lord of the Universe, did we not die early only because of the sins of our fathers? Let our fathers come over to us through our merits.[12] He replied to them: Your fathers sinned also after your death, and their wrongdoing accuse them."[13]

The Tanchuma states that "a child's death not only makes atonement for a father's sin, but it also makes the father's relationship with God a better one."[14] It seems that the rabbis viewed a child's death as an opportunity for the parents to wipe clean their slates and start over again. If a parent had been wayward and had chosen not to be a participatory member of the Jewish community, he/she was to be re-welcomed into the community following their child's death. Perhaps the rabbis viewed this opportunity as a comfort, impressing upon the grief-stricken parents that good can yield from their tragedy.

Given that children die, either as a result of a parent's sin or God's desire to recall the child's entrusted soul, how are the parents instructed to respond to this tragedy? The Bible teaches that a response to infant or child death is quite individual and personal, for reactions differed amongst

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[12]Let our early deaths be an expiation for their sins and, thus, let our fathers be counted among the righteous

[13]Kohelet Rabbah 4:1,1

[14]Tanchuma Ki Tetzei:2

our biblical ancestors (most certainly influenced by their day's view of infant/child death and appropriate grief responses). The text does not offer an obvious affective response from Adam and Eve when Abel was killed; we are told only that Adam and Eve continue to have children, one of whom - Seth - was considered by Eve as a replacement for Abel.[15] When Jacob heard of Joseph's (supposed) death, he rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins and observed mourning for several days.[16] Aaron was silent when Nadav and Abihu died; his only marked response was to abstain from eating the day's sin offering.[17] King David sat by his newborn son's sick bed, day after day, without eating or sleeping; he offered unceasing prayer. Yet when his son died, he rose up, bathed, anointed himself and then sat down to a meal.[18] When Amnon died, King David responded in a different manner; he rent his clothes.[19]

It was Job who exhibited the most full reaction to the death of his children. He responded with affirmations of faith and with physical behaviors. Upon receiving the news that his

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[15]Genesis 4:25

[16]Genesis 37:34

[17]Leviticus 10:3

[18]II Samuel 12:15-25 King David explained that while his son was alive, he believed that, through his behavior, he could exert some influence over whether or not his son would heal. After his death, King David realized that he could not do anything more for his son and, thus, continued on with life.

[19]II Samuel 13:31

children were dead, Job rose up, tore his robe, cut off his hair and threw himself on the ground. Once on the ground, Job began to pray. He sat on the ground for seven days and seven nights.[20]

While it is not possible to conclude that the rabbis learned directly from their biblical ancestors about how to instruct their contemporaries with regard to responding to a child's death, it is clear that the Bible teaches that some response is necessary. The rabbis, thus, developed laws whose purpose is to facilitate parental response.[21]

It is important to note at this juncture that the rabbis understood burial and the mourning process to be a tremendous financial hardship.[22] Especially at a time when infant and child mortality rates were quite high, parents simply could not afford to buy a casket and abstain from work during the seven days following burial for each child that died. The rabbis took the reality of financial burden into account when fashioning the laws of response.

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[20]Job 1:20-21, 2:13

[21]Chapter I taught that, at the time of an adult's death, God is praised as the soul's ideal resting place. Family members are instructed to remind the dying person to recite a confession in order to atone for past wrongs and ensure that his soul will return to God. Since the rabbis believed that children's souls are pure and always return to God, children do not have to recite a confession.

[22]Bekorot 49a

Concerning a child's burial, the rabbis detailed what kind of burial is appropriate for a child at selected age levels. For a child who dies at birth or before the age of thirty days: לפני שלושים יום יוצא בחיק נקבר באישה אחת ובשני אנשים... אין עומדין עליו בשורה ואין אומרין עליו ברכת אבלים.

"Before thirty days an infant is taken out in arms and is buried by one woman and two men. We do not stand in the rows[23] and do not say the blessing for mourners or the traditional consolations."[24] It was customary to bury a non-viable child in a special part of the cemetery.[25] It became a later practice to bury the child with his mother, on her right, if she died either in childbirth or shortly thereafter.[26]

For a child who dies between the age of thirty days and twelve months:

יוצא באנשים ובנשים ובדלוסקמא ובאגפים

"He is accompanied (to the grave) by men and women and is carried in a case upon the arms."[27] The mourner's blessing is said and traditional consolations are offered. If the child's age was between twelve months and three years:

יוצא באנשים ובנשים ובדלוסקמה

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[23]to surround the mourners as a gesture of comfort

[24]Moed Katan 24a-b, also: Semachot 3:2, Kiddushin 80b

[25]Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah, Hilkchot Nedarim 224

[26]Darkchei Shalom, page 72.

[27]Semachot 3:2 A full size coffin is not indicated.

"He is accompanied by men and women and is carried in a case on the shoulder."[28] Beginning at the age of three, a child is to be buried in a casket which is borne to the cemetery on a bier.[29] It is interesting to note Rav Judah's comment in this same chapter of Masechet Semachot. He states that if a father desires to honor his child (and can afford the cost), that child may be buried in a casket regardless of age.[30]

Burial customs show a tendency to increase in intensity corresponding to the development of the child. Outward expressions of mourning (stomping one's foot, lamenting, and/or wailing) are appropriate at the funeral of a child age three or older. If the child was known to the public, people other than family may participate in the funeral.[31] A eulogy is offered at an earlier age (not before three, though) for a poor child than for a rich child[32]. Perhaps the rabbis believed that a child is a greater joy to a poor parent who has few pleasures in life and, thus, his death is a greater loss. If a child was mature and had a unique character, the eulogy should address his character. If, however, the child

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[28] Ibid. also, Moed Katan 24b The body is carried out in a regular casket.

[29] Semachot 3:3

[30] Semachot 3:2

[31] Semachot 3:3

[32] Semachot 3:4

did not distinguish himself in any way, the eulogy should be based upon his parents' merit.[33]

Age is an important determinant with regard to whether or not parents who have lost a child are legally obligated to follow Jewish mourning laws. The rabbis sought to determine at what age a child becomes a נפל קיימא , a viable human being for whom mourning must be observed. The Bible mentions two different cases in which a viable human being is defined as one who has lived longer than one month or thirty days. God, who had decreed that each first born of a Levite family will be dedicated to divine service, commanded Moses to "*record the Levites by ancestral house and by clan; record every male among them from the age of one month up.*"[34] Several chapters later in the Book of Numbers, God tells Aaron that the first issue of every living thing, including human offspring, must be dedicated to priestly service. Any child, however, with the exception of a Levite child, may be redeemed from this service, for God said: "*And those that are to be redeemed of them from a month old shalt thou redeem...*"[35]

Rabbi Simeon ben Gamliel commented upon this verse:

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[33]Semachot 3:5

[34]Numbers 3:15

[35]Numbers 18:16

תניא: ר"ש בן גמליאל אומר: כל ששהה ל' יום באדם
אינו נפל שנאמר: ופדויו מבן חדש תפדה

"Any human being which tarries for thirty days is not a *nefel*,[36] because it is said: and those that are to be redeemed of them from a month old shalt thou redeem."[37] From this text we learn that the rabbis, too, legally defined a non-viable child as one who is less than 30 days old.

Prayers affirming God as the ultimate Judge of truth and justice, a part of the rituals said at the time of death whose main purpose is to repair death's negative impact upon the mourner's relationship with God, are not said if the child who died was not viable. Why were the rabbis not concerned with the parents' relationship with God? Perhaps it was the rabbis' evaluation that parental bonding does not take place until the child is older. Thus, they did not consider an infant's death to have the kind of impact on mourners which would profoundly effect a parent's concept of theology and theodicy. On the other hand, it is possible the rabbis knew that parents have great difficulty understanding and dealing with infant death. With this struggle in mind, the rabbis might have decided that the child's deathbed presented neither the place nor the time to begin repair on one's relationship with God.

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[36]a non-viable, premature birth

[37]Shabbat 135b

With regard to the legal obligation of mourning the death of a non-viable child, the rabbis sought, as mentioned above, to minimize the financial and emotional burden incurred by bereaved parents. A Mishna and the accompanying Gemora passage found in Bekorot 49a define the parents' obligation with an eye towards leniency. The text states:

את פ'יום שלושים, כיום שלפניו... הכל מודים לעניין
פלוגות יום שלושים כיום שלפניו, ואומר שמואל: הלכה
כדברי המקל באבלו.

"If he dies on the thirtieth day, it is as if he died on the previous day... Rav Ashi said: All the authorities concerned agree that as regards the laws of mourning the thirtieth day is counted as being like the previous day,[38] for Samuel said: The law is in accordance with the authority which is lenient in matters of mourning."

The law continues to exempt parents from this obligation throughout the Middle Ages. Maimonides, in the Mishneh Torah Hilkchot Avel, writes that one may not formally mourn for a nefel since a human being who does not live for thirty days is considered non-viable. Maimonides also supports Rav Ashi's leniency that even if the child dies on the thirtieth day, one is not obligated to mourn.[39] Yoreh De'ah of the Shulchan Aruch is even more specific. It states:

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[38]Thus, the father is not obligated to mourn the child according to the Jewish mourning process.

[39]Mishneh Torah Hilkchot Avel 1:6

"A child, concerning whom it is not known that he completed his months,[40] who died before thirty days or even on the thirtieth day, for him one does not rend."[41]

A thorough study of the language contained in this passage from Yoreh De'ah yields an interesting condition to the law which decrees that one is not obligated to mourn for a child who is considered non-viable. Joseph Caro, when writing this document, repeated a less known yet more complete definition of what our sages considered to be at issue with regard to viability. At first glance, the focus is on an infant living thirty days after birth. Yet, upon closer inspection of the law, it is possible to determine that the rabbis considered viable a child who was born at the end of a full term pregnancy. They believed that it takes a full nine months to produce a healthy baby and, thus, determined that a child who was born premature must live as long as it would take to bring him up to "full term" health (30 days if born at eight months) in order for him to be considered viable. Viability, thus, is defined in terms of length of pregnancy and not in terms of days alive - provided that the child is born alive.

It would follow, then, that a father is obligated to

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[40]was born after a full term (nine months) pregnancy

[41]Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah Hilkchot Keriah 340:30

mourn the death of a less-than-thirty-day-old child born viable (alive) following a nine-month pregnancy. A story from Shabbat 136a concerning the questionable behavior of two or our sages illustrates this obligation:

בריה דרב דימי בר יוסף אתיליד ליה: ההוא ינוקא בגו
תלתין יומין. שכיב יתיב קמתאבל עליה. אמר לה אבוה: פרורייתא
קבעת למיכל? אמר לה: ליה קים ביה שכלו לו חדשין. רב אשי
איקלע בי רב כהנא. איתרע ביה מילתא בגו תלתין יומין. חזייה
דיתיב וקא מתאבל עליה. אמר ליה: לא סבר ליה מר דאמר
רבי יהודה אמר שמואל הלכה כרבן שמעון בן גמליאל? אמר
לה: קים לי בגויה שכלו לו חדשין.

"A child was born to the son of Rav Dimi ben Joseph. It died within thirty days. He sat and mourned for it. His father said to him:Do you wish to eat dainties?[42] He said to him: It is known to me (for certain) that he had completed his months. Rav Asi visited the home of Rav Kahana: a mishap befell him concerning his son within thirty days.[43] Seeing him sitting and mourning for it, he said to him: Does the Master not agree with what Rav Judah said in Samuel's name, that the *halacha* is according to Rav Simeon ben Gamliel? He said to him: It is known to me (for certain) that he completed his months."

A later tractate of the Talmud makes this same distinction between a child born premature and one born following a full term pregnancy. Masechet Semachot 1:8 states:

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[42]traditional mourning food

[43]his son died within thirty days of birth

"We do not carry out the mourning rites for one who came out (at birth) by pieces or with feet foremost, or for one born prematurely at eight months alive or at nine months dead." Thus, if the child was born alive at nine months, mourning rites are carried out for him. This law is made even more clear further on in the tractate: "A child who lived only one day counts to his father and mother as a fully-grown man."[44]

Various legal codes to the Talmud affirm a parent's obligation to mourn a full-term child who was born alive. The Mishneh Torah states:

ואם נודע בודאי שנולד לתשעה חדשים מארים עליו,
אע"פ שיום שנולד, משלים שלו.

"If it is known for certain that the child was born alive at the end of nine full months, even if it died on the day it was born, one must observe formal mourning."[45] The Tur comments:

וה"ה קיים לן בי"ה שכלו חדשיו כגון שבעל ופירש, ונולד
לתשעה חדשים בין שנים בין מקולקלים משלימים שלו.

"If it is known (for certain) that it completed its months, for example if he had intercourse with her and then separated

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[44]Semachot 3:1 One is obligated to mourn a fully grown man who has died.

[45]Mishneh Torah Hilkchot Avel 1:7

from her,[46] and was born alive at nine months, whether whole or in pieces, one is obligated to observe formal mourning."[47] The Shulchan Aruch presents a similar legal understanding.[48]

There is a difficulty present within this law. In rabbinic times, under normal circumstances, it was nearly impossible for a parent to determine whether or not the child was full term. Since it was customary for couples to engage in intercourse several times a week during permitted periods each consecutive month, it was possible for a woman to be either two weeks or one and a half months pregnant before she noticed any obvious signs of change. Thus, it would not be known if the child was born at eight months premature or at full term. A child's birth status could be determined only in the case of imposed separation for at least two months immediately following intercourse. It seems that this was the situation concerning Rav Dimi and Rav Kahana. Since they both stated that they knew for certain their child had completed its months, each sage must have experienced a lengthy separation from his wife immediately following intercourse.

In summary, one is obligated to mourn the death of an infant not yet thirty days old if it is known for certain that the child was born at full term. Otherwise, no formal mourning

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[46]He did not have intercourse with her again until after she knew she was pregnant

[47]Arba'ah Turim, Yoreh De'ah Hilkchot Avelut 374:16

[48]Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah Hilkchot Avelut 374:8

is required until the age of 31 days is reached.[49]

This chapter has developed the history of rabbinic thought concerning proper burial and mourning for young children who die. We are to understand, from a lack of material dealing with what rituals are involved in formal mourning for a child, that one enters into the same mourning process for a child as one does for an adult. The rabbis were not concerned with the differences in relationship between an adult and a child and between two adults, and the need to mourn these relationships differently; in their thought, there exists one proper way to mourn for every situation which could possibly arise. The only evidence which can be cited as a slight acknowledgement that parents might have unique needs as they grieve their child's death is a late rabbinic text which mentions this kind of need by prohibition: "one must not kiss his dead children because it is dangerous."[50]

In contrast to the rabbinic position that it is appropriate to mourn a child as one mourns an adult, the

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[49]The Shulchan Aruch, in Yoreh De'ah Hilkchot Avelut 374:8, brings a new leniency (not found in any other source) to the law of thirty days. The text states that if a child was known to have been born in the eighth month, even if it lives to the thirty-first day and dies, one does not observe formal mourning. Dr. Michael Chernick explained that this leniency is based upon the influence of Greek medicine which held that a child born in the seventh month was considered viable while a child born at eight months was considered non-viable. This unusual ruling is, perhaps, due to the fact that the Greek number seven - Zita -is also the word for life.

[50]Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 197:1

following chapter is based upon the point of view that a parent's grief and mourning response is unique. The text will present contemporary thought - the work of sociologists, psychologists and social workers[51] whose expertise is in the field of pediatric thanatology - concerning this unparalleled grief and how parents must mourn the myriad of "deaths" which accompany this gross upset of nature.

[51] A psychoanalytic perspective will not be presented due to the author's lack of familiarity with this science.

CHAPTER III

The natural cycle of life is such that the old die first and are replaced by the young. There is an implicit expectation that a parent will die before his child. The unnaturalness of child death is not determined by the age of the child, but by the fact that the child dies out of turn with the parent. The strangeness of this event becomes a major stumbling block for those who mourn.[1]

Child death is unique and it presents unique issues for mourning parents.[2] The horror-filled tragedy of child death carries with it a pain, terror and grief which is unlike any other experienced by a bereaved person. Parents often describe the loss of a child as losing a part of yourself which is vital to your existence. One mother described it in this manner: when you lose your spouse, it is like losing a limb;

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[1]Therese Rando, "Unique Issues and Impact," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986), p. 12.

[2]Although most of the information presented in this chapter can be applied to every parent whose experiences the death of a child, the focus of this work is on the parent whose child dies between birth and age twenty-one. For more information regarding parental grief when an adult child dies, please see Therese Rando's "Death of an Adult Child," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986).

when you lose your child, it is like losing your lung.

One of the reasons why the death of a child is unique is because the parent-child relationship is singular. Children today are wanted for themselves; they satisfy the parents' desire for love and the feeling of being part of a family. They fulfill the basic functions of parenthood and satisfy a wide range of needs for the parent.[3] Parents highly value children not only for who they are and how they currently reflect their guidance; children also embody their parents' distant hopes, fantasies, values and expectations. When a child dies, so dies the dream. When a child dies, so dies that parent's future.

Parents experience many secondary losses when their child dies, losses that develop as a consequence of the death.[4] The loss of dreams, hopes and fantasies is very real. A parent's vision of immortality entrusted to his child's future is just as real and as precious as their dreams and fantasies. Thus, a child's death also causes the pain of irreplaceable self-loss. In addition, parental love is, in part, self-love. When a child dies, a parent loses not only his future, but also an integral part of himself in the present. This pain of self-loss often poses a great obstacle to a parent's expression of

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[3]Ronald J. Knapp, Beyond Endurance: When A Child Dies (New York: Shocken Books, 1986), p. 12.

[4]Rando, "Unique Issues and Impact," in Parental Loss of a Child, p. 11.

grief and efforts at healing. It is not uncommon for bereaved parents to yearn to emotionally or physically die with their children - in effect, following their children to the grave.[5] Their wish to die is grounded in a lack of hope, failing to justify a continuation of their lives without the deceased child. Bereaved parents desperately need to believe in the value of life itself, to move forward despite - and in spite of - their pain.

It can be expected that when mourning the death of a parent, spouse or friend, grief diminishes as the memories fade. For parents who mourn a child, however, this relationship of memories and grief present a double bind: when a child dies young, not only do parents have fewer memories, but since they are so few, parents are often reluctant to give them up, to let them fade. Thus parental grief takes a much longer time to diminish. Allowing memories to fade is most difficult for parents who have lost their only child; memories are the one link they have within their grasp which identifies them as parents. A bereaved parent will desperately struggle to maintain his parental identity and its inherent relationship with the child. A most difficult part of the mourning process involves a shedding of this role and an acknowledgement of the relationship's end.

Age, childhood and adolescent development, also sets

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[5]Knapp, p.19.

apart a parent's grief from every other mourning. Unlike a ten year relationship between two adults which does not change significantly due to advancing age, the age of the child colors a parent's grief because it identifies the issues which were present in the parent-child relationship at the time of death.[6] That which a parent must grieve and work through is different for a relationship with an eager-to-go-to-school first grader than a stormy relationship with the typical teenager. For example, if a child dies in adolescence, at a time when she was being normally rebellious, parents are probably left feeling that they had been in a struggle with her. In contrast, if a child dies at the age of twelve months, rebelliousness would not be an issue. However, parents would have to cope with the loss of a child to whom they gave physical, hands on care, someone they could "baby."[7]

At the time of death, parents seek tangible proof that their worst nightmare has actually occurred. Especially for the parent whose child dies suddenly, without prolonged illness or injury, a parent searches for evidence that will prove the fact of their child's death. Until this evidence is witnessed and accepted, a parent will refuse to believe that his little girl will never again jump into his arms. Thus,

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[6]Therese Rando, Grieving: How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1988), p. 162.

[7]Rando, pp. 161-162.

bereaved parents need closure, involvement with proof and undeniable evidence that their child is dead.

The best opportunities for closure are in the hospital or before the funeral. In either setting, parents to see, touch, hold and/or rock their child - to communicate with their child in death as they did in life. Viewing a child's corpse is not easy; wrenching ache and pain are accompanied by strong feelings of ambivalence. As desperately as they want and need to see their child, bereaved parents also want to believe that the child laying before them is not theirs. They yearn to go back to the time when the family was alive, whole and happy. Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, a bereaved parent and author of The Bereaved Parent, writes that these ambivalent feelings are quite common and a natural aspect of parental grief. She adds, however, that, despite the pain and anguish such a viewing may cause, it is very important for parents to see their dead child. She claims that the often heard parental preference to "remember him as he was" is an expressed wish think of him as "alive." Schiff stresses that in order for parents to remember that he is dead, they need to see him after he died.[8]

Burial preparations present another opportunity for closure. Parents who choose to participate in preparing their child for burial - either in making plans, choosing the

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[8]Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, The Bereaved Parent, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 13.

child's clothes and/or dressing him - find it meaningful to offer parental nurturing and exhibit parental behavior in this one, final setting. Most contemporary psychologists affirm this practice as helpful and therapeutic; confronting death's reality aides a parent in resolving his grief.[9]

The funeral - or memorial service - by its very nature, is an act of closure; it confirms and reinforces the fact of death. This is a time set aside for the family to focus on their loss and to review the relationship which they shared with the deceased. In addition, the funeral presents bereaved parents with a socially acceptable setting in which to grieve. Surrounded by friends and loved ones, grief-stricken parents can safely express feelings and receive condolences for their tremendous loss. Thus, a funeral teaches others that bereaved parents do need support - at that time and for many months to come.

For families with a religious orientation, the funeral can give a context of meaning as one attempts to place the death within a religious framework. At the very least, a funeral provides structured activities to counter the loss of predictability and order which accompany the death of a child.[10]

Some parents opt for a private funeral, usually for a

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[9]Knapp, p.79.

[10]Rando, pp.266-269.

child who died by suicide, as a criminal or as a result of a lifestyle of which the parents did not approve. These parents, burdened with feelings of shame and guilt, guard their emotions and vulnerability from the public. Private funerals often lead to private grief, however, and it is the bereaved parent of a suicide or criminal who needs community support as much or more so than any other.[11]

The grief reactions a bereaved parent experiences vary in intensity and duration depending upon the circumstances surrounding the child's death: stillbirth, newborn or at a mature age, suddenly or after a long illness, from disease or in an accident, murdered or by his own hand. While each kind of death brings with it its unique mourning issues, contemporary psychologists agree that all bereaved parents experience a similar series of phases in the grieving process. It is not possible to assign an average period of time for which a bereaved parent will stay within a certain phase; in addition, movement is not always progressive. The purpose of understanding grief in phases, then, is to offer insight into what the bereaved parent must endure in order to journey through the "valley of the shadow of death" towards a new and different investment in life.

The phases soon to be presented in this thesis are from

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[11]Schiff, p. 12.

a study conducted by Ronald J. Knapp, author of Beyond Endurance: When A Child Dies.[12] Knapp is a sociologist at Clemson University in South Carolina. His research into and analysis of parental grief was chosen as a base model for this chapter due to his thorough presentation of collected data from the bereaved parents with whom he was working.[13] The findings presented in his work are "based on an assessment and analysis of in-depth interviews with 155 families - mothers and fathers - who have suffered the loss of a child ranging in age from 1 to 28. The interviews were conducted in five midwestern and southern cities during the winter, spring and summer of 1982. The families suffered their losses anywhere from three months to five years prior to the interviews. All variety of losses were included - anticipated after a long illness, unanticipated or sudden, and murder."[14]

SHOCK and DENIAL is a parent's first reaction upon

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[12]The phase groupings used in this chapter are the product of Knapp's research. As each phase is addressed, however, additional sociologist's, social worker's and psychologist's ideas and opinions will be presented. For further study into parental grief reactions, please see Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's On Children and Death, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), and Therese Rando's, ed., Parental Loss of a Child, (Illinois: Research Press, 1986). The phases of grief are similar to those of Knapp; each author's analysis, however, differs slightly.

[13]Unlike other contemporary authors in this field, Knapp records the background to, nature of, and methodology for his research at the beginning of his book. I, in turn, developed a greater trust in his analysis of parental grief due to an understanding of from where he gained his experience and expertise.

[14]Knapp, p. xii.

receiving the news that his child has died. Shock, the inability to feel effectively and respond appropriately, cushions the impact of the terror, pain and anguish which accompany child death. These feelings are deep and wide-ranging; it would be impossible for one human being to experience their full strength all in a single moment. Shock, therefore, protects a parent from horror's total inundation.

Denial, too, is a state of protection. It is structured to protect the psychological system from the trauma which is trying to overtake it.[15] Denial presents a parent with an initial foundation for living; it keeps under his legs a part of the rug which reality continuously tries to pull out.

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff experienced a pervasive numbness during this phase. She acquiesced to other's instructions, suggestions and guidance because she was unable to think or feel for herself. Bereaved parents are overwhelmed with a feeling that the whole world has come to a standstill during that initial period just after their child's death. Unable to perceive any purpose in their actions, they look to others to help them function.[16]

Knapp notes that "these parent-survivors have the most difficult work of their lives ahead of them. To move through their mourning and to regain a sense of wanting to live, they

[15]Knapp, p.131.

[16]Schiff, p. 131.

must express their sorrow with the powerful, often conflicting feelings they are experiencing... Confronting denial on a weekly basis will surely facilitate one's journey through the ravages of a child's death."[17] Gentled reality, rather than protection, aides a parent with this confrontation.[18]

DISORGANIZATION, the second phase, comes about when denial begins to lose its grip. This period, generally of short duration, characterizes parents as pieces of paper blowing in the wind. They are tossed about here and there depending upon which gust of emotions hits them first. They have no sense of direction, no goals and cannot accomplish any tasks.[19] This stage represents the actual beginning of the grieving process, though. As long as denial is operating, a parent does not experience an "emotional" recognition of the loss, and, therefore, no expression of genuine grief is possible.[20]

Parents often regret important decisions, such as what do to with the child's room, clothes and belongings, made during this most turbulent time. It is essential that, if possible, these kinds of considerations with lasting consequences be postponed until the parent can re-establish

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[17]Knapp, p.247.

[18]Jane A. Nichols, "Newborn Death," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986), p. 151.

[19]Knapp, p. 136.

[20]Knapp, p. 133.

his hold on reality.

Agitation, jitteriness and talkativeness accompany DISORGANIZATION. Parents have difficulty sittting still or concentrating on even the most meaningless task.[21] They find that constant activity helps them to block out unpleasant thoughts and better control the downpour of emotions from behind their well-fortified walled defense. Although ceaseless chatter is trying for any listener, talking is essential at this stage. It is not necessary that any sense be made out of what is said, nor is a response required. Parents just need someone to listen to and accept what they say.[22]

When denial's grip is sufficiently loosened to permit those pent-up emotions to escape from behind their boundaries, parents experience torrents of VIOLENT EMOTIONS. Parents' feelings of powerlessness fuel the force of this rage; they are hysterically frustrated at their lack of control - control over the disease, the death, the accident and/or the ensuing emotions.

Anger and blame are indiscriminately thrust at anyone and everyone. Parents often express anger at the child who died, especially if the child's death was a suicide. It is not inappropriate to be angry with the dead and these feelings

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[21]Knapp, p. 137.

[22]Knapp, p. 137.

must be normalized.[23] Anger at the child is less threatening for a parent to feel than the more powerful feelings of love and loss.

Some parents express or act out in anger towards surviving siblings. Since most bereaved parents are preoccupied with thoughts of the dead child for months after his death, they often resent another child's desire to laugh and/or socialize, blaming him for adjusting too quickly or not having grieved enough.[24] Sibling resemblance to the dead child can also cause parental anger - if you look/talk/walk so much like _____, why aren't you _____? Resemblance is a continuous, painful reminder of the parent's loss. In addition, it is common for parents to respond in anger to a surviving child's grief and non-grief related expressions of need. Bereaved parents often feel that they have barely enough energy to keep their own two feet on the ground, and are, thus, incapable of assuming responsibility for anyone else.[25]

Sometimes, previously good and loyal friends distance themselves from bereaved parents - either because they feel impotent as healers or out of an irrational fear that confronting another's pain might make their families more

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[23]Schiff, p. 36.

[24]Rando, p. 179.

[25]Schiff, p.91.

vulnerable to loss. Thus, bereaved parents experience a kind of social ostracism which induces anger towards the community at large and those friends who are noticeably absent in their lives. Bereaved parents also harbor anger towards anyone who feigns to understand their pain or expresses an opinion about what constitutes appropriate mourning and comfort. People's rude and thoughtless comments only serve to enhance their already profound awareness of separation and isolation.

Anger at God is a common, yet not a majority, response. Some parents feel betrayed by God, questioning God's loving-kindness and believing that if God really cared, their child's death could have been prevented.[26] Knapp's study demonstrated that a parent's rejection of God could be of short or permanent duration. Many parents who had, in fact, blamed God and held him responsible for their child's death indicated later that they did not feel shame for this reaction. It was "good" to be able to hold <u>someone</u> responsible, and God represented the least threatening focus.[27] Most parents who turn away from diety at the time of their child's death re-enter into a relationship with God as their anger subsides.

Many parents feel that it is too painful to reject religion and God. Powerful, wild emotions are channeled into a desperate yearning to believe that their child's life and

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[26]Schiff, p. 111.

[27]Knapp, p.204.

death hold meaning; in addition, parents seek a reason to live, and they conceive of religion as bearing a source for that reason.[28] Knapp's data supports the following findings: 70% of bereaved parents turn to religion. Of that 70%, 30% experience a genuine religious revitalization or conversion (not defined), while 40% identify a growth or a rekindling of the belief in some sort of reunification with the child after the parents own death. One father said: "I always thought religion was a myth. But since Mike's death, I have come to think of it as a nice myth, a comforting myth. If it's not true, after I die it won't matter anyway. But right now, it's kind of nice to hang on to."[29]

Parents who are able to stoke up their religious fires find a way of making the loss less "final," and, ultimately, less painful. A belief that their child is with God provides comfort. Generally, the most common "place" where the child is conceived to be existing is defined in religious terms. The place is "heaven" or an "afterlife" of sorts.[30]

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff's experience correlates with Knapp's findings. She asserts that many bereaved parents seem to turn entirely toward an organized religion, or religious belief, as an anchor - something to hold on to and which, in

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[28]Knapp, p.34.

[29]Knapp, pp. 34-5.

[30]Knapp, pp. 82-3.

turn, will hold on to them.[31] Involvement in religion eases a parent's anger and overwhelming sense of futility.

Since there is no such category of "death due to natural causes" in the case of a child, parents search to find and identify a cause. One of the ways in which parents have tried to make sense of their suffering has been by assuming that they deserve what they get, that somehow this misfortune is a punishment for their sins.[32] GUILT, the next phase, is a natural part of the grieving process. Aside from assuring a parent that past or current mistakes do not impact upon children's health, there is virtually nothing anyone can, or should, do to try to remove it. Parents need to work out their guilt feelings on their own.

However, in the case of a sudden death, an autopsy report, delivered in a factual yet sensitive manner, often eases a parent's anxiety about carelessness and neglect, especially in the case of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).[33] An autopsy can also be of tremendous help to parents of stillbirths and newborn deaths. In addition to explaining the physiological cause of death, it can also address their concerns for the success of future pregnancies.[34] With or

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[31]Schiff, p. 109.

[32]Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People (New York: Avon Books, 1981), p.9.

[33]Knapp, p. 166. also: Schiff, p.35.

[34]Rando, p.184, 187.

without an autopsy, though, mothers of stillbirths and newborns who die a short time after birth often feel guilt for their inability to conceive, carry and deliver a healthy baby. They blame themselves for an inadequate perinatal environment.

Even if a parent is free from feeling directly responsible for the child's death, guilt still runs rampant. In a parent's mind, he is guilty of failing in his primary job as a parent: to protect his child from all harm.

Once the period of active grieving has passed, a sickening and bone-chilling sense of loss begins its assault. LOSS AND LONELINESS, the next and longest phase, is a time in which others want life to return to normal, yet for the bereaved parent this is impossible.[35] Bereaved parents feel cut off, isolated, from the rest of the world. No one is capable of understanding their pain. This feeling of being alone and out of touch with others is most intensely felt within the bereaved parent's nucleus family.

It is not uncommon for parents to experience hard times in relating with their living children. In a household devastated by grief, discipline often falls by the wayside; living children feel uncared for or of little concern - essentially, forgotten. Bereaved siblings experience their parents as inapproachable, unable to move beyond grief's

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[35]Knapp, p. 143.

tunnel vision to be concerned with maintaining the family. Many parents do not allow the living children to focus their attention away from momentary sorrow and sense of loss towards gratitude that they are still left with precious gifts which give them pleasure, elation or contentment.[36] This lack of parent/child compatibility, coupled with the anger children receive from parents, often causes surviving siblings to distance themselves from family life. Thus, bereaved parents experience further child loss.

It is also common for spouses to experience alienation from each other. Each carries a tremendous burden of pain and loss. This burden is complicated by the fact that most couples grieve their common loss in very different ways.[37] Thus, a spouse's pain, and how he or she copes with that pain, can prevent either partner from providing the other with meaningful support. It is shocking for the couple to realize that they can not rely each other as a main source of support.

Individual grief reactions are influenced by many variables. One such influence is each parent's unique relationship with the dead child. Due to the uniqueness of the relationship for the parent, each experiences a different loss; thus, one's grief is quite personal. Another influence

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[36]Schiff, p. 125.

[37]Therese Rando, in Parental Loss of a Child, p. 25.

on a spouse's grief reaction is how he or she perceives societal norms concerning mourning. Many men believe that they must maintain a stiff upper lip, holding back the force of their emotions in order to "keep the family together." It is more common for women, on the other hand, to feel that it is appropriate to express emotions and to rely upon others for support.

Regardless of the origin of these differences, individualized grief and mourning behaviors can cause a great many problems for a bereaved couple. One's stoic appearance is often interpreted by the other as "you did not love _____ enough." If one partner is always crying and focusing on the loss, it is natural for the other to counter with a desire to distance himself from his partner, to distance himself from the pain. Another cause for stress in the relationship is that "up" days and "down" days do not always parallel. One parent could be having a good day, feeling a bit lighter, while the other parent may be feeling especially depressed or weighted. It is natural, then, for the "up" parent to resent being pulled "down" by his partner, and the "down" parent to need his mood respected and pain addressed.

Whether or not to discuss the dead child is also a big issue. It is common for one parent to want to talk about the child on a daily basis, while the other would rather not be reminded of the pain.

One of the greatest areas of difficulty for bereaved

parents is the re-insertion of pleasure into their lives. Some parents believe that grief serves as an umbilical cord to keep the dead child ever close and, thus, view pleasure as an act of abandonment.[38] Parents hesitate to socialize by themselves or with others in fear of the flood of pain which this pleasure will surely bring. This tension of pleasure and pain comes to the forefront when parents are at odds concerning the re-establishment of sexual relations. One parent's need may be intimacy while the other shrinks away from its inherent selfishness. Also, some parents are sickened at the thought of intercourse, for it was by this act that their dead child was created - only to die. Parents need guidance to accept that pleasure, especially intimacy, is one of the things to which one can cling in the fight to endure after the loss of a child. Learning to enjoy life again is essential to the healing process.[39]

Heated and recriminating arguments often result from anger, pain, resentment, frustration and unfulfilled needs. Intense and out of control emotions, and their consequent actions, are dangerous; they prevent bereaved parents from sharing and understanding their mutual grief.

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff concludes that at issue in all these potential problem areas is the pain caused by a bereaved

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[38]Schiff, p.126.

[39]Schiff, p.122, 124.

couples loss of illusion about each other.[40] Previous to their child's death, the couple experienced and overcame hardship together. As bereaved parents, however, each stands alone. Following the death of a child, too much is expected of the mate and too little received. "Mothers and fathers lose faith in their ability to survive as a unit. They feel that they can no longer accept the responsibility for someone else. They feel that they need to get their act together, and, perhaps, they can do it better on their own."[41]

Grief attacks a bereaved parent's feelings of security, strength, assertiveness, independence and health - all of which are necessary for keeping any relationship positive and growing.[42] This attack, along with the conception that parents feel more competent coping alone than as a unit, explains the fact that as high as 90% of all bereaved couples are in serious marital difficulty after the death of their child.[43] Following upon the heels of these problems, Knapp presents figures, ranging from 30% to 70%, of the substantial number of bereaved marriages which end in divorce.[44] All of these divorces take place in the phase of LOSS and LONELINESS.

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[40]Schiff, p.5.

[41]Knapp, p.102.

[42]Rando, p. 170.

[43]Schiff, p.57.

[44]Knapp, p.146.

At this juncture, it is important to mention the bereaved single parent. While most of what has and will be written in this chapter applies to their grief, single parents do have many unique issues. The word "alone" screams out at a single parent.[45] He cries out to have another person alongside who really knows what the death of his child means, someone with whom he can share the special memories. Yet, he is alone, trying to cope with the insane madness of grief and unable to share his emotions or remembrance with another. In the middle of the night, when the terror of a nightmare causes him to scream out in agony, a single parent has no one to touch him, hold him, and reassure him that he is not crazy. In the midst of the madness there is just silence.[46]

The desired, sought-after goal of bereavement is RELIEF and RE-ESTABLISHMENT. At this phase, parents feel capable of living their lives within a new definition of fullness. Guilt is gone, solace and companionship are present; parents have chosen to live, again, with hope. Their child is ever present in their thoughts, and they are still sad and feel an emptiness, but these feelings are no longer overwhelming and in control of their lives. What bereaved parents experience during this phase, and for the remainder of their lives, is

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[45]Evelyn Gillis, "A Single Parent Confronting the Loss of an Only Child," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986), p. 316.

[46]Ibid, pp. 316-317.

shadow grief - an awareness of not being whole during life's important moments. Birthdays, deathdays, anniversaries, holidays, an anticipated graduation, when the child might have married - are difficult and troubling times for bereaved parents. These are the times which tend to keep the subdued expressions of grief alive.[47] A parent who has completed his grief-work, however, is ever-capable of planting his feet on the ground and walking forward, one step at a time.

Knapp writes of common psychological responses to the death of a child which can enter into any of the above-detailed grief phases. These responses are patterned in most bereaved parents, yet the extent to which a response is experienced and its consequent impact on the mourner's life is unique to each parent's perception of his loss.

Most parents vow to never forget their child, to always hold on to his hand.[48] In its extreme form, this vow is fulfilled by a parent's deification of the dead child. These parents enshrine their child's room and belongings, left exactly as they were the day he died, and permit others to speak only of the child's good traits. A parent's inability to see the child as he really was and to let go of his

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[47]Knapp, p.147.

[48]Many parents, when asked the question "How many children do you have?" respond with a number which includes the child who died. This often asked social question presents great pain to bereaved parents, regardless of how he chooses to answer.

"living" identity complicates the normal process of grieving. To deify a child is to lose him two times: parents lose not only his life, but also the child's real and unique character.[49]

A very common response of bereaved parents is the wish to die. These parents suffer from a survivor syndrome; they struggle to fathom why they are alive while their child is dead. There appears to be no hope, no way of justifying their lives, no way of continuing on with life, without the deceased child.[50]

Often, parents experience a change of values after the loss of a child. Family issues and concerns become primary over work-related obligations and personal gratification. In addition, bereaved parents have experienced the ultimate depth of powerlessness; they know first-hand that they have little or no control over anyone other than themselves. Thus, they tend to develop a high level of tolerance for behaviors, opinions and choices which are unlike their own. These parents realize an irreplaceable value of an individual's character and traits.

Contemporary psychologists and social workers, including Knapp, Schiff and Rando, offer vast and detailed suggestions

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[49]Schiff, p.104.

[50]Knapp, p.31.

as to how one can best comfort and support a bereaved parent as he rides the emotional roller-coaster of grief and healing. Judy Tattlebaum, in her book The Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery and Growth,[51] presents the results of a survey on what resources contribute to the links of an effective support system. Tattlebaum concludes that one receives 25% of one's needed support from inner resources, 20% from one's spouse and 55% from one's community. In the case of a child's death and of parental grief, a bereaved parent cannot rely upon his spouse for support. Thus, a parent must seek 75% of his support from professionals and the community.

Bereaved parents need active support and help throughout the whole grieving process. Harriet Sarnoff Schiff mentions that it is the responsibility of third parties - clergy or social workers - to teach, guide, and instruct friends as to what are the needs of bereaved parents and how they can act to support and care for these people in the depth of their grief.[52] While the role of instructing others is an important one for clergy, bereaved parents have specific needs they need fulfilled by their priest, minister or rabbi. In addition to impportant ritual guidance, bereaved parents need clergy to grant then permission to grieve, to confirm their legitimate

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[51]Judy Tattlebaum, The Courage to Grieve: Creative Living, Recovery and Growth (New York: Lipincott and Crowell, 1980).

[52]Schiff, pp. 105-6.

right, as parents, to mourn.[53]

The following chapter will explore the impact of a child's death on a parent's spiritual beliefs and needs. The text will also present those questions and concerns for which a bereaved parent seeks spiritual address.

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[53]Sherrell Harter Hutchins, "Stillbirth," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986), p.131.

CHAPTER IV

The previous chapter of this thesis briefly detailed a bereaved parent's grief reactions and responses following the death of a child. Although anger at God was discussed within the phase of Violent Emotions, it is worthwhile to further examine the impact of a child's death upon the parents' spiritual beliefs and identity. A child's death is, by its nature, a spiritual crisis.[1] Just as the very foundation of nature's order is shaken when the old outlive the young, the spirit, humanity's inner core, is cast into an turbulent chaos.

A myriad of issues and questions propel this chaos whose storm ceaselessly penetrates into a bereaved parent's conscious state, forcing him to reconsider previously held religious convictions and beliefs: God's role in the world, notions of good and evil with their - supposed - reward and punishment, hope, and what happens after death. Oftentimes parents are overwhelmed by this whirl of thought and emotion; they feel that life's very foundation is threatened at a time when they most need the comfort and ease of religious practice and belief.

It might take many months, if not years, for a bereaved parent

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[1]Personal interview with Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, Chaplain - Lenox Hill Hospital, 24 October 1990.

to heal the rift between his anger and his faith. Religious practice and clergy, however, can help to calm the chaos. Both are in the position to offer invaluable guidance and shelter from the storm.

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff asserts that the advantage of an espoused religious practice is enormous. She, a Jew, is thankful for the guidance her tradition offered to her when her son, age 10, died of cancer. She did not have to think about funeral preparations or make any decisions regarding the service; Jewish tradition is quite strict on issues such as casket, flowers, time of the service and its content. "Because she was (we were) unable to really concentrate, having rigid religious burial rules made things a great deal simpler."[2]

Immediately following their child's death, bereaved parents do not run after answers or theology; with regard to religious thought and issues, they require only comforting assurance of where their child is and that he or she is "safe." Rather, bereaved parents seek presence and support from their priest, minister or rabbi. In addition, a member of the clergy, usually someone with whom they have a relationship and who represents the religion with which they identify, can guide them as to what is accepted religious practice concerning a child's death and how to incorporate these rituals into their grieving. At this time, clergy

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[2]Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, The Bereaved Parent (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 10.

can be most helpful by making themselves available to parents and addressing each concern as it is raised.

Parents of Murdered Children,[3] a self-help group founded in 1978 and whose headquarters are located in Cincinnati, Ohio, conducted a survey in 1989 of their nation-wide members concerning their experiences with various community institutions following their child's homicide. One section left room for comments concerning clergy - clergy responsiveness, sensitivity and effectiveness. It is most interesting to note these parents' answers (from the handwriting it is possible to discern that most of the respondents were women) and their evaluation of clergy involvement.

The majority of respondents reflected a positive interaction with clergy: 55% said that their priest or minister was very good, helpful and/or supportive. They were most appreciative of those clerics who immediately came to be with the family, and those who were good listeners - quiet yet present - who didn't intrude or preach. Many relied upon their clergy for guidance concerning funeral preparations and practices; most received the information and support they needed.

Not a single respondent mentioned a need for questions to be

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[3]Parents of Murdered Children was founded by Charlotte and Bob Hullinger in 1978, three months after the brutal murder of their daughter, Lisa, by her former boyfriend. This self-help group provides continuous emotional support to parents by phone, by mail, in person on a one-to-one basis, in group meetings and through literature. The purpose of this group is to serve as a link connecting any parent with others in the community who have survived their child's homicide.

answered, nor for God's role to be addressed or justified. In fact, many wrote that they found a cleric's platitudes to be insulting and disruptive. Unfortunately, 23% of the parents had experiences ranging from negative to awful. They either received little or no support from their clergy, or when a cleric was present, they were subjected to trivial statements such as "it was God's will," or "you must try to forgive the murderer - he is, after all, human," or "you should be happy... _____ is with God."

Some parents wrote that they could sense their clergyperson's unease with them and with their family members. Those were the clergy who were not as involved as the parents might have wished and the ones who did not continue to support the family beyond a few weeks after death. A few urged members of the clergy to receive training in this field. They felt that this training would help them to become more attuned to grief in general and, specifically, to the uniqueness of parental grief.

Less than 10% went to their clergyperson for ongoing counseling in the months following their child's murder. This percentage does not reflect the number of couples who might have met briefly with a member of the clergy, or who received informal counseling or support during chance encounters at church.

Only seven respondents left the clergy part blank. It is not possible to determine if these parents received pastoral support; perhaps they intentionally turned away from any and all reminders of God.

A Jewish bereaved parent's spiritual needs are not unlike those of a Christian or Muslim. Every bereaved parent needs a spiritual presence to listen to their soul's cry and to help them heal their brokenness. The difference is manifest in the source which addresses these cries, tears and questions. Jewish bereaved parents need a response which comes from within the Jewish tradition and the Jewish community; they need to interpret the loss from a Jewish perspective.[4] "Men and women with a sensitivity to religion have the right to respect a religious response to their child's death. The rabbi must be the respondent of faith."[5]

Chapter II outlines, in detail, the history of Jewish thought and law concerning infant and child death. While it is very important for every rabbi to know this history and the rationale behind such practices, it is equally important to listen to each bereaved parent express what ritual is important to him, and what will help to facilitate the grieving process.[6] A Jewish bereaved parent needs the rabbi to meaningfully integrate Jewish practice into his desire to affirm and celebrate his child's life.

In contemporary Jewish practice and religious life, many parents fear that if their child should die at a non-viable age, a rabbi would not officiate at a funeral or be available for *shiva* services. Rabbi Kestenbaum considers the option of formal burial

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[4]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

[5]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

[6]Telephone interview with Rabbi Robert Marx, spiritual leader of Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois, 29 October 1990.

and mourning practice for every bereaved parent an act of *gemilut chasadim*.[7] Rabbi Robert Loewy, himself a bereaved parent, agrees. He affirms that by granting parents whose child dies at a non-viable age the opportunity to mourn within traditional Jewish practice, "we help the family and community acknowledge the life and death of their baby."[8] In this manner, rabbinic service to the parent takes precedence over historic practice.

Rabbi Tzvi Blanchard, Director of B'nai Brith Hillel at New York University and an orthodox rabbi who holds doctorates in philosophy and clinical psychology, concurs that some concrete response to the death of a non-viable child must come from within Jewish tradition. He asserts that the fact that there is no requirement for *shiva* and the other mourning practices does not exclude appropriate mourning rituals on a voluntary basis. He asks, "If Jewish tradition values the infant as a person,[9] why should there not be room for developing a more complete ritual expression of the real human feelings of having lost a beloved child?" To do so would express faith in the power of *halacha* to meet human needs.[10]

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[7]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

[8]Robert Loewy, "A Rabbi Confronts Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death," The Journal of Reform Judaism, Spring 1988, p. 4.

[9]The non-viable child who dies has a legitimate place in the fully restored community of the Resurrection of the Dead.

[10]Rabbi Tzvi Blanchard, "A Response to: A Community of One," Jewish Review, 3, No. 1, (5750), p.6.

The important historic principle of *kavod hamet*, honor of the dead, must also be reassessed when the one who has died is a child.[11] Our sages taught that when a person has died, it is disrespectful to touch his body for any reason other ritual cleansing and dressing. The previous chapter pointed out, however, that a parent's holding, rocking and stroking his child is important for his need to say goodbye after death in the manner by which he communicated with him in life. In essence, a parent who caresses and strokes his deceased child displays honor for that child and the relationship that they shared.

Parents who follow Jewish formal mourning practice benefit from its wisdom; prescribed ritual substantially eases the initial phase of SHOCK and DENIAL. It is Jewish historic tradition to confront death's reality in a straight-forward manner. An immediate funeral and burial, followed by observance of the *shiva* period, navigates the parents through the deep haze of grief by encouraging their energy and thoughts to focus solely on their loss. This focus enables a parent to shed any remnants of denial within the embrace of family and friends. In addition, the funeral and shiva rituals provide the bereaved parent with an immediate community; one - three daily *minyans* necessitate the involvement of many people.

Harriet Sarnoff Schiff writes that during *shiva*, her house "was nearly always filled, and, without question, we found this most helpful and therapeutic. We did not suffer the sudden silence

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[11]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

and emptiness people frequently experience after the funeral. When we needed to talk, we had many sympathetic ears."[12]

The *sheloshim* period can also be helpful to a parent's shaky psychological state. While in the DISORGANIZATION phase, a bereaved parent is unable to make decisions or plan an activity. An obligation to recite *kaddish* every day gives the bereaved parent something to do, something to rely upon as constant, concerning which there is little needed thought or effort. This religious ritual of disciplined routine helps the parent to face a dreadful truth daily and, ultimately, to accept his loss.[13]

In addition, the ritual of reciting a daily *kaddish* for a period of time directs the parent to enter into the midst of a religious community which can be an important source of support. This religious community is, then, in a prime position to help ease the pain of LOSS and LONELINESS.

It is important to mention at this point in the chapter that not every rabbi believes that the structure of the Jewish mourning process is beneficial to bereaved parents. Rabbi Robert Marx of Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois, himself a bereaved parent as well as a chapter leader of The Compassionate Friends,[14] does not

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[12]Schiff, p.19.

[13]Schiff, p. 115.

[14]The Compassionate Friends, the first self-help group to be established in the United States (1972) offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purpose of the group is to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of their child, and to foster the physical and emotional health of bereaved parents and siblings.

encourage parents to observe the *shiva* or *sheloshim* periods. It is his opinion, based upon his involvement with the membership of his chapter which is 70% Jewish, that designated time-limits for grief (7 days, 30 days) does great damage to bereaved parents; they feel guilty and inadequate when the intensity of their grief does not diminish on schedule.[15] In addition, his experience teaches that it is too painful for people to visit parents who have lost a child and, thus, they do not participate in *shiva* more than once.[16]

In addition to guidance with regard to the funeral, burial, shiva and general mourning practice, bereaved parents need an active and sensitive spiritual presence. Many faithful parents, after a child's death, and especially in the case of a child who died suddenly, feel abandoned by God or, at a minimum, alienated from God's care and protection. Their feelings of aloneness and loneliness are heightened by the absence of this invisible support, yet their anger compels them to reject any attempt at

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[15]Marx, telephone interview.

[16]Anne Marie Putter, a bereaved parent and chairperson of an international conference on parental bereavement, addresses the question of why Jewish adults do not visit with bereaved parents. She advances two reasons for the community's absence after this kind of tragedy: first, in order to protect their children from life's horrors, parents attempt to deny that a child's death ever occurred; second, many Jewish adults are either Holocaust survivors or the children of Holocaust survivors and, thus, actively distance themselves from witnessing more suffering. Putter adds that it is difficult enough to be a post Holocaust Jew with questions of theodicy and justice ever-present in one's mind. Most Jews can not deal with the added pain of child death in their own time. (Telephone interview with Anne Marie Putter, 4 November 1990.)

reunification.[17] They need time away from God. A rabbi must both respect this need for distance, and, at the same time, represent God as he works with parents to re-establish trust and hope.

Acting as God's representative is often difficult for clergy. In an effort to distinguish themselves from Christians whose faith is in Jesus, the man in whom God's word was made flesh, rabbis tend to shy away from conceiving of themselves as either representing or reflecting God's presence. Israel Kestenbaum writes, in a article printed in Tradition magazine, that a rabbi's role surely involves a call to reflect God's teaching and God's ways to the community.[18] He stresses that "*created in the image of God*"[19] does not charge a rabbi to bring about God-like changes in the circumstances of life; rather, the ethic of *meriting God's image* requires a rabbi to imitate the model God set in Psalm 91: "When he calls upon me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble."[20] Rabbis reflect the divine image when they act as a sensitive listener and empath.[21]

Most certainly, the most often asked parental question is "Why?" Parents who ask this question yearn desperately to hear of

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[17]Schiff, p. 119.

[18]Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, "The Rabbi as Caregiver: A Traditional Model," Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought, 23, No.3, Spring 1988, p.35.

[19]Genesis 1:27

[20]Psalm 91:15

[21]Kestenbaum, p.36.

some Jewish teaching which will make sense of his horror. Rabbi Kushner, in Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People, reminds the reader about what happened when Job asked his friends this question. They believed, and wanted to continue believing, in God's goodness and absolute power. But, if Job was innocent, then God must be guilty - guilty of making an innocent man suffer. With that at stake, they found it easier to stop believing in Job's goodness, than to stop believing in God's perfection.[22] Blaming the victim is a way of assuring ourselves that the world is not as bad a place as it may seem.[23]

Kushner concludes that both Job and God are good; God, however, is not all-powerful. Tragedy is random, without meaningful cause.[24] Bad things do happen to good people in this world, but it is not God who wills it. Bereaved parents need people around them who will neither blame them nor God. Kushner writes, "Job needed sympathy more than he needed advice, even good and correct advice. There would be a time and a place for that later. He needed compassion, the sense that others felt his pain with him, more than he needed learned theological explanations about God's ways. He needed physical comforting, people sharing their strength with him, holding him.... He needed friends who would permit him to be

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[22]Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People (New York: Avon Press, 1981), p.38.

[23]Ibid, p. 39.

[24]Ibid, p. 41.

angry, to cry and to scream."[25]

Kushner also teaches that "it is the result, not the cause, of pain that makes some experiences of pain meaningful and others empty and destructive."[26] A bereaved parent needs help in finding some meaning in the terror which has befallen him. Jewish tradition and literature provide a rich resource for those who search for meaning in tragedy. Rabbi Kushner learned from Job. Rabbi Kestenbaum, at a Shabbaton for bereaved parents, told stories about parental loss of a child in the Bible and then asked parents to role-play the characters' grief. What did Mrs. Aaron feel? How did Adam respond? His point is to stress to parents that the greatest people of our faith also mourned for a dead child and survived.[27]

Similarly, the rabbi who officiated at Harriet Sarnoff Schiff's son's funeral told the story of King David's son's death and the king's response. He related how King David "did everything possible for his son while the boy was alive, but when the son died, David once again took up the business of living."[28] These rabbis appropriately placed the bereaved parent's experience within a Jewish context and frame of reference; healing, too, is a part of our tradition.

Sometimes, after the initial shock and intensity of grief has

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[25]Kushner, p.89.

[26]Kushner, p.64.

[27]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

[28]Schiff, p.10.

diminished, parents will approach their rabbi for help in understanding "the" Jewish theology concerning God's role in human affairs. What these parents are looking for is an opportunity to validate their pain within Jewish tradition and to learn more about Jewish thought on the subject of pain and suffering.[29] A rabbi is most helpful at this time when he listens to the questions that are asked and, then, guides the parents - through study and counsel - to their own answers and conclusions.

A final area of parental spiritual concern is the need to create "life rituals" which reinforce the child's spiritual presence.[30] Rabbi Kestenbaum asserts that Judaism has a vast number of death rituals, yet the tradition has little to offer -aside from the *yharzeit* - to those who want to keep their child's memory alive on a regular basis. Kestenbaum recommends that an extra candle be lit on Shabbat as a reminder of the light and warmth that child brought to the family. In addition, he stresses the importance of talking about the child during holidays and special anniversaries when he would be most missed, as well as marking the child's birthdate - Hebrew or Roman - with an activity which reflects a unique aspect of the dead child's character.

As a complement to the above description of what clergy and bereavement professionals consider to be the impact of a child's

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[29]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

[30]Kestenbaum, personal interview.

death on his parents' spiritual beliefs and identity, Chapter V presents the results of research conducted within the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Rabinical Assembly whose purpose it was to document the exact nature of this impact on a selected population.

CHAPTER V

Assessment of the impact of a child's death on a Jewish parent's spiritual concerns, life and beliefs is imperative for rabbis who seek to be ritually and spiritually present during this time of crisis. Yet, there is a difficulty. This kind of evaluation and critique has never before been systematically explored and, thus, little or no data exists to provide insight into the spiritual world of Jewish bereaved parents.

As a small, yet hopefully accurate and insightful, attempt, this chapter will present the results of a survey conducted within the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) whose purpose it was to determine the impact of a child's death on a Jewish parent's spiritual identity. The pool for this study's data is comprised of rabbinic bereaved parents and their spouses.

A population of rabbinic families was selected for two quite practical reasons: first, it was a safe assumption that these parents had considered issues of spirituality prior to their child's death and, thus, change, growth or loss would be easier to identify; and, second, in light of the scope of

a rabbinic thesis which does not provide the time nor the financial resources to scout out and interview bereaved parents throughout the country, rabbinic families present a limited population with an already built-in access for communication through each association's newsletter. It is understood, however, that sending surveys to and meeting with exclusively rabbinic families provides a somewhat narrow and unique perspective on the spiritual impact of parental bereavement.

The study was advertised in the February and March, 1990, newsletters of both the Reform and Conservative rabbinical associations: seventeen families responded to the printed query, thirteen of which either completed a questionnaire, spoke on tape or made themselves available for a telephone and/or personal interview.[1] While these thirteen responses represent only a small fraction of the number of bereaved rabbinic parents, the quality and substance of their reflections support an important research opportunity.

The following analysis of the collected data represents parental bereavement in response to various origins of child death - stillbirth, a car accident, long-term illness and degeneration, sudden death related to infection and disease,

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[1]Seven respondents are members of the CCAR, six of the RA

and medical negligence.[2] Ten of the children were male, three female; ages range from one day to sixteen years.

Following a brief set of questions concerning the circumstances surrounding the child's death, each parent was asked if the child had been sick before his death, and, if so, had the parent received any kind of pastoral support. Six of the thirteen children had been sick prior to death; four of whose parents considered their experience to include pastoral care during the illness. This support was provided by nearby rabbis and colleagues; parents stated, however, that it was common for colleagues to function more as friends than as clergy.

Prayer, affirming a strong faith in God and seeking strength - not intervention - from God, was the predominant spiritual focus of parents whose child had been ill. These parents' prayers were both spontaneous and fixed, taking place in the synagogue, at home, in the hospital and in the car.

Seven parents received pastoral support at the time of their child's death. This support, like that during illness, was provided by rabbis and colleagues; death brought with it, however, a more wide-spread network of rabbis and colleagues from areas of distance around the country, as well as

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[2]This study does not confront the myriad of issues surrounding infertility, miscarriage and perinatal death. The impact of these kinds of death on parents, and their subsequent grief and concerns, are different enough to warrant a separate and distinct study.

meaningful spiritual support from key members in their congregations. There was also a strong feeling, as mentioned above, of colleagues whose presence reflected companionship rather than spiritual support. One family also reported a particularly helpful and sensitive relationship with a hospital chaplain.

There is a category of respondents who noted pastoral presence, yet not as a support or comfort. One woman responded that she did not experience her rabbis' presence as either caring or sympathetic. She received from him hurtful platitudes and comments such as: "You're young. You'll have another," and "It's time to stop crying." She boldly said that, for her, no presence would have been better than a bad presence, for his insensitivity caused her to feel discomfort and a lack of acceptance at *shul*. Another parent related that his rabbi's uneasiness with and inability to share his pain prevented him from examining those spiritual questions which deluged his mind.

Due to the fact that the scenario of a child's death took place within a rabbinic family, it was quite common for parents to report the presence of multiple rabbis and colleagues. Thus, some parents experienced a mixture of rabbinic responses - both positive and negative. One rabbi, who lost a child during his seminary years and had received wonderful support from a local rabbi and members of the faculty, mentioned that his classmates and their spouses were

unable to deal with his grief. One "friend," in fact, blamed his wife for the child's death. He attributed their inability to confront his loss to their own feelings of vulnerability as new and young parents.

Of the five who noted that they did not receive any pastoral support at the time of their child's death, two added that this kind of support would have been tremendously helpful. One was unable to rely upon the social support he received due to the spiritual brokenness and lack of spiritual solidarity he was experiencing. He yearned for someone with whom he could share the private hell raging within him.

Parents were asked to comment upon the manner in which their children were buried. Was it within a framework of Jewish ritual? Was *halakcha*, Jewish law, a factor in the decisions which were made? Was formal mourning observed? From their answers, an inherent link between chosen ritual practice and spiritual ease is illustrated.

One rabbi expressed gratitude for a tradition which helped him to confront death's reality. He was very much tormented by the vision he had of his son's body lying still in the ground, prey for all of nature's elements. As a parent, he wanted one of those cushioned and felt-lined caskets. He will be in the ground - what if he gets wet? The Jewish custom of burial in a plain pine box forced him to acknowledge that neither a casket nor grave liner mattered; his son was dead.

Eight of the thirteen children died at an age when formal mourning is, without question, considered an obligation. Most of these parents did follow Jewish mourning tradition; one father was mindful that the rituals were geared to losses other than that of a child and, thus, did not follow through with a complete ritual. Although shiva was not always observed for seven days, many parents did find the home *minyan* a sensitive and supportive environment in which to grieve. One parent, however, resented the "party" atmosphere which inevitably resulted when a large group of people gathered for the service.

It is interesting to note that many parents continued to recite the *Kaddish* prayer for their child beyond the thirty day prescribed period. One year was the longest length of time. In addition to reciting *Kaddish*, one father wore a black tie for twelve months.[3]

Five children died at an age when viability could not be determined for certain. One child whose age was only 10 hours, the son of a member of the CCAR, was buried within the context of a funeral, and his parents observed the *shiva* and *sheloshim* periods. These parents were grateful that the officiating rabbi chose to heed their needs and concerns, rather than to follow that which is stated in Jewish law. In addition, after the child's burial, the rabbi went over to the hospital where

[3]He commented, though, that when his father died a few years later, he did not wear a black tie for the year period.

the mother was still recovering and performed a memorial service, there, for her.

Another child of a CCAR member died during birth. She, too, was formally mourned.

The other three children were offsprings of members of the RA; their parents' mourning patterns were similar, yet reflection upon this practice differed widely. None of the parents participated in a funeral, nor did they observe formal mourning. One child was a stillbirth; he was immediately taken away and buried. Today, the mother ardently supports the recognition and validation of a parent's need to mourn within Jewish practice and ritual. Another child, a boy, died at the age of seven days. His father was away - a chaplain in the service (WWII). His grandfather, also a rabbi, arranged for the foreskin to be removed and buried the child in an unmarked grave. Although the mother accepts this practice as part of the law to which she is committed, she is still angry, forty-five years later, that she does not know where her son is buried. In addition, she would have preferred that the baby had remained untouched after death. The third child died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) when she was three and a half weeks old. Her parents found comfort within the *halakchic* guidelines; they were grateful that the law told them exactly what to do (in this case, what not to do) at a time when they were absolutely incapable of making decisions. They do not

have any regrets concerning their practice.[4]

In recognition that a child's death is unique from that of an adult, one of the survey questions asked parents if they had adapted or created meaningful ritual - either surrounding funeral and burial rites or during the mourning period - to celebrate their child's life. One mother succinctly responded that "No, it was not a time of creativity at all. You must understand that our shock was total and we were barely functional." Agreement was universal. When a child dies, creativity ceases - for the time being - to be an avenue of expression.[5]

A substantial number of survey questions were designed to identify spiritual issues and questions which result from Jewish parental loss of a child. What is the impact of a child's death on a Jewish parent's spiritual identity? The respondents noted a variety of difficult challenges. Many of the issues they detailed are not, on an obvious level, spiritual; yet the parents' focus on healing their broken selves inextricably links wholeness with the spirit.

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[4]It is interesting to note that this couple chose to name their next child after the same people their daughter, now dead, had been named.

[5]Many parents, however, did eventually create individual or family rituals through which their child's memory will remain alive. Lighting an extra Shabbat candle, planting a tree nearby and watching it grow, and special birthday celebrations are just a few examples.

Several mothers and fathers needed assurance of their worth as parents and as human beings. They sought moral support - nurture of their egos as well as their selves. Within their developing new identities, parents also experienced a need to re-evaluate their priorities and to redefine their commitments to family and to life. Daily existence was a struggle; belief that life would, one day, again hold meaning seemed remote and elusive.

Identifying, working through and letting go of guilt was a pivotal issue for many parents. One rabbi, self-described as committed to traditional practice, was tormented by the result of a car accident on Shabbat in which he was driving and his daughter was killed. In addition to the burden of potential responsibility for the accident, this father carries tremendous guilt for having dared to drive on Shabbat. Another set of parents struggled with the decision they had made to give birth at home instead of in a hospital setting; their daughter died due to the midwife's poor judgement during delivery. Many parents still question if they did everything medically and emotionally possible for their children while they were still alive.

One woman who held her child for just a couple of hours mentioned an overwhelming need for others to affirm his life and her loss as real. The parents of a stillborn child responded with a similar need to validate the vacuum created by a potential life never given the chance to actualize.

Many parents experienced a pull toward active participation in Jewish prayer, ritual and community. Their ambivalence towards God - the cycle of anger, yet wanting to draw near - steered them to forge ahead within the realm of Jewish practice. Several mothers and fathers found great comfort and deeper significance in prayers and psalms; one rabbi took to carrying around a prayer book with him at all times. Another often turned to Job's wisdom for solace. In addition, the daily ritual of *Kaddish* offered parents a meaningful involvement in and support from the Jewish community.

A few parents, mostly the ordained spouse, felt constricted in their reliance upon public ritual and worship as a medium for working through their grief. Very much in the public eye and under scrutiny, they experienced a need to maintain a fine balance between emotional expression and professional control. One rabbi spoke of never truly experiencing the power of the *Yizkor* service because he can not bring himself to mourn on the *bima*.

Some parents expressed anger at God and, for a short while, distanced themselves from theological thought.[6] Despite this brief hiatus, however, not one parent ultimately rejected God. In fact, most parents expressed a need - within time -

[6]Especially profound was the anger of two Holocaust survivors. Their pain and grief were compounded by the atrocity and loss they witnessed in the concentration camps.

to keep open a dialogue with God. One rabbi asserted that while he fervently maintains a belief in God, he still keeps God in parentheses; he is not quite sure he understands this God with whom he desires a relationship and to whom he directs his prayer. A father's comment accurately describes what most parents felt and continue to feel: a pattern of rolling in and rolling out of strong faith.

Many rabbis sought to publicly articulate a view on God's role in their suffering. They addressed their loss and theological concepts in sermons, bulletin articles and/or journal publications. After stating his belief that God is good, loving and just, one rabbi preached on what he rejects:

> *I reject blaming God, for this is the same God who has bestowed so many blessings upon me throughout life. I reject the thought that God is testing me. That kind of activity was stopped when Abraham bound Isaac. I reject the belief that, perhaps God is punishing me, for that idea was negated with Job. I reject the suggestion that God wanted our little boy, for I cannot believe that God operates in that way - that God wanted ____ more than we did. I reject the literal interpretation of our High Holy Day liturgy, when we read that God determines who shall live and who shall die. The forces that God put into motion include the fact that all who live must one day die, but I do not believe that God has a list and a time selected for each of us.*[7]

This same rabbi went on to affirm a God who is and

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[7]Rabbi Robert H. Loewy, "Lessons From Life and Death: Erev Rosh HaShanah," (Congregation Gates of Prayer: Metairie, Louisiana), October 3, 1986.

celebrates life; he attributed his family's strength to a deep-seeded belief in God and in life's healing powers. During this sermon he announced that he and his wife were expecting another child.

Another sermon, written and sent by a respondent, permits a glimpse into one parent's developing theology as his son's illness progressed to death:

Last year I said to you on Yom Kippur when _____ was doing great: "while God did not bring my son's disease, godliness was present nonetheless. Godliness was present in the doctors and nurses who took the risks to bring _____ back to health. Godliness was present in the researchers who pioneered new procedures that were used on him. Godliness was present in all of you who gave so much love and support. Godliness is found among people when we improve the quality of life for us all." I still believe that, but now I see that it is only half the picture. Life doesn't always improve. Godliness is present in the darkness, too. Godliness is found among those who sit in the darkness, or those who work in it day after day and don't turn away. It is found among those who respond to the darkness as meaningfully as they respond to the light. No theology is complete when God is absent from the suffering of life.[8]

Parents overwhelmingly acknowledged that this spiritual crisis challenged, strengthened and deepened their previous faith. Perhaps it is a reflection of this strong faith - in God's goodness and justice - that not a single parent

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[8]Rabbi Marc Sack, "Yom Kippur Sermon," (Congregation Agudas Achim: Austin, Texas) 5750.

mentioned concern about "where" and/or "with whom" his child exists after death. In truth, thoughts concerning afterlife, reward and punishment, *or olam haba* were not noted on one survey or in one conversation. It is difficult to say whether this lack of concern reflects Jewish parents in general or, in particular, this specific population of rabbinic parents.

How did these parents address the spiritual issues and concerns cited above? With whom did they share their questions, search and journey out of "the Valley of the Shadow of Death?"

Friends and relatives received the highest accolades for support and guidance during death's immediate crisis. They were present and helpful - knowing when to carry on with life and when to cry in pain and anguish.

However, with regard to presence throughout grief's swells and trenches, many bereaved parents were unable to count on friends and family as a constant source of support. They relied upon social workers, therapists and support groups as a forum for expressing their ever-present pain and managing daily crises. Some parents even noted that it was within their therapy relationships that they worked through their spiritual questions.

Many parents read books about God, the meaning of life, and on death and grieving to identify and normalize their feelings. Those parents whose child's death was recent enough

to benefit from the plethora of literature on death and mourning sensed through this literature that they were not alone in their pain. Some of the older couples expressed regret that this kind of pop-literature was not available at the time of their child's death; they noted that these works, along with the now popular bereavement support groups, would have been a tremendous help.

Many parents responded that they came to rely upon their own, inner resources to both live a one-day-at-a-time strategy and to wrestle with the less tangible matters of spiritual concern. In addition, several parents turned towards serving others as a means for taking care of themselves. One parent wrote: "I did not reach out for others to meet my spiritual needs. Instead, I turned to my own resources and utilized my opportunities to help others as a therapeutic method for myself."

The survey revealed four parents who consciously redirected their spiritual concerns away from themselves and towards an investment of time and effort into helping others in crisis. One rabbi established and leads a chapter of the Compassionate Friends, the national self-help support group for bereaved parents, in his synagogue. Another became a hospital chaplain; his wife, a social worker, is involved with Jewish Family and Child Services of her area where she developed and monitors a network for Jewish parents who have lost a child. A fourth parent reached out to the families of

the Challenger victims; the accident occurred a short time after his son's death.

A majority of parents responded that their child's death, at first, produced great stress within the marriage, but that the long-term effect was a solid strengthening. Many mentioned that they were even able to rely upon each other for significant support; they practiced a fine balance of alternating turns at being the support and the concern. Seven couples went on to conceive and deliver at least one more healthy child. One family adopted a son after a second stillbirth.

Out of the thirteen relationships presented by this study, two couples are no longer married: one marriage dissolved before the child's death due, in part, to the strain of the child's illness; a second marriage ended in divorce after the child's death. In this case, the father explained that the mother was not capable of forgiving him for driving the car in which his daughter was killed.

Most parents did not comment at length concerning the impact their child's death had on their relationships with the living children. One son, the brother of the girl who died in the accident, reminded his father after a visit with a Holocaust survivor that they, too, are survivors.[9] His father

[9]The boy was also in the car at the time of the accident.

considers this a significant bond, as of yet unexplored, between him and his son. Another parent mentioned that she has never told her adopted son about her two unsuccessful pregnancies.

As a final question, parents were asked to specify those issues which, in their opinion, were unique to Jewish bereaved parents. Many parents wrote that the cycle of Jewish holidays was very difficult. Two fathers explained that liberal Judaism's emphasis on children and family within most holiday celebrations reminds him, at each new season, of his painful loss.

Yizkor's four-time presence throughout the Jewish year is both a comfort and a cause of continued pain. Some parents like to have that special, contained period of time set aside during which they consciously recall their child. This kind of setting is viewed as a safe opportunity for remembrance; someone else controls its beginning and its end. Others, however, view *Yizkor* as a real struggle. They commented that just when they seem to be functioning quite well, along comes another memorial service. One parent, a strong opponent of setting time limits on and specific days aside for mourning, stated that *Yizkor* is not helpful for him because it is a clear example of how the Jewish mourning tradition was not created with parental bereavement in mind; most of the service reflects upon death's presence at the end of a full and long

life.[10]

One father learned from the *text of the Yizkor* service that memory can act as a powerful force commanding the mourner to progress from wallowing in grief to directed, positive action. In each of the traditional *Yizkor* paragraphs the following sentence is found: "I hereby pledge *tzedaka* for the sake of the memory of his soul." Acts of *tzedaka* help the father in two ways. Tangible actions and gifts which benefit others affirm that the child's life continues to hold meaning. In addition, giving tzedaka reminds him that life goes on and, despite his pain, he must support the welfare of the living.

Practically every parent wrote that the High Holy Days are part of a very difficult season. As a natural time for every Jew to consider existence and mortality, a bereaved parent dwells on the fleeting and scarcely predictable qualities of life and health.

The above-cited data, along with its simultaneous analysis, illustrates the significant impact a child's death has upon the parent's spiritual life and identity. The parents who participated in this study identified this impact's impression upon virtually every aspect of their being:

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[10]In addition, it is a Jewish custom not to attend the *Yiskor* service if both of one's parents are still alive. For some bereaved parents, *Yiskor* is, thus, another painful reminder child death upsets the natural order of life.

parental identity, self-worth and esteem, conscience, relationship with one's spouse, prayer and dialogue with God, commitment to life, and perspective on Jewish tradition.

It is worthwhile to examine a few of the highlights discovered within the study. These conclusions present a insightful foundation for providing meaningful spiritual care to the modern Jewish bereaved parent.

Noted differences in burial practice amongst the thirteen respondents teaches that, in the case of child death, each parent or couple has his or their own view of what is appropriate, meaningful and helpful within the Jewish mourning tradition. Modern Jewish life does not permit one, uniform, ritual practice. It can not and will not meet the needs of every parent's unique commitment and ideology.

On the whole, however, for these parents, Judaism was a true and worthy guide. Each parent was able to rely upon the various practices and beliefs which comprise his religion in order to choose that which was appropriate for him in his unique situation. Essentially, these parents did not find Judaism lacking.

Most of the parents in this study now enjoy a greater fulfillment in religious life. Although they might experience shadow grief at certain times throughout the Jewish calendar year, they commit themselves to life, Jewish living and the future. This commitment supports what was presented in Chapter III of this work - that it is common for bereaved parents to

intentionally seek out activity, thoughts and beliefs which infuse life with meaning.

Purposeful participation and involvement in public religious activities also played a significant role in many parents' spiritual healing. Whether it was a parent's counseling another in pain, praying in a daily *minyan*, or regularly attending Shabbat and holiday services, parents benefitted from being involved with other people in a spiritual environment. In addition, forging spiritual bonds with others - especially other bereaved parents - helped to bring a much needed element of wholeness to their lives.

Equally meaningful and important are the parents' deeper and more challenging relationships with God. For the parents whose nature it is to wrestle with questions of theology and theodicy, their child's death renewed and rededicated them to this ongoing dialogue. The depth of these parents' faith and beliefs, as well as their continued desire for a relationship with God, depict a commitment to Judaism and Jewish life which can withstand trial and pain. Anger, doubt, love and affirmation characterize each parent's dance with God. Prayer is the music.

What is both interesting and disturbing, however, is that these parents, who defined their child's death as an event which significantly impacted upon their spiritual foundation, did not receive or seek out spiritual support much beyond death's initial crisis. In fact, three parents intentionally

went to a therapist to address certain spiritual concerns. While there were many rabbis who visited and offered prayers, support and love, the additional and important element of rabbinic, pastoral or theological presence was lacking. It is this aspect of spiritual care which renders unique what the rabbi has to offer.

Although the population of this study, rabbinic parents and their spouses, addressed their spiritual concerns with a predominantly successful outcome in which it is possible to witness varying degrees of spiritual growth, it can not be assumed that the average Jewish bereaved parent possesses the resources to singlehandedly confront and reconcile these issues. A Jewish bereaved parent needs spiritual guidance.

Does a prevailing lack of pastoral and spiritual care of bereaved parents denote a rabbinic population which is more comfortable with good psychological practice than with confronting the spiritual and theological concerns of profound parental grief? Or, does it reflect a misunderstanding concerning for what a bereaved parent turns to the rabbi? The answer lies somewhere in the middle.

The following chapter will provide a guide for the modern rabbi who seeks to offer pastoral care, spiritual care, to bereaved parents. The text will present discussion on those issues which the rabbi must confront in order to be prepared for meeting those spiritual challenges which are unique to parental grief: the tension between conserving tradition and

the modern parent's response to tradition, ritual innovation, the rabbinic counselor, and a Jewish concept of wholeness. In addition, the chapter will detail the unique gifts a rabbi can offer a bereaved parent and his family.

CHAPTER VI

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the modern liberal rabbinate is the task of establishing a comfortable niche within the balance of traditional religious law and contemporary thought and practice. This challenge involves a juggling of two important rabbinic roles - the rabbi as conserver and the rabbi as innovator. What is it within our tradition's legacy which continues to meaningfully instruct the course of our lives, and concerning which aspects of this tradition might the people we serve benefit from development and change?

Conservation and innovation, this task and its challenge, seem most daunting when a rabbi confronts the horror of child death. When a child dies, the modern rabbi can not help but become caught up in the tension between tradition and modern life. As an inheritor of a precious legacy, the rabbi seeks to preserve that which defines and contributes to Judaism's uniqueness. Yet anthropology, sociology, and psychology comprise a strong and valid attraction as well. These sciences present an understanding of the modern person which rabbinic teaching does not, and can not, reflect. The contemporary Jewish bereaved parent exists and grieves within both the

religious and secular worlds. Thus, the rabbi must extract guidance from both realms in order to meaningfully serve the whole person.

Our sages displayed sensitivity to the varying needs of their followers as they fashioned law concerning a parent's obligation to mourn. Elaborate burial rites and formal mourning were quite costly and, thus, presented a financial burden to the average mourner. So as not to impoverish parents for whom it was common to bury many children, the rabbis decreed that a parent is only obligated to mourn a viable child; in addition, the child need not be buried in a casket until the age of three. Yet, due to modern medical technology and conscientious perinatal care, infant and child mortality rates are quite low. It is not common for today's parents to bury a child; if a child does die, however, most funeral homes do not charge a fee for a child's service and burial. Thus, financial consideration is no longer relevant and the rabbinic prohibitions against formal mourning require re-evaluation.

Rabbi Meir, in Kohelet Rabbah, once said: "Shall a man lose something which is precious to him and not weep?"[1] Grief is the natural response to significant loss. As there is nothing more precious than a child, parental bereavement necessitates mourning. In most situations, parental mourning is supported within rabbinic law; a parent mourns even for

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[1]Kohelet Rabbah 5:10, 1

the full-term child born alive who dies before the age of thirty days. Yet, for the stillborn or premature child who dies before attaining the status of viability, there is no formal mourning; hence, these laws are not sufficient. Every parent, regardless of the child's age or status, deserves the oppportunity to grieve within and benefit from a Jewish mourning framework.

The intention of all mourning practices should be the fullest possible outpouring of grief and the opportunity for the family and the community to re-knit after the loss of one of its members. Parents will ask questions regarding appropriate behaviors and "correct" procedures for burial and mourning. The issue should not be solely one of providing a definite *halakchic* response. A rabbi must also be informed by his understanding and assessment of the parents' needs and feelings.[2]

The depth and expanse of a parent's grief is influenced by many factors. Chapter III mentioned a few key variables: how the child died, his age and character, place in the family, as well as how the parent perceives the nature of the parent/child relationship. The additional factor of sudden verses anticipated death should be taken into consideration. The Bible teaches that Job and King David grieved quite

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[2]Rabbi Sol Goodman, "Selected Aggadic References to Death and Dying and Their Significance for the Counseling Role of the Rabbi," Thesis HUC-JIR 1980, pp. 118-119.

differently; King David, whose son had been sick for many days, rose up from weeping and resumed normal living. Job, on the other hand, mourned for his children at length. Those who have no warning of death have the most difficulty in recovering from their loss; a period of anticipation permits one to come to grips with the possibility, almost inevitability, of death.[3] All of these factors play an important role in the bereaved parent's psychological state and need for religious and spiritual care.

There is no question that the process of Jewish mourning - *aninut* and *avelut* for periods of seven and thirty days - inherently possess psychological benefit. A parent is afforded time for both intense grief and gradual re-involvement in daily living. However, rabbinic mourning laws were predominantly fashioned to honor and protect the one who died. Great care was taken to show respect for the body, i.e. prohibition of touching the dead and the laws of purification, and to pray for the future of his soul. These two foci, however, reflect our sages' concerns with regard to an adult's death. Rabbinic lore teaches that the child's soul always returns to God. A child, then, does not need specific prayers for God's protection and redemption. In addition, Chapter III noted how parental stroking and rocking of the dead child is

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[3]Rabbi Leonard Helman, "An Analysis of Death and Mourning in Talmudic Literature and Related Materials," Thesis HUC-JIR 1955, p. 24.

an act honor to that child and the parent/child relationship they shared.

Thus, one can not grieve for a child in the exact manner one mourns for an adult. Rather, the focus of the mourning ritual needs to offer hope and express life's meaning, as well to reflect the painful nature of their profound grief.

Unfortunately, Jewish mourning rites lack rituals which celebrate a child's life and express the pain associated with its death; ceremonies are brief or non-existent. Especially when a child dies soon after birth, there is seldom a coming together of family and community in a way which offers hope and comfort.[4] This lack has created significant adjustment problems for grieving parents and others.[5] Rabbis, as ritual counselors, can provide helpful channels for emotional, religious and spiritual needs by creatively applying Jewish tradition.[6] It is not easy to develop new rituals; their benefit, however, is invaluable.

What is a ritual? What should be considered when creating a new ritual? A ritual is a specific behavior or activity that

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[4]Susan Borg, Judith Lasker, When Pregnancy Fails, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), p. 139.

[5]Ronald J. Knapp, Beyond Endurance: When A Child Dies, (New York: Shocken Books, 1986), p. 14.

[6]Rabbi Robert Loewy, "A Rabbi Confronts Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Infant Death," Journal of Reform Judaism, Spring 1988, p. 4.

gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts.[7] Rituals have therapeutic properties that can be of help to the bereaved parent. They provide a focus for grief and grant legitimization of emotional and/or physical expression. They help the parent to recognize and confirm his grief, as well as assist the parent's grieving and confrontation of unresolved issues. Rituals delineate a clear beginning and end to a purposeful period of remembrance. In addition, they provide the conditions and structure a bereaved parent needs in order to feel grounded and safe while experiencing grief's intense emotions.[8]

The best time to think about and develop new rituals is before a distraught couple calls for spiritual guidance. A rabbi might compose a prayer in praise of parenting which can be said as the parents prepare the child for burial or inserted into the funeral service. A prayer which says goodbye to lost hopes and dreams would be appropriate as well.

The eulogy might include examples of biblical parents who continued their commitment to life despite their grief.[9] These powerful biblical images have the potential to illumine dark and lonely nights as parents scrounge about in search of a morsel of hope. Some time should be taken to also address

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[7]Therese Rando, Grieving: How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies, (Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1988) p. 262.

[8]Ibid, pp. 262-265.

[9]King David, Aaron and Job

friends and relatives. As mourners, they, too are in need of comfort; as care-providers, they want to help but, often, do not know how. The funeral provides a perfect opportunity to reach out to and teach them.[10]

Thought, too, should be given as to how burial can reflect a child's death. Perhaps some of the child's toys can be placed in the grave along with the casket and dirt as a Hebrew lullaby is sung.

Along with planning for the funeral, it is very important to create "life rituals" which will continuously -in a healthy way - memorialize the child within the family's life. Parents could be encouraged to light an extra candle on Shabbat, symbolizing the warmth and brightness of his character. If the child who died was the family's youngest, perhaps a sibling can recite the four questions at Pesach in his memory. In addition, a re-dedication of the child's kiddush cup as that which now, and in the future, holds Elijah's wine would be a beautiful and meaningful rite.

Six or seven months later, the rabbi might suggest planting a garden, donating a set of books to the synagogue library or planning a charity festival in the child's memory. Commitments and activity, building something new and/or

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[10]The rabbi might also consider offering a workshop designed to train lay people in Jewish death ritual and how the Jewish community can support and care for the bereaved parent. Once trained, the laity can establish a caring committee whose purpose it is to extend the synagogue's ability to reach out and offer ongoing care to those in need.

bringing something to life, help parents to regain their self-esteem and feelings of control and power.[11] In addition, proof of one's own worth is very important.[12] Parents could be honored with an *aliyah* on the yearly anniversary of the child's bar/bat mitzvah, birth or death.

These suggestions for parental grief rituals represent only a few of the vast number of possibilities which a rabbi can create and implement. What must be kept at the forefront of the rabbi's mind, however, is a concern for the best interest of each individual parent. Rituals can be interpreted in many ways, however; discretion is needed to evaluate which practices are appropriate for a given situation.

When the rabbi does meet with and comfort bereaved parents, what, in addition to religious and ritual guidance, can he uniquely offer? Bereaved parents, in both the survey conducted by Parents of Murdered Children and the study presented in this thesis, responded that presence was what they needed and appreciated the most.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, rabbinic presence reflects God's image. Two names for God - Shechina and Makom - fundamentally portray through their meanings that it is God's nature to dwell and be "in place" at all times. A rabbi's presence reminds and assures bereaved parents that God, too,

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[11]Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, The Bereaved Parent, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 55.

[12]Ibid.

is near.

Rabbis need to be aware that a child's death can cause a deep uprooting of a previously close bond with God. Parental anger towards God must be respected and responded to with great sensitivity. The healing journey for many bereaved parents involves being permitted to lash out at God, for seeming absence in a time of overwhelming need.[13] A rabbi need not defend God, for protest and anger are a part of any healthy relationship.

Rabbi presence is mostly silent. In truth, what can be said? Our sages attributed child death to either a parent's sin or to God's singular discretion. These ideas were founded on a strong belief in God's justice. Contemporary notions of justice are different, however. Although the modern rabbi still trusts in God's justice, he limits the extent of God's power.[14] The attribute of divine justice does not enter into the human realm. A child's death is the random act of a morally blind nature.[15] Thus, a simple "I'm sorry" tells the parents that you, too, experience their anger, and that you

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[13]Reverend Kenneth J. Czillinger, "Advice to Clergy on Counseling Bereaved Parents," in Parental Loss of a Child, ed. Therese Rando (Illinois: Research Press, 1986), p. 468.

[14]A belief in divine justice, yet a limitation of divine power, reflects the author's response to evil in this world. While many rabbis also espouse this belief, it must be understood that this, and the following, statement does not represent a pervasive thought.

[15]Rabbi Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen To Good People, (New York: Avon Books, 1981), p. 59.

share their pain and their grief.

When words and response are appropriate, it is imperative that the rabbi offer to the bereaved parent a spiritual presence. A great amount of vigilance is necessary for rabbis to avoid taking on the therapeutic role. When they do that, religious counselors abdicate their uniqueness.[16] A child's death does present a spiritual crisis for the bereaved parent; the rabbi, relying upon his religious expertise, is the individual who can most meaningfully address these issues.

One of the most direct ways a rabbi can portray a spiritual presence is to gently probe into a parent's religious beliefs. Where is your child now? Do you believe in life after death? What kind of existence, if any, is there after death? It is, of course, imperative that a rabbi show sensitivity with the timing and depth of these questions.

The potential power of rabbinic spiritual presence can not actualize, however, until the rabbi understands the nature of his own spirituality. A rabbi can not hope to meaningfully journey with others if he has never taken the time to intensely examine his faith or to determine from where his strength comes. Rabbi Saul Goldman published an article in Conservative Judaism which links the concept of the rabbi as healer with a strong spiritual identity. He wrote: "When the physician behaves as healer, displaying confidence in his

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[16]Dr. Robert Katz, Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p.18.

medicines and in his judgement, the patient develops confidence in him. When the rabbi appears on the scene trusting in his spiritual strength and in his ability to strengthen, then he, too, is a healer."[17] Reading religious and secular literature on parental grief provides an important foundation as well.[18]

Prayer is a potent source of healing. Many bereaved parents, however, need help from their rabbi to learn how to be more capable and more comfortable praying from where they are and offering to God prayers of loss, confusion, bitterness, and loneliness.[19] For those whose anger causes them to lash out at God with curses, the rabbi must also help them direct those feelings to God. Hopefully, these parents will not become stuck in cursing God, but, like the psalmists, move through curse to praise.[20] In this fashion, rabbinic support of a bereaved parent's feelings towards God can aide a process with which our sages were very concerned: healing the relationship between a mourner and God.

In his role as spiritual healer to the bereaved parent, a rabbi can draw upon Aggadic material as a model, analogy

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[17]N. Saul Goldman, "The Rabbi as Healer," Conservative Judaism, XLI, No. 4, Summer 1989, p. 56.

[18]Please note the list of recommended resources found on p. 119, as well as the bibliography appended to the body of this work.

[19]Czillinger, pp. 468-9.

[20]Ibid.

and paradigm whose intent it is to inspire, rather than dictate, appropriate responses to grief.[21] Moed Katan 28b describes the response of four rabbis who come to visit Rabbi Yishmael after his sons died. Their method of consolation, praising Rabbi Yishmael's sons over some of the lesser heroes of the Bible and not over Abraham or Moses, reflects the role of honesty within one's words of comfort.[22] A rabbi should not offer counsel or comfort to a parent which he, himself, could not believe or follow. In addition, the four rabbis spoke to Rabbi Yishmael in a idiomatic manner with which he was familiar and comfortable.[23] This teaches the modern rabbi of how important it is to put aside his personal expectations and to meet bereaved parents where they are.

Aggadic tradition also reminds the rabbi to convey to the parent that he is not, nor does he have to be, alone. Healing, especially one's spirit, is a process which necessitates an "other."[24] Berakchot 5b teaches that Rabbi Jochanan, who was adept at healing others, could not heal himself. Another's insight and background is important in helping the one who is broken journey towards wholeness.

A rabbi can help to allay a parent's natural feelings of

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[21]Goodman, p. 131.

[22]Ronald Stern, "The Talmudic Origins of Rabbinic Counseling," Thesis HUC-JIR 1990, p. 57.

[23]Ibid, p. 58.

[24]Ibid, p. 28.

guilt and responsibility. Rabbi Harold Kushner suggests that religious people should say to those who have been hurt by life: "This was not your fault. You are a good, decent person who deserves better. I can understand that you feel hurt, confused, angry at what happened, but there is no reason why you should feel guilty. As a man (woman) of faith, I have come here in God's name, not to judge you, but to help you. Will you let me help you?"[25] It might be helpful, too, to teach parents of the Jewish concept of Shalom. It's root שלם means completeness - joy and sorrow, celebration and bereavement.[26] Pain, sadness and disappointment are a natural part of life's cycle; human responsibility is rarely the cause.

An autopsy can also ease a bereaved parent's feelings of guilt. Especially when a child is born dead or dies a short time after birth, pathology results which pinpoint a cause of death let the parents know that they are not to blame. In addition, these results might yield important information for the success of future pregnancies. Yet, rabbinic law does not permit touching someone once death has occurred.

Rabbis should be aware of a new ruling concerning autopsy and children. Many contemporary *poskim* agree that if a woman has delivered several stillbirths or a number of children who died before reaching an age of viability, one should permit

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[25]Kushner, p. 104.

[26]Rabbi Earl Grollman, "Address to The Compassionate Friends," audiotape, (Philadelphia), July 7 1990.

an autopsy on the most recent child who died in an effort to prevent potential problems in future pregnancies.[27]

Part of the rabbi's role is to know what it is that he can not offer bereaved parents. Except in the rare situation when he, himself, has lost a child, a rabbi is not capable of fulfillling a bereaved parent's need to share his feelings with others who have experienced a similar loss. Thus, it is the rabbi's responsibility to direct bereaved parents to the appropriate social and psychological support networks within the community. Many cities have a Jewish Family Service which offers individual counseling and/or support groups for Jewish bereaved parents. In addition, those hospitals with a large Neonatal Intensive Care Unit often sponsor bereavement groups for parents. Both agencies would most certainly welcome referrals from local clergy.

In addition to those very important local networks, there exist four national bereavement organizations for parents, siblings and grandparents who have experienced a child's death.[28] A call to one of their national headquarters can help to determine if such a group is available in a specific location. In addition to weekly, bi-weekly or monthly support group meetings, these organizations publish newsletters and

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[27]Rabbi Aharon Levine, *Zichron Meir al Avelut v'Inyanei Rifuah v'Cholei*, (Willowdale, Ontario: Zichron Meir Publications, 1985), p.226. Also, *Leiv Avraham*, Chapter 2, p. 70, matter 16.

[28]Please see the list of these organizations and their addresses found on p. 118.

literature, as well as sponsor weekends and conventions, whose purpose it is to join those effected by child death in a mutual support effort.

As a final word within this guide, it is imperative for the rabbi to keep in mind that parental grief does not end with *sheloshim*. The five phases of grief, as outlined in Chapter III, certainly unfold over a period of months, perhaps even years. A bereaved parent's spiritual healing requires an ever-present sensitivity to that which recalls his child's memory and causes enveloping pain. For Jewish parents, the Jewish calendar year is filled with such ongoing times of remembrance.

Children are blessed every Friday night. They place coins in a *tzedakah* box before candles are lit. The *sukkah* is decorated with their artistic creations while they parade with the *Torah*, *lulav* and *etrog* around the synagogue. After lighting candles on Chanukkah, children are given coins and gifts; then the family, together, plays *dreidle*. Purim is a time for children to dress up as ancient characters and drown out the name of the evil Haman. And, our most widely practiced Jewish ritual, the Passover *seder*, was developed with one purpose in mind: to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt to our children.[29]

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[29]Michael Gold, And Hannah Wept: Infertility, Adoption and the Jewish Couple, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 9.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR BEREAVED PARENTS

The Compassionate Friends
National Headquarters
Post Office Box 1347
Oak Brook, Illinois 60521
(312) 323-5010

Parents of Murdered Children, Inc.
100 East 8th Street, B-41
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
(513) 721-5683

Hope For Bereaved
1342 Lancaster Avenue
Syracuse, New York 13210
(315) 472-4673

Kinder-Mourn
515 Fenton Place
Charlotte, North Carolina 28207
(704) 376-2580

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY OF RABBINIC BEREAVED PARENTS

Name:
Address:

Child's Name:
Date of Birth:
Age at Death:

Telephone Number:
Please Circle: CCAR RA

Names and Birthdates of Living Children:

1. What were the circumstances surrounding your child's death?

2. If your child was sick before his/her death, did you receive pastoral support? If so, from whom? What was/was not helpful?

3. If your child was sick before his/her death, did you rely upon Judaism and the Jewish tradition for comfort? What was/was not helpful?

4. At the time of your child's death, did you receive pastoral support? If so, from whom? If not, would pastoral care have been a comfort? Why?

5. At the time of your child's death, what were your spiritual needs?

6. How did you meet these spiritual needs? Were others helpful and supportive? Upon whom did you rely? What was it that they offered you?

7. What effect did you child's death have upon your spiritual beliefs? your relationship with God?

8. Did you mourn your child's death within a framework of Jewish ritual? What were the rituals/traditions which were of comfort? What was not helpful?

9. Did you adapt or create a ritual to meet your spiritual needs? If not, would this have been helpful? If so, please describe.

10. What effect did the death of your child have upon your relationship with your spouse? your parents? your living children?

11. What effect does your child's death have upon your current spiritual needs? beliefs? relationship with God?

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