

FUNERAL CUSTOMS IN THE TALMUD

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Rabbi.

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April 1, 1937

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TO MY PARENTS

## PREPARATION OF BODY

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Closing the Eyes

After it is certain that all life has departed from the body, the eyes of the deceased are closed. Care must be taken, however, not to do this unless there is absolutely no doubt that death has really come. Further, it may not be done at the exact moment of death for the dying person is compared to a candle which is about to go out -- if allowed to burn unmolested, it might remain burning for a bit longer than if it were snuffed out. Therefore, one who closes the eyes of the deceased before death has really set in, or at the exact moment of death is considered a בא פולע<sup>1</sup>.

R. Simeon b. Gamliel (according to the Tosephta R. Simeon b. Eleazar) is of the opinion that an indirect method should be used in closing the eyes. He recommends that wine be injected into the nostrils of the corpse, the eyelids anointed with oil and the big toes of the deceased pulled. After this treatment the eyes<sup>2</sup> were supposed to close of their own accord. The reason for this custom is obscure. In personal conversations, medical authorities have stated that such a procedure would not produce the desired results. The custom, however, evidently arises from the fact that they were



afraid to touch the eyes directly for fear of closing them while the person was still alive.

Should death take place on the Sabbath, the eyes were not allowed to be closed.<sup>3</sup> *on the Sabbath.*

Washing, Bathing, Anointing, etc. of the Body

After the eyes had been closed, the jaw, which usually falls open at the time of death, was closed and bound up, and, although it is not permissible to close the eyes of a corpse on the Sabbath, it is permissible<sup>4</sup> to tie up the jaw. In all probability, the reason for this last bit of Sabbath legislation is that when rigor mortis sets in, it is almost impossible to close the mouth, whereas the eyes may be opened or closed at any time and without any difficulty.

The corpse was then bathed<sup>5</sup> and anointed<sup>6</sup>, a pot placed on the stomach to prevent disfigurement because<sup>7</sup> of swelling, and the body placed on sand or salt.<sup>8</sup> Judging from the statement that "Babylonia is called Shinar<sup>9</sup>, because they (the Babylonians) die in anguish, without lights and without baths," great stress seems to have been laid upon bathing the corpse. For this purpose, washing pits were maintained expressly for the performance<sup>10</sup> of this duty.

Then all the orifices of the body were stopped up. The reason given is (in order) to keep the air from

entering the body. Undertakers and doctors today are also accustomed to close the orifices for it often happens that the waste products of the body are discharged<sup>10a</sup> after death.

Having been bathed, the body was then anointed; spices being used for this purpose of neutralizing the odors which accompany decomposition.<sup>11</sup> Incense was also used and it seems that there were different ways of placing the incense, depending on the nature of the disease that brought about death. If a person died of some bowel disease it was placed under the body but this custom was discontinued so as not <sup>hurt the feelings of</sup> to insult those people<sup>12</sup> still living who suffered from that particular illness. It is also reported that incense was burned at the funerals of great persons. Onkelos burned balsam in<sup>12a</sup> honor of R. Gamliel.

After this the body was placed upon sand or<sup>13</sup> salt to hinder deterioration, while R. Honina b. Kahana was of the opinion that to keep a corpse from deterior-<sup>14</sup>ating it should be turned upon its face.

It appears that as a rule the hair was cut<sup>14a</sup> from the head, while it is reported that the hair of a bride was disarranged:

סותרין שארות סא כלות <sup>14b</sup>

Further, women were accustomed to bequeath  
14c  
their hair to designated persons, but no use was to be  
14d  
made of it.

### Shrouding the Dead

The body was then wrapped in garments specially made for the corpse. To be buried naked was thought to be a sign<sup>15</sup> of shame and disgrace. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, Jews, before the destruction of the Second Temple, were buried in the garments they wore during their life time, "the poor being swathed like the Egyptians in shrouds."<sup>16</sup> One of the ways in which relatives showed their grief was to put a quantity of valuable garments on the body of the deceased; although they knew that garments which had been touched by the corpse could not be used for any other purpose afterwards.<sup>17</sup> This custom grew rapidly and led to such excessive display and waste that the cost of burial was frequently a more serious matter to the relatives than the death itself, and, since many could not afford the great cost and at the same time did not wish to disregard the current practice, they abandoned the corpse and left the interment of their relatives to the care of the town authorities. In order to stop this disastrous custom, R. Gamliel, about fifty years after the destruction of the temple, left an order that he be buried in simple lin-



en garments. This good example seems to have been not without its good effect, for by the time of R. Papa (died 375 C. E.), it is reported that people buried their dead in garments costing but one zuz.<sup>18</sup> R. Hisda, in the early part of the fourth century, opposed the practice of heaping a mass of garments upon corpses, and it is reported that he was buried in a plain linen shroud.<sup>19</sup>

(c. 150)

R. Meir/had laid down the principle that:

כל המרגה כלים על המת הרי זה עובר חסום

ב' תשחית<sup>20</sup>. Hezekiah, in the fourth

century, and Simeon b. Gamliel, two centuries later, are both of the opinion that the more shrouding the more worms.<sup>21</sup> Thus from the time of R. Gamliel though the time of R. Papa there was an effort made on the part of the rabbis to simplify the wrappings of the corpse and it was not until the fourth century that the example of R. Gamliel had taken effect. Even then, R. Hezekiah, who lived around the same time as Papa, is still inveighing against this waste.

Another custom which was practiced was to use worn-out Torah covers for shrouds, since it was forbidden to make any other use of them.<sup>22</sup>

There seems to have been no standard color which was used for these burial garments. R. Johanan made the statement: קברו אותי בכלים צבועים בדרוקא לא לבנים ולא שחורים ואם עמתי בין הצדיקים לא נגש ואם עמתי בין הרשעים לא נכאם: (23)

In Gen. Rabba, 100 3, the same idea is conveyed in different words: לא תלבישוני לא חורין ולא אוכוהין אלא מאנין דבריקטא אם חתבית עם צדיקיא לא יבטין בי רשיעיא. ואם אתבטית עם רשיעיא לא יבטין בי צדיקיא. *return to Berch + Haleha*

while the version given in Jer. Kilaim<sup>32b</sup> is:

מלבושי ביריריקא לא חורין ולא אוכוהין אין קחית ביני צדיקיא לא נבהת. אין קחית ביני רשיעיא לא נבהת.

R. Josiah, the pupil of R. Johanan, however, <sup>third</sup> in the second century, wished to be buried in white robes, and the fact that his desires were different from those of his teacher shows that the latter did not influence him. <sup>24</sup>

R. Yannai uttered a request similar to that of  
25  
R. Johanan. R. Jirmiyah expressed the desire that he be  
buried in white shrouds made of thistles, with shoes on  
26  
his feet and a staff in his hand.

From the foregoing, therefore, it appears that during Talmudic times there was no set color nor specified material used for shrouds, as is evidenced by the various requests for different colored shrouds and especially by the fact that R. Josiah thought nothing of differing from his teacher in this regard. That any type of material may be used is shown from the statement that shrouds  
27  
are not subject to the laws of kilayim. The only point on which all are agreed is that they all tend toward the simple and inexpensive burial garments.

*alleged  
sentence*

Embalming

There seems to be no reason for supposing that the practice of embalming was followed during Talmudic times. We could locate but few references touching the practice of embalming and these statements concern the deaths of the patriarch Jacob and Joseph who died in Egypt. Since there is no other reference it is possible that this remark reflects an Egyptian custom rather than one practiced among Jews. In fact, the statement is made that the reason Joseph died before his brothers is that he had the body of his father embalmed.



Method of Laying out the Body

It appears to have been the custom to cover the faces of the corpse if the features were distorted, for we find the statement made that in former times the faces of the rich were uncovered and the faces of the poor covered, because the faces of the latter were black, due to hunger. Later, it became the custom to cover the faces of all bodies so as not to shame the poor.<sup>30</sup> However, an exception was made in the case of a bridegroom who died. In this instance the face was allowed to remain uncovered,<sup>31</sup> and we are unable to account for this practice.

Judging from the report of Raba b. Huna (299-352)<sup>32</sup> that the מתים נכבדים were lying on their backs we might infer that this is indicative of Jewish usage — in spite of the fact that R. Jirmiyah (fourth century) desired to be placed on his side,<sup>33</sup> in view of the following statement:

א' ליהו משכב כדרכו רגליו  
מבוסטות וידין על לבו אבא  
קמצוץ אני אומר הן נכבד עליו והרמא :



which shows that the customary practice was to lay the corpse face turned upwards, hands folded on the breast and lips stretched out. Any other position indicated that the person had met an unnatural death.

Abba Saul requested that his 35 3'3' be placed in the coffin with him, it is also reported that the entire talith was placed in the casket. <sup>36</sup> It was customary to place in the coffin various objects which the deceased <sup>37</sup> had used during their lifetime, such as pen, keys, etc.

NOTES

CHAPTER I. PREPARATION OF BODY

1. Maseches<sup>s</sup> <sup>t</sup>S. 1.4, Sabbat 151 b.
2. Sabbath 151 b, Tosefta Sabbath XVII (XVIII), 19.
3. Sabb. 151 b, Mishnah 23.5.
4. M.S. 1.2., Sabb. 151 b, Mishnah 23.5.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. The stomach usually swells when the cause of death is due to a dietary ailment.
8. M.S. 1.2, Sabb. 151 b, Mishnah 23.5.
9. Jer. Berakoth 7 b, Gen. Rabba 37.5.
10. Moed Katan 8b, Mishnah Gemarah.
- 10a. M.S. 1.2, Sabb. 151 b.
11. Berakoth 53a, Gitin 56 a, Betzah 6 a.
12. Moed Katan 27 b.
- 12a. Abodah Zarah 11 a.
13. Maseches Semakoth 1.3.
14. Abodah Zarah 20 b.
- 14 a. Moed Katan 8 b, Mishnah 1.6.
- 14b. M.S. 8.7.
- 14c. Arakhin 7 b.
- 14d. Tosephta Arakhin 1, 4 (543, 21).
15. Sabb. 14 a.
16. Jewish Encyclopedia, v. XI, p. 314.
17. Sanhedrin 48 a - 48 b.

18. Moed Katan 27 b, Ketuboth 8 b.
19. Megillah 26 b.
20. M.S. 9.23
21. ibid., Gen. Rab. 100.2.
22. Megillah 26 b.
23. Gen. Rabba 96.9. Jastrow translates קפ'אריא as "scarlet."
24. Gen. Rabba 100.3
25. Sabb. 114 a.
26. Gen. Rabba 100.3, Jer. Ketuboth 35 a.
27. Kilaim 9.4.
28. Taanith 5 b, Gen. Rabba 100.11.
29. Gen. Rabba 100.4.
30. Moed Katan 27 b.
31. M.S. 8.7.
32. Baba Bathra 74a.
33. Gen. Rabba 100.3.
34. Jer. Nazir 57 c.
35. M.S. 12.10
36. Jer. Ketubah 35 a.
37. M.S. 8.7.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE BURIAL PROCESSION

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The funeral procession went from the house of the deceased to the cemetery and special care and attention were devoted to it. It was considered an obligation for anyone who saw a funeral procession to take part in it. The object was to get as many people as possible to take part in accompanying the body to the grave.<sup>1</sup> In order to take part in such a procession it was even permitted to interrupt study.<sup>2</sup> "When a funeral procession passed a school, R. Judah used to dismiss his disciples, saying 'Doing takes precedence over studying.'<sup>3</sup> However, when the Jer. Talmud reports that a vote was taken regarding this practice,~~and~~ the opinion was that the study of Torah should not be interrupted in order to accompany a funeral party. the general sentiment being "Studying takes precedence over doing."<sup>4</sup> However, the procession only seemed adequate when it extended itself from the home of the deceased to the place of burial.

"How many are considered sufficient (for a funeral escort)? R. יצחק בר אבין, in the name of Rab: 'Twelve thousand people and six thousand should be announcers.' According to other authorities, twelve thousand people of whom six thousand should be announcers.



Ula said: 'Sufficient, means when there are enough people<sup>5</sup> to form a line from the city gateway to the cemetery.'

In all probability, though, the above statements are not to be taken literally for in a large town the number of those who were thus compelled to join the procession would mount up and a funeral would paralyze a whole town. Rather these statements should be construed to show what emphasis they placed upon the duty of accompanying a body to its final resting place. "He who escorts the dead will be escorted by others, and he who carries the biers of others will be carried in return, in honor by others."<sup>5a</sup>

The reason given for all of this is that one should pay honor to the deceased. However, underlying this conception of honor, there is probably the idea of the fear of the dead which, in this instance, is basic. This concept of the fear of the dead will be discussed in our conclusions.

Method of Carrying the Corpse

There seems to be some confusion as to the mode of carrying the corpse. One thing, however, is certain and that is that the method of conveyance was dependent upon the age of the deceased. Children who died before they were a month old were carried out in the arms and attended by one woman and two men without any special mourning ceremonies. From the age of one month until one year it was carried in a coffin ( דיקוי (א) ) by its handles; those who died at an age of from one to three years were also carried in a coffin <sup>(דיקוי (א))</sup> upon men's shoulders.

"R. Judah, however, said, if the father desires to honor it they may bring a coffin <sup>(אורח)</sup> into the cemetery, until it is three years old." At the age of three the child is carried on a bier ( דיקוי ). "R. Akiba said: if it is three years old, but looks like two, or if it is two and looks like three it is carried on a bier," <sup>7</sup> which would indicate that the mode of carrying the corpse depended upon the very practical consideration of the size and weight of the deceased.

When the deceased was an adult, a distinction was made between those who were wealthy and those who were poor. The former were carried on a עדר and the latter upon a גנ. However, in later times a גנ was used for all alike, no distinction being made. A difficulty arises, however, as to the exact meaning of the words עדר and גנ and as to their exact nature. Jastrow translates גנ as "bier,"<sup>8</sup> and עדר as a "state bed with its footstool."<sup>9</sup> The explanation for this seems to be found in the fact that scholars were carried to their graves upon their beds (i.e. without being removed from the bed upon which they died), such being the opinion of R. Hilda.<sup>10</sup> At the time of the death of R. Huna (about 135 C. E.), the custom probably arose of showing honor to all dead by bearing them to the cemetery in their own beds. Because of the fact that the rich had more beautiful beds (i.e. state beds) and the poor had not, it was embarrassing to those who were not well-off financially and, therefore, the law that all persons should be carried upon a simple bier was instituted.

From the statement that King Hezekiah was praised because he caused the body of his father to be carried to

*dragged*

the grave upon a bier made of ropes so as to rebuke him  
for an evil life,<sup>11</sup> it appears that the wicked were disgraced by being carried to their graves upon such a bier.

*not warranted*

Pallbearers

The bearers of the bier, who were called either גנני ה'כס' 12 or כתובים 13, who walked barefooted as a precaution against stumbling, were changed frequently in the course of the procession, due to the fact that it was strenuous work to carry the body for such a long distance and probably also for the reason that they wished as many as possible to be able to share in this last labor of love performed for the deceased.

The patriarch Jacob is reported as having commanded his sons before his death that he wanted three <sup>14</sup> pallbearers on each of the four sides of his coffin.

These pallbearers were freed from certain obligations. "They that bear the bier and they that <sup>2</sup>relieve them, and they that relieve these.....are exempt from reciting <sup>15</sup> the Shema" and were also exempt from saying the tefillah.



2EINI 3N3N-- Stopping Places

In order to relive the pallbearer<sup>3</sup> the coffin was set down at various places along the procession's course to the grave and it appears that these various stopping places were fixed and their dimensions were definitely established, for we find the statement made that although there is no limit prescribed for the passage to the grave, "the halting places, according to the judges of Sepphoris, should be four kab's space of ground.<sup>16</sup> Such a field could not be used for any other purpose, such as farming, but its earth was considered clean and could be used for manufacture.<sup>17</sup> However, the statement that "the crop may be reaped before the Omer if the ground is needed as a station for mourning,"<sup>18</sup> seems to represent the exact opposite of what has been said regarding the set stopping places which could not be used for planting. Since no clue can be ascertained as to which of these passages is earlier it is impossible for us to draw a conclusion in this instance.

This seeming contradiction gives rise to the problem regarding the reason that planting was not allowed though the ground could be utilized. If, as is likely,

the reason behind the law was based on the fact that such a field was unclean and therefore the produce would also be in the same state, then the same would also apply to the use of this earth for the purposes of manufacture. Or, if this is due to the fear that the spirit of the departed would linger in the spot, then the opinion that the field could be used for planting would be unexplainable.

It also appears that the custom of 3N6N  
[and] 2E/N did not obtain in all localities, but where the custom was in practice the body had to be put down at least seven times. <sup>18a</sup> But even in those places where the custom obtained of setting the bier upon the ground, there were certain days when such interruptions of the passage to the grave were not permitted in the case of male corpses, and it was never permitted in the case of <sup>18b</sup> female dead.

The pauses which occurred when the body was set <sup>19</sup> down were filled with songs of lamentation. This will be discussed later on.

If it happened that the funeral procession met a bridal party or a royal procession, the latter two were given preference, or "the right of way," and the funeral

was rerouted, since the honor of the living was considered  
19a  
to be greater than that of the dead.

### The Order of the Funeral Procession

In the procession the bier upon which the body was carried divided the two sexes. Whether the man preceded the bier or followed it depended upon local custom and it is expressly stated that some authorities were of the opinion that men should precede while others follow the custom of placing the men after the bier and the women in front,<sup>20</sup> while the Midrash states that women should always precede because it was they who first brought death into<sup>21</sup> the world, while it is also said that "Wherever it is customary for women to follow the bier they may do so,"<sup>22</sup> but R. Judah said: "Women must always precede the bier."

There seems to have been a special significance attached to women on such an occasion and the difference of opinion stated above is really a concern about the position of the woman rather than that of the man for the woman had certain special duties to perform. She used to lament ( נִשְׁחַח ), which is explained as the "singing together" of all the women "in a chorus"; also she used to clap her hands ( נִפְּחַח ) and wail ( נִשְׁחַח ), which is<sup>23</sup> when "one begins by herself and all respond after her."

Thus, it appears to have been the function of the woman to drive away evil spirits through the singing of dirges and the clapping of hands and it was thought that the noise thus made would frighten away those spirits which linger about the dead and who would do harm to the living. During the Festival, however, women may not clap their hands, although they may sing dirges. However, since the most dangerous place is in that area immediately about the bier, R. Ishmael holds that those women close to the bier may clap their hands at such a time.<sup>24</sup>

*He doesn't say that - it's just my theory.*

There also seems to be some difference of opinion regarding the position of the mourners in relation to the bier. In some places the mourners preceded and in other places they followed, although the earlier custom seems to place the mourners in the rear.<sup>25</sup>  
<sup>26</sup>

When a member of the royal family died, the king could "not go forth from the door of his palace. R. Judah says: If he is minded to follow the bier he may follow it, for so have we found it in the case of David, who followed the bier of Abner, as it is written, "And King David followed the bier" (II Samuel 3.31). They answered: That was but to appease the people."<sup>27</sup> And if a death occurs in the family of the High Priest, "he must not walk



immediately behind the bier, but when they (the other mourners) disappear, he may show himself....and so he may go with them as far as the city gate." This is the opinion of R. Meir. R. Judah, however, holds that the High Priest may not leave the sanctuary.

*style*  
The reason behind R. Meir's opinion concerning the actions of the High Priest seems to be an extra precaution against his becoming levitically impure; in fact, it is expressly stated that he is liable to stripes if he contacts uncleanness, because of dead kindred. Nor is he permitted to bare his head or rend his garments. However, there are opinions which seem to infer that for certain dead the High Priest may defile himself. This *problem* difficulty will be discussed in the section dealing with the activities of the high priest.

In the case of the king, on the other hand, there seems to be no reason for his not taking part in the procession, unless it be that such an action would be deemed below the royal dignity and it was considered to be more suitable for such a personage to mourn within the strict seclusion of his own apartments and not in public where a display of grief might give the impression that the king is subject to the same weaknesses as

*end of long*

his people. The only instance mentioned in which the king took part in the procession is the case of David but here it was probably his object to dispel the suspicion that he had killed Abner, whose funeral procession he accompanied.

see Frazer Taken & Taken passim

Special Observances for People of Rank

The procession which preceded the burial of persons of rank was marked by special ceremonies, the most outstanding of which was the burning of their household articles and things which were among their personal effects. Even though this custom is acknowledged to have been borrowed from the neighboring peoples, still "Pyres may be lit in honor of deceased kings, and this is not forbidden as being of the ways of the Amorites."<sup>31</sup>

This custom has no connection with cremation for it is expressly stated "What is it that may be burnt in the case of kings? Their beds and articles that were in use by them."<sup>32</sup> Their personal riding horses were hamstringed, the bed of state was burned and other similar observances were carried out. The same honor was accorded princes and also great scholars. It is reported that in honor of R. Gamliel, the elder, Onkelos, the proselyte, erected a funeral pyre the cost of which amounted to seventy Tyrian monehs, although from the text it is not certain whether the coins themselves were actually burnt or whether the cost of the pyre was of the value<sup>33</sup> mentioned above.

### Hired Mourners

One of the most important roles in the funeral procession was played by those who were especially employed for the purpose of mourning. These hired mourn-<sup>34</sup>ers performed the funeral dirges, and played music upon flutes.

"R. Judah says: Even the poorest in Israel should not hire less than two flutes and one wailing woman."<sup>35</sup> The functions of these hired mourners is somewhat elaborate. They were accustomed to beat their breasts, to clap their hands, to stomp<sup>a</sup> their feet. In regard to the last named function, it is expressly stated that "one should not stomp with a sandaled foot, but only when wearing shoes, because of the danger" that he might injure his foot.<sup>36</sup> While going through these movements, they lamented as we have already explained in that section which deals with the funeral procession. In Galilee these people went in front of the bier while<sup>37</sup> in Judea they followed it.

<sup>38</sup> The procession was also made up of torch-bearers.

No doubt, all the motions, noises, lights, etc. were for the express purpose of driving away the spirits which might harm the living. This phase also will be included in more detail in our conclusions.



### Funeral Sermons

Besides the lamentations which were held at the stopping places along the way, there were funeral orations held at the grave, and judging from the examples which we possess, great stress seems to have been laid upon this feature of the funeral, especially when the funeral was one for a scholar or a person of note. <sup>39</sup> As to the purpose of these orations, the question is asked, "Is the funeral orations in honor of the living or of the dead? What is the practical difference? If the deceased had said, Pronounce no funeral oration over me; or again in respect of collecting the cost from the heirs," <sup>40</sup> the result of the argument is that the sermon is delivered in honor of the dead. Thus we see that at first the opinion was divided as to the purpose of the oration; that a man could ask that this practice be dispensed with at his funeral; and, that the oration was considered to be of such importance that the heirs could be forced to defray the expenses for its delivery, if the life of <sup>the</sup> deceased <sup>was</sup> such that he merited a eulogy.

Such honor, however, was not accorded slaves. But if the slave were "a worthy man we say of him: 'Alas

*from whose work one benefited*

the good and faithful man who derived pleasure from his work.<sup>41</sup> Also, so as not to anger the authorities of the Roman government those who were killed by the authorities of the government were not accorded the honor of a eulogy.<sup>42</sup>

*but there are other statements too*

The orator used the opportunity to recount the deeds of the deceased, but he was admonished "as the dead are called to account for their deeds, so are the funeral orators and they who respond "Amen" after them called to account.<sup>43</sup> On the basis of the life of the deceased, the orator attempted to prognosticate the future life. "From the funeral sermon held over the remains of the deceased, it may be observed whether they will enter the kingdom of heaven or not."<sup>44</sup>

We still possess many fragments of the sermons which, for the most part, are written in Hebrew rather than Aramaic.

In speaking at the funeral of R. Eliezer, R. Akiba (110-135) began the address as follows, the mourners being lined up around the coffin: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horseman thereof, I have many coins but no money changer to accept them."<sup>45</sup>

When his son died, Akiba spoke as follows, "Brothers of Israel! Hear! Not that I am wise. There are wiser men than myself, Not that I am rich; for there are richer men than I....but you have troubled yourself to come to honor the Torah and the commandments. Therefore, I am comforted, even if I had had seven sons and buried them; not that a man wishes to bury his son, still I know that my son is destined for the 'world to come' (and therefore I am comforted)."<sup>46</sup> And in this vein he continues.

One of the disciples of Rabba b. R. Huna uttered the following over the remains of his teacher: "An offspring of worthy men has come up from Babylon and with him was the 'Book of Wars.' The pelican and owl were bent on looking at the coming destruction. When He bestirs Himself, He is angry with His world and collects souls from it and rejoices with them as a newlywed bride. He who rideth upon the heavens (Psalm 68.5) rejoices; He is happy when a pure and righteous soul comes to Him."<sup>47</sup>

When Rabina died, the funeral orator held the following oration. "O palms, bend your heads (in grief) for one who was כחנך יצא. Let the

night be as the day."<sup>48</sup>

When R. Z~~e~~<sup>i</sup>era passed away, the following was delivered. "In Shinor (Babylon) was he born. Palestine adorned him. Woe unto her, said נפר<sup>49</sup>, for my precious jewel is lost."

When R. Johanan (175-290) died, the public mourner then uttered this expression: "Even the doorkeeper of Gehenna could not withstand thee, O our teacher."<sup>50</sup>

R. Hanin (350), the son-in-law of the Exilarch, <sup>d</sup>has been childless; he prayed and his prayer was answered. On the day of the circumcision, the father died. On this occasion, the orator spoke thus: "Joy was changed to grief. Happiness and sorrow clung to him. At the moment of his receiving caresses died he who was to caress him."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>d.c. 421</sup>  
R. Ashi (d. 247) asked Bar Kipuk, the funeral orator, what oration would be delivered over him. The answer was: "If the fish-hook is thrown into the rapid river what can the waters in the pond do?"<sup>52</sup>

<sup>at</sup>  
When R. Pedo~~th~~ died, the following was said: "This day is as grievous to Israel as the day in which

the sun ~~would set~~ at noon; for it is written (Amos 8.9):  
And it shall come to pass in that day that I will cause  
the sun to go down at noon."<sup>53</sup>

When the son of R. Hiyya died, R. Ze'ira preached the sermon by announcing the text: "Sweet is the sleep of the worker. It is as a king who had a vineyard and hired many workers to attend to it. One was more diligent than the others, so the king took him by the arm and strolled with him. At eventide the workers came to be paid. The king paid the diligent workman who had strolled with him in full. The others objected: We worked all day. He worked only two hours and yet he gets paid in full. The king answered: He worked harder in two hours than you did all day. Thus the son of Hiyya learned more Torah in twenty-eight years than  
others do in a hundred."<sup>54</sup>

The women of Sechenzib had an obscure way of lamenting and the following were probably refrains which they used for funeral sermons: "Woe to him who went away, woe to those <sup>who</sup> are left behind." "The pitcher has strayed away from the tent and we must take water in the bowl." "Overspread and cover yourself, ye mountains, for he was the descendant of great men." "Our brethren, the merchants, are searched at the toll gate." "He ran and fell and now at the ferry he must



borrow the passage money." "His death was like the death of others, but his sufferings were a great burden."<sup>55</sup>

Besides being delivered at the grave these orations were also delivered at the stopping places, and,<sup>56</sup> in the case of scholars, in the synagogues. However, such a practice was not permitted in a synagogue which was in ruins, probably because of the belief that such ruins were inhabited by demons.<sup>57</sup> The custom also obtained of holding these rites at the family sepulchre or at a special house<sup>58</sup> of mourning.

*perhaps because of  
לוי ונזיר*

As has been intimated, these orations were delivered by men especially skilled in the art, called לויזו. We even have the names of some of these men, such as<sup>59</sup> bar Kipuk. As regards the women of Sechanzib, they may have been the women who wailed and sang lamentations, rather than funeral orators.

NOTES

CHAPTER II. THE BURIAL PROCESSION

1. Berakoth 18 a.
2. Megillah 3 b, Ketuboth 17 a.
3. Sukkah 49 b.
4. Jer. Hagigah 7 b c.
5. Ketuboth 17 a.
- 5a. Ketuboth 72 a.
6. M.S. 3.2, Moed Katan 24 b. For the difference between פירק and דפוסה, section on "coffin."
7. M.S. 3.3.
8. page 765.
9. page 321, cf. Sanedrin 20 a- 20 b, for discussion of this word.
10. Moed Katan 25 a.
11. Berakoth 10 b.
12. Berakoth 3.1, 17 b.
13. Jer. Berakoth 6 a, Jer. Moed Katan, 82 b.
- 13a. Jer. Nazir 56 a.
14. Gen. Rabba 100.2.
15. Berakoth 3.1.
16. B.B. 6.7.
17. Oholoth 18.4.
18. Menahoth 10.9.
- 18a. Tosephta Pesahim ch. 2, line 15ff. 18b. Moed Katan 3.8
19. Menahoth 10.9.
- 19a. Ketuboth 16b.
20. Jer. Sanhedrin 20 b.

21. Gen. Rabba 17.8
22. Sanhedrin 20 a.
23. Moed Katan 3.9.
24. ibid. 3.8.
25. Tosephta Pesahim ch. 2, line 16.
26. Mishnah Sanhedrin 2.1, Gemara 18 a.
27. Mishnah Sanhedrin 2.3, 20 a.
28. Mishnah Sanhedrin 2.1, 18a.
29. Nazir 7.1.
30. M.S. 4.12.
31. Sanhedrin 52 b.
32. Abodah Zarah 11 a.
33. ibid.
34. Moed Katan 1.5.
35. Ketuboth 4.4, 46 b; cf. B.M. 6.1 and Sabb. 23.4.
36. Moed Katan 27b.
37. Sabb. 153 a.
38. Berakoth 53 a.
39. Sabb. 105 b.
40. Sanhedrin 46 b.
41. Berakoth 16 b.
42. Sanhedrin.
43. Berakoth 62 a.
44. Sabb. 153 a.
45. Sanhedrin 68 a.
46. M.S. 8.13.
47. Moed Katan 25 b.

48. *ibid.*
49. *ibid.*
50. Hagigah 14 b.
51. Moed Katan 25 b.
52. *ibid.*
53. *ibid.*
54. Koheleth Rabba 5. 18.
55. Moed Katan 28 b.
56. Megillah 28 b.
57. Megillah 3.3.
58. B.B. 100 b.
59. Moed Katan 59b, Moed Katan 8 a.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ONEN



is a state,  
not a period

The mourning period is divided into various periods. Our concern is with that period known as Alus which is characterized by the phrase:

1'525 5'614 1'525

### Keriah

From the references in the Talmud we can not be certain as to the exact time the garments were torn. At the time of the Shulchan Aruch<sup>h</sup> the custom seems to have been to tear the garment immediately after the coffin was closed as is explained by Isserles and further expounded<sup>1</sup> in the Baer Haytev. From the references which we have been able to gather, however, those who were present at the death of a person<sup>2</sup> tore their garments immediately. Those who were not present rent their garments as soon<sup>3</sup> as the news of the death was reported to them.

On festivals only the nearest of kin may rend<sup>4</sup> their garments and we may infer that the same is the case on the Sabbath, from the following passage: "If a man tore his raiment on Sabbath...because of his dead he is not culpable. There is a contradiction. We have learned in a baraita, 'One who tears a thing while in

a rage or through grief, or because of mourning for the dead is culpable, and, although he desecrates the Sabbath, the duty of tearing is fulfilled.' This presents no difficulties; the baraita treats of the case of a man who tore his garments at the death of one on whose account it was his duty to tear his garment, while the Mishnah treats of the case of a man who did not do so for duty's sake but because of the death of a stranger and this not being his duty he merely spoiled his garment.<sup>5</sup> This would seem to indicate that garments should not be torn on the Sabbath even for the nearest of kin.

As is seen above, the rending was obligatory upon all who were present at the death. Others who were not present and who do not come under the special categories, which shall be discussed immediately, may tear their garments, but this is not obligatory.<sup>6</sup> It is obligatory for children to rend their garments for their parents;<sup>7</sup> a wife for her husband;<sup>8</sup> brothers and sisters for each other;<sup>9</sup> a father for his children;<sup>10</sup> a son-in-law for his parents-in-law.<sup>11</sup> Then we find the statements that it is obligatory for all relatives;<sup>12</sup> for a scholar;<sup>13</sup> for a teacher;<sup>14</sup> for a Nasi and Ab Beth Din and for a righteous man.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup>

From the above categories women and minors are  
not exempt, <sup>17</sup> However, if a sick person has a death in his  
family we learn that he must not be informed of the fact,  
for it might cause him distress, and no rending is done in  
his presence. <sup>18</sup> Only the High Priest may at no time rend  
his garments and should he do so he is liable to stripes. <sup>19</sup>  
For a suicide garments may not be torn. <sup>20</sup>  
<sup>21</sup>

Keriah is to be performed while standing. <sup>23</sup> For  
all dead, with the exception of parents, the rent could  
be made with an instrument, however, in the latter case  
it had to be manually made. <sup>23</sup> Over relatives it was per-  
missable to tear while indoors; for parents, however, it  
had to be performed on the outside. <sup>24</sup>

There are varying opinions as to the length of  
the tear. The simplest of these is that one tore one span  
for all dead except in the case of the parent. <sup>25</sup> Othe tra-  
ditions indicate that one tore as far as the navel while  
others say as far as the breast. <sup>26</sup> The navel seems to be  
the limit for tearing. <sup>27</sup> An even more confusing tradition  
arises in R. Judah's discussion of additional rendings for  
additional deaths within the mourning period. He declares  
that the original tear is three fingers long and the ad-  
ditional as much as one desires. R. Meir is of the opin-

ion that the original rend is one span<sup>28</sup> and the additional three fingers. To add to the confusion, however, we find the tradition which declares that one makes one rend<sup>29</sup> whether there be one death or more.

The whole problem is further complicated because we are not sure of the exact nature or purpose of the additional rendings. It may be that they apply only in the case of additional deaths or they may be extra displays of grief over the requirement. Then, too, judging from the fact that statements concerning the original and additional rendings date from the times of R. Meir and R. Judah, such rendings may represent an early stage in the development of Keriah. All this is merely conjectural.

As to the garments which are to be torn, the same variety of traditions exists. One tradition has it that for all dead the upper garment alone need be torn while for parents all garments, including the underwear, must<sup>30</sup> be torn. R. Benjamin, in the name of R. Akiba, makes the latter obligatory in all cases.<sup>31</sup> Women, according to one tradition, rend the under garment, turn it around and<sup>32</sup> rend the upper garment. Another tradition states that

a woman rends the upper garment first, reverses it and<sup>33</sup>  
then rends the lower.

Concerning the hem of the neck, we find two traditions. One makes the tearing of the hem optional except in the case of parents.<sup>34</sup> Another states categorically that if one does not rend the hem it is not a true<sup>35</sup> rending.

When it is necessary for children to make a<sup>36</sup>  
rent this ~~severing~~ is performed by other. However, a bar-  
aitha is reported to the effect that "the garments of a  
minor who is a mourner are rent for the purpose of moving  
others to mourn."<sup>37</sup>

M. Jastrow, Jr., in his article, "The Tearing  
of Garments as a Symbol of Mourning, with Especial Ref-  
erence to the Customs of the Ancient Hebrews,"<sup>38</sup> propounds  
the thesis "that there exists a general tendency in reli-  
gious observances to revert to (or, as we might also put  
it, to retain) the ways and manners of an earlier age.  
That in the process some customs involving a return to  
earlier fashions should have survived without change, while  
in others modifications were introduced, is perfectly nat-  
ural." Baring the feet might be retained, as this would



not be considered indecent; however, a compromise might be made which permitted the wearing of a stocking. However, the custom of going about naked during religious services "would soon yield to compromises suggested by the growing sense of decency, and would only be resorted to on extraordinary occasions." The first stage in this development was the wearing of a loin cloth at a time when a more elaborate type of dress was being worn.

Later, when even more elaborate clothing was worn, i.e. upper and lower garments, it became the custom to bear oneself to the waise. After a time, the custom of "tearing off" the garment, as is implied in the verb ṣṛṭ, became a "tearing" or a rent in the garment.

We do not have the necessary background in primitive religions to evaluate this thesis. However, it does seem probable that the fear of evil demons, etc. might be offered also as a reason for this custom. This we shall discuss at length in our conclusions.

Baring the Shoulder

~~It appears that~~ at one time the custom obtained of bearing the shoulder at the death of a prominent person.<sup>39</sup>

It then appears that this custom was practised for all who died, for the law was made that "one is only obliged to bare his arm for his father and mother and not for all his relatives. However, if he does not wish to, he need not. It happened that when the death of R. Akiba's father occurred, he did not bare his arm, though others did."<sup>40</sup>

Seemingly contradictory is the statement then that "All bear their arms for a פֶּסַח and a שְׁמִינִי. For a פֶּסַח that dies all bare their right arm, for the יָמֵי אֲזַיָּהוּ , the left, for the יָמֵי דָּוִד both."<sup>41</sup>

In all probability we have here a development of the custom which runs something like this. At first, the shoulder was bared for all deceased, then only for the nearest of kin and for special dignitaries, and then<sup>42</sup> became a voluntary matter as is evidenced from the fact that, although Akiba did not perform this ceremony for his father, he did so in honor of R. Eliezer.<sup>43</sup>

Jastrow summarizes his thesis in regard to this custom and also Keriah as follows:

"The custom, therefore, of going naked as a sign of grief -- the nakedness representing the return to older habits at a time when one garment constituted the entire outfit -- assumed modifications in two directions: (1) on the one hand, with a continuation of the general tendency to have religious customs represent older fashions, the mourning garb underwent modifications corresponding in each case to a fashion that belonged to the past (such as removing the upper garment when it was customary to wear two) and (2) on the other hand, the survival of the recollection that nakedness was once a part of religious rites led, with a neglect of reason underlying the custom, to modifications involving the baring of a part of the body instead of the whole as a concession rendered necessary by a more sensitive age -- and perhaps other factors were involved. As the original tearing off of garments degenerated into a purely symbolical tear, so the custom of going naked in days of mourning all but disappears, the baring of the shoulder representing a purely symbolical act of what was once fraught with deep significance."

Another custom closely associated with Keriah  
and baring the shoulder is the practice of going bare-  
44  
footed during the mourning period and the same explanation  
would hold true.

Special Rules Regarding the Onen

A. Bathing, anointing, etc.

The Talmud says that an Onen is forbidden to bathe because of what is written (II Samuel 14.2): "And Joab sent to Tekoa, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her: 'I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel, I pray thee, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that a long time mourned for the dead.'<sup>45</sup>" On the basis of this same verse he is not permitted to anoint himself with oil or to wash his clothes.<sup>46</sup> However, it is reported that when the wife of R. Gamliel died, he washed, excusing himself by saying that he was delicate.<sup>47</sup> The clearest statement of the law regarding both washing and anointing is "a mourner is not allowed to bathe his entire body either in warm or in cold water during the whole week of mourning, but as to face, hands, and feet he is forbidden to wash them in cold water; he is not allowed to anoint his body to any extent whatever, but if he intends only to use the oil in order to remove dirt, he may do so."<sup>48</sup>



To apply the thesis of Jastrow mentioned above we might say that the reason for not washing, etc. is part of the tendency to revert to a more primitive type of life and that at a time when decency demanded, the custom was modified, <sup>as</sup> /was done by R. Gamliel or as is reflected in the quotation from Taanith 13b.

Apparently for the same reason it was also for-  
bidden for the mourner to cut his hair and pare his nails. <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup>

B. Ritualistic prohibitions in re: Onen.

The Onen is not allowed to recite the Shema, the Tefilla, or to put on Tefillin. He is also not allowed <sup>52</sup> to study Bible or Talmud.

We can find no explanation of these customs unless it be that under the conditions of mourning the mourner could not give the proper attention to these various ceremonies and thus the execution of them would be a mockery.

It is also forbidden for the Onen to have sexual intercourse. <sup>53</sup> This is probably due to the occasion, which, because of its mournful character, would make such an action out of place, if not impossible.

Rows

After the Onen has buried his dead and upon leaving the grave, he passes between rows of people who have accompanied the funeral cortege. It appears as though there were two rows, an inner and an outer.<sup>54</sup> It is reported that R. Judah differentiates between two rows, i.e. those who are there because they are mourning the deceased, and those who have come "ליון פה".<sup>54</sup> It is even possible to have only one row and it is past this row,<sup>55</sup> or through the rows, that the Onen passes. The Talmud<sup>56</sup> reports "that the mourners stand, while the people pass by." And, also, "There is a <sup>a</sup>beraitha: formerly the mourners used to stand still while the people passed by. But there were two families in Jerusalem who contended with each other, each maintaining, 'We shall pass first.' So the Rabbis established the rule that the public should remain standing and the mourners pass by. Rammi bar Abba said: R. Jose restored the earlier custom in Sepphoris, that the mourners should stand still and the public pass by."

The connection between ליון פה and ליון פה is not quite clear for it appears that while returning from a funeral the escort of the cortege

stopped at certain places and stood up and sat down seven times during which period consolation, etc. was offered the mourners. The signal to stop was given as follows: "Take your places, dear friends," and the signal for renewing the march was the formula: "Rise, dear friends!"<sup>57</sup>

At the time the line was formed, consolation was offered the mourners. This is called פ'סלע וינדל<sup>58</sup>, which is mentioned as being the one word וינדל. This custom is not to be confused with the אגדה פ'סלע, which is often mentioned in the same phrase as פ'סלע וינדל, and which is the benediction made at meals at which the mourner is present.<sup>59</sup> Ten persons are needed for this ceremony of consolation, excluding the <sup>60</sup> Onenim.

While the mourner is going from the grave to the rows, if he has time to say the Shema before reaching the rows,<sup>61</sup> he should do so. Behind this custom there probably lies the belief that the spirit of the deceased is apt to follow the mourners from the grave and do them harm. While the rows would act as a protection due to the fact that the mourner is completely surrounded by others, he is particularly vulnerable for that space between <sup>✓</sup>grave and <sup>~</sup>now,

therefore the Shema would act as a talisman.

For slaves, rows are not formed, nor are the  
P' S' 214 1410JA <sup>62</sup> said. For a child that <sup>63</sup>  
died before it was thirty days old no row is formed. How-  
ever, rows are formed for suicides. <sup>64</sup> The belief probably  
was that the connection between slave and master was not  
close enough for the spirit of the deceased slave to do  
harm to the master, while along the same lines, we might ex-  
plain the custom regarding babies. The suicide's spirit,  
however, could do ~~no~~ harm to relatives, etc.

There remains but one more custom to be mentioned  
in connection with the discussion on Rows and that is when  
the mourner leaves the graves he wraps his head; when he  
approaches the rows he uncovers his head and, upon leaving  
the rows, again he covers his head and keeps it covered  
for the rest of the period and, after returning home -- only  
uncovering it when people come to offer condolence. <sup>65</sup>

This probably arises from the fact states before  
that, while alone, the mourner is in particular danger and  
therefore he covers his head -- ostrich-like -- to hide  
his identity, as it were.

Food Eaten by Onen

Two different views exist as to the food which an Onen was allowed to eat. One tradition seems to infer<sup>66</sup> that the Onen must fast. While the most popular custom was to forbid the eating of meat and the drinking of wine. "I take it upon me that I shall not eat meat and that I shall not drink wine, as on the day that my father died, or, as on the day that so and so was killed."<sup>67</sup> It is possible that the passages mentioned above which seem to indicate a complete fast are only speaking in general terms and interprets fast as meaning abstaining from meat and wine.

If the Onen happens to be a High Priest he may perform the sacrifice but may not eat of it.

During this period the Onen was ordered to eat in the house of a neighbor. Should this be impossible he was ordered to eat in another room besides that in which the corpse lay, and, in the event that he did not have another room in the house he was to hang a curtain between<sup>68</sup> himself and the corpse.

The motive for this custom is probably the same as the motive underlying all the previous legislation



which makes the mourner appear desolate. This <sup>will</sup> ~~shall~~ be  
discussed in our conclusion.

Turning Down Beds

Immediately after death has taken place, all the beds in the house are overturned and the mourner then sleeps on the floor or on the overturned <sup>69</sup>bed. This fits in with the theory of Jastrow concerning that reversion to a more primitive way of life. There is also a possibility that this is part of the procedure of making the mourner as destitute as possible as has been mentioned before.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Yoreh Deah, Hilcoth Keriah 240.1.
2. Maseches Semakoth 9.1; Moed Katan 25a, 26b; Sabbath 105b.
3. Moed Katan, 26b; M.S. 9.16.
4. Moed Katan 24b-25a.
5. Sabbath 105b.
6. M.S. 9.1.
7. M.S. 9.5, 6, 7, 16, 17; Moed Katan 22b, 26a-26b.
8. Yebamoth 15.1.
9. Moed Katan 26b.7.
10. Ibid.; M.S. 9.17.
11. Moed Katan 26b.
12. Moed Katan 22b, M.S. 9.1, 16.
13. M.S. 9.1, 8.8, 9; Moed Katan 24b.
14. Moed Katan 24b, 26a; Sanhedrin 60a.
15. Moed Katan 26a.
16. Moed Katan 24b.
17. M.S. 9.7; Moed Katan 22b.
18. Moed Katan 26b, 24b-24b.
19. Moed Katan 26b.
20. M.S., 4.12.
21. M.S. 2.1.
22. Moed Katan 20b-21a.
23. M.S. 9.4; Moed Katan 22b.
24. Moed Katan 22b.

25. Moed Katan 22b.
26. Ibid., 26b.
27. M.S. 9.6, 17.
28. Moed Katan 26b.
29. M.S., 9.17.
30. M.S., 9.7; Moed Katan 22b.
31. M.S. 9.6.
32. Moed Katan 22b.
33. M.S. 9.7.
34. Moed Katan 22b; M.S. 9.6.
35. Ibid., 22b.
36. M.S. 9.6.
37. Moed Katan 14a.
38. Journal, American Oriental Society, XX:1, p. 130-150.
39. Baba Kama 17a.
40. M.S. 9.3.
41. Ibid., 9.2.
42. Moed Katan 24b; Jer. Moed Katan 83b.
43. Sanhedrin 68a.
44. Taanith 13a, 30a; Moed Katan 15b.
45. Moed Katan 15b; see also Taanith 13a, 30a.
46. Moed Katan 15a.
47. Berachoth 2.6.
48. Taanith 13b.
49. Moed Katan 14a,b: 8b and Taanith 13a.
50. Moed Katan 17b.
51. Berachoth 3.1; Moed Katan 15a.

52. Moed Katan 21a, 15a.

53. Ibid., 15b.

54. Berachoth 3.2; M.S. 10.6, 7.

55. M.S. 10.7. As has been mentioned, the term 3123, as it is used in connection with our subject will be dealt with in our conclusions.

56. Ibid.

57. Sanhedrin 19a.

57. Baba Bathra 100b.

58. Sanhedrin 19a.

59. Ketuboth 8b.

60. Megillah 4.3.

61. Berachoth 3.2.

62. Ibid. 16b.

63. M.S. 3.2.

64. Ibid. 2.1.

65. M.S. 10.9; Moed Katan 15a.

66. Taanith 13a, 30a.

67. Shevuoth 20b.

68. Moed Katan 23b.

69. Ibid. 15a-15b.



CONCLUSIONS

### Conclusion

During the Talmudic period it was believed that death resulted when the angel of death separated the soul from the body.<sup>1</sup> The soul was taken from the body and continued to exist in a separate sphere; however, for a short period after death the soul remained in the vicinity of the body. There are varying reports concerning the length of this period.<sup>2</sup> After this period, the soul took up residence in its permanent abode. For the righteous this meant that their souls dwelt near the throne of God, while no such reward awaited the wicked.<sup>3</sup> All souls, however,<sup>4</sup> often returned to their burial places.

With this in mind let us now turn to a discussion of three motifs which occur constantly, sometimes together, and sometimes separately, in the traditions of this period. The first deals with the relationship between funeral customs and the established religious practices of the time. It is strange to note that at this time when the great prayers of the liturgy were developing there appears in the Talmud no prayer to be recited at a funeral. Further, it seems that the disposal of the body was essential a perusal and civic duty rather than a religious rite.

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The חנן who was the representative of the official religion was prohibited by his priestly taboos from even approaching the body; and so this last rite was performed out of respect and love for the deceased by his family and those who were close to him during his life time. The civic aspect is exemplified in the various rules which have been discussed in the body of the thesis, concerning attendance at funerals. The great revolution of Rabban Gamliel in the direction of the simplification of funeral ceremonies was a civil rather than a religious reform; for, underlying this action was the problem, faced by the civil authorities, of bodies abandoned because the relatives could not afford to keep up with the accepted standards. Whatever ethical motives may have been at work were secondary to this civic responsibility. The only thing which approaches a religious act is the funeral oration with which we have dealt above and which, strictly speaking, was recited in honor of the dead as a consolation for the living.

The second leading motif arose out of the natural feelings of the living to deal kindly with the remains of one who had been close during life. This motif is more implicit than explicit. In reading through numerous passages in the Talmud dealing with funeral, one senses a certain nicety of feeling, a certain display of deep human affection toward the deceased and his mourners.

Throughout, there is a recurrent reference to the fact that something is done because of 3122 per. And one is tempted to seize upon this phrase and draw from it various ethical conclusions. However, the suspicion enter one's mind that at the basis of this honor shown to the dead, there may be that concept which Frazer terms "the fear of the dead," and which he finds at work in all societies.

This brings us to the third motif which, to use Frazer's terminology, we might term the "Fear of the dead." It is only natural that certain superstitions should arise around the problem or phenomenon of death and that these should lead to superstitious practices and observances.

The ghosts of the deceased roamed about and were apt to injure man. The mourner was particularly subject to their evil devices and he was spoken of as being<sup>5</sup> haunted by demons. At night the ghosts were particularly active and therefore it was considered unwise for a man to spend a night in a cemetery.<sup>6</sup> In commenting on the verse from Isaiah (36.14). "The Rephaim shall not rise," the comment is made: "All their souls become winds,

accursed, injuring the sons of men." <sup>7</sup> Exactly how these spirits injure is never mentioned explicitly, but the mourner was especially vulnerable to their attacks, particularly immediately before and after the funeral. <sup>8</sup>

With this in mind many of the customs can be explained. In the light of this we can offer a possible explanation for closing the eyes of the corpse. Fearing that the ghost of the departed might attempt to follow the party back from the cemetery the eyes of the corpse were closed so that it would not know where it was being taken and consequently could not find its way back. The reason for closing the mouth is different, however. In this latter case the underlying cause <sup>is</sup> if that corpses often regurgitate and to prevent this the jaws were tied shut.

This theory, however, does apply to the cutting of the hair on the body of the deceased. Frazer gives examples of the hair being conceived as the lodging place of the soul. <sup>9</sup> Therefore, because of the fear that the spirit of the departed might stay in the hair -- it was cut.

The insistence that as many people as possible take



part in the funeral procession may also be due to this fear of the spirits. This belief being, in this instance, that there is safety in numbers. Similarly the practice of wailing, lamenting and so forth, was no doubt an attempt either to frighten or confuse the demons.

The involved problem of הקריאה may be dealt with in this same light although such treatment must remain for the present hypothetical: Is it not possible that the mourner performed the הקריאה ceremony and remained in an unkempt condition in order to confuse and bewilder the spirit by appearing in a change and this unrecognizable state? Or, may it not be, that by appearing in a defected and desolate condition one would the pity of the spirit and thus warded off any unfriendly acts?

We run the danger, in drawing conclusions from the material investigated, of oversimplifying. It is certain that each of the customs dealt with had its source, not in any one phase of the primitive mind, but drew from a number of varied reactions of individuals and communities to the phenomenon of death.

Notes on Conclusions

1. Ber. 51a.
2. Sabbath 151b.
3. Sabbath 152b.
4. Sabbath 15ab.
5. Berachoth 54b.
6. Middah 17a; Sanhedrin 65b.
7. Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, page 253, ed. Friedlander.
8. Moed Katan 27b.
9. Frazer, "Taboo and Perils of the Soul," p. 258-287.