

## *Visiting the Cemetery: Suggested Readings*



*This booklet provides prayers, readings, rituals and reflections you may choose to use when visiting the grave of a loved one.*

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## *How to Plan a Visit to a Cemetery*

The purpose of a visit to a cemetery is twofold. The first reason is to remember the life of someone who we loved and inspired us. Visiting the place where they are buried provides us a place and a time to reflect on the meaning of their lives. The second dimension is often overlooked. Going to a cemetery is intended to remind us of our own mortality. We are meant to reflect upon the passage of time and ask ourselves if we are living a life of value and meaning to the fullest extent. Jewish prayers therefore reflect both of these aspects.

*It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. -Ecclesiastes*

In the following pages, we will suggest ways you can frame your own visit, either alone or with family or friends. You may choose to use some of these materials for an unveiling as well. The materials are both traditional as well as contemporary, and we encourage you to choose those which you feel speaks to you.

Here is a suggested structure. You may adapt it according to your needs:

- 1) Introductory prayer
- 2) Suggested Psalms and meditations
- 3) Words about the deceased
- 4) Lighting yahrzeit Candle
- 5) Recitation of El Maleh Rachamim
- 6) Prayer upon leaving cemetery
- 7) Giving Tzedakah

## Introductory Prayers

### Traditional Verses

וְנַחֵם יְיָ יִקְוָה תַּמִּיד וְהַשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחֲצוּחוֹת נַפְשְׁךָ וְעֲצַמְתֶּיךָ יַחְלִיץ וְהָיִיתָ כְּגֹן רָוָה וּכְמוֹצָא מַיִם

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּזְבוּ מִיָּמָיו:

וְנִבְנוּ מִמֶּךָ חֲרֻבוֹת עוֹלָם מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר־דּוֹר תִּקְוָמָם וְלִקְרָא לְךָ גֹּדֶר פָּרֶץ מְשֻׁבֵּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשָׁכָה

ת:

And the Lord will always guide you,  
and satisfy your soul in scorched places,  
and resurrect your bones;  
And you will be like a watered garden,  
and like a spring of waters that never fail.  
From you [i.e., your good deeds] will rebuild  
the ancient ruins;  
The generations-old foundations  
you will reestablish;  
They will call you "the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of the ways of civilization."

*-Isaiah 58: 11-12*

For both life and death are aspects of a greater mystery, the mystery of being, the mystery of creation. Over and above the preciousness of particular existence stands the marvel of its being related to the infinite mystery of being or creation.

Death, then, is not simply man's coming to an end.  
It is also entering a beginning.

*-Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*

### Suggested Introductory Reading

We are gathered here to remember \_\_\_\_\_. We have come to reflect on his/her life. A chord has been broken, but we affirm that God, the source of all life and existence will continue to care for \_\_\_\_\_. Through our remembrance today and our good deeds, we ensure that his/her spirit continues to be an animating and important force in our lives.

In being here, we recognize the fleeting nature of our own lives, and at the same time we are reminded of the sacred nature of every moment. Our lives embody the great contradiction described by the Psalmist:

לְמַנְצָחַ עַל־הַגִּתִּית מְזֻמּוֹר לְדָוִד: יְקֹנֶק אֲדֹנֵינוּ מֶה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּנָּה הוֹדֶךְ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם:  
ס: מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקִים יִסְדָּתְךָ עַד לְמַעַן צוֹרְרֶיךָ לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם: כִּי־אֲרָאָה שְׁמִיךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבֵּעַ  
תִּיר יָרֵחַ וְכוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנְנָתָה: מֶה־אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבְנ־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ:  
וְתִחַסְרָהוּ מַעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכְבוֹד וְהֹדָר תַּעֲטֹרָהוּ: תִּמְשִׁילֵהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ כֹּל שְׁתָּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו: צִנָּה וְ  
אֲלֵפִים כָּלָם וְגַם בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי: צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם וְדָגֵי הַיָּם עֹבְרֵי אֲרָחוֹת וְיָמִים: יְקֹנֶק אֲדֹנֵינוּ מֶה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ  
בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

For the leader; on the *gittith*. A psalm of David.

O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name throughout the earth, You who have covered the heavens with Your splendor!

From the mouths of infants and sucklings You have founded strength on account of Your foes, to put an end to enemy and avenger.

When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place,

What is man that You have been mindful of him mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine, (or, "the angels") and adorned him with glory and majesty;

You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet,

Sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

- Psalm 8

## *Suggested Psalms and Meditations*

### **Psalm 23**

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְקֹנֶה רָעִי לֹא אֲחֻסֶּר: בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מֵי מִנְחֹת וְנִהְלֵנִי: נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּב־  
בִּי וְנִחְיֶה בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לִמְעַן שְׁמוֹ: גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי  
אֲתָה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הֵמָּה וְנִחְמְנִי: תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שִׁלְחֹן נֶגֶד צָרְרִי דֹשַׁנָּת  
בְּשִׁמְן רֹאשִׁי כֹסֵי רוּחַ: אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְפּוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית יְקֹנֶה  
לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:

The Lord is my shepherd;  
I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me to water in places of repose;  
He renews my life;  
He guides me in right paths as befits His name.  
Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness,  
I fear no harm, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.  
You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil; my drink is abundant.  
Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me  
all the days of my life,  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
for many long years.

The days of our years are threescore years  
and ten, or even by reason of strength  
fourscore years; yet is their pride but travail  
and vanity; for it is speedily gone, and we  
fly away...So teach us to number our days,  
that we may get us a heart of wisdom.

*Psalm 90*

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### **We Remember Them**

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember them.

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.

In the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.

In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of the summer, we remember them.

In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.

In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.

When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.

So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.

*- Rabbi Jack Riemer and Rabbi Sylvan D. Kamens*

### **Life after Death**

These things I know:

How the living go on living  
and how the dead go on living with them  
so that in a forest

even a dead tree casts a shadow

and the leaves fall one by one

and the branches break in the wind

and the bark peels off slowly

and the trunk cracks

and the rain seeps in through the cracks

and the trunk falls to the ground

and the moss covers it

and in the spring the rabbits find it

and build their nest

inside the dead tree

so that nothing is wasted in nature

or in love.

*-Laura Gilpin*

### **A Reflection on Friendship and Companionship**

*Inscription from a tombstone written by R. Yehudah Ha-Levi (1080-1141); Poem upon Death of poet Moshe Ibn Ezra. We suggest you take a line or two from this poem that inspires you, and relate it to your loved one.*

Do these tears know who made them fall?  
Do these hearts know who made them recoil?  
They recoiled when their shining light sank into the earth,  
and the clods of earth knew not what they hold.  
They hold a princely man,  
a good man, blameless, upright,  
a God-fearing man, discreet and wise.  
Since you are gone, my friend, I seek in vain for peace;  
At your leave-taking, my heart joined you, to share your  
wanderings.  
Were it not that love may hope for the day of your return  
the day of parting had been unto me, the day of death.  
O Light of the West, come back unto thy West,  
Be again a seal on every heart, a signet on every arm!  
Behold, the mountains that divide us will testify  
That my tears are more abundant upon them than the rains of  
heaven...

### **Everyone Has A Name- Zelda**

*Translated from Hebrew by Marcia Lee Falk*

Each of us has a name	given by our enemies
given by God	and given by our love
and given by our parents	Each of us has a name
Each of us has a name	given by our celebrations
given by our stature and our	and given by our work
smile	Each of us has a name
and given by what we wear	given by the seasons
Each of us has a name	and given by our blindness
given by the mountains	Each of us has a name
and given by our walls	given by the sea
Each of us has a name	and given by
given by the stars	our death.
and given by our neighbors	
Each of us has a name	
given by our sins	
and given by our longing	
Each of us has a name	

## Psalm 33: A Psalm of Gratitude and of God's Enduring Kindness

(א) רִנְנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּיהוָה לֵישָׁרִים נֶאֱמָה תְהִלָּה: (ב) הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה בְּכִנּוֹר בְּנֶגֶב  
עֶשׂוֹר זָמְרוּ לוֹ: (ג) שִׁירֵי לֹא שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ הֵיטִיבוּ נָגֶן בְּתוֹרָעָה: (ד) כִּי־יִשָּׁר  
דְּבַר־יְהוָה וְכָל־מַעֲשָׂהוּ בִּאֱמוּנָה: (ה) אֱהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט חֶסֶד יְהוָה מִלֵּאָה  
הָאָרֶץ: (ו) בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נִעֲשׂוּ וּבְרוּחַ יְהוָה כָּל־צִבְאָם: (ז) כִּנֹּס בְּנֶד מִי  
הַיָּם נָתַן בְּאֶצְרוֹת תְּהוֹמוֹת: (ח) יִירָאוּ מִיְהוָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ מִמֶּנּוּ יִגְדּוּ כָל־יוֹשְׁבֵי  
תֵּבֶל: (ט) כִּי הוּא אֱמַר וַיְהִי הוּא־צִוָּה וַיַּעֲמֵד: (י) יְהוָה הַפִּיר עֲצֵת־גּוֹיִם הִנֵּיא  
מַחֲשָׁבוֹת עַמִּים: (יא) עֲצַת יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תַּעֲמֵד מַחֲשָׁבוֹת לִבּוֹ לְדֹר וָדֹר: (יב)  
אֲשֶׁר־יִגְדּוּ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הָעַם אֲבָרָה לְנַחֲלָה לוֹ: (יג) מִשְׁמִיִּם הֵבִיט  
יְהוָה וַיֵּרָא אֶת־כָּל־בְּנֵי הָאָדָם: (יד) מִמִּכּוֹן־שָׁבָתוֹ הִשְׁגִּיחַ אֶל־כָּל־יוֹשְׁבֵי  
הָאָרֶץ: (טו) הֵיטֵר יַחַד לֵבָם הִמְבִּין אֶל־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם: (טז) אֵין־הֶמְלֵךְ נוֹשָׁע  
בְּרֶב־חַיִּל גָּבוֹר לֹא־יִנָּצֵל בְּרֶב־כֹּחַ: (יז) שֶׁקֶר הִסּוֹס לְתִשְׁוָעָה וּבְרֶב חַיִּלוֹ לֹא  
יִמְלֹט: (יח) הִנֵּה עֵיִן יְהוָה אֶל־יִרְאָיו לְמַיְחִלִּים לְחִסְדּוֹ: (יט) לְהַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת  
נַפְשָׁם וּלְחַיּוֹתָם בְּרָעַב: (כ) גִּפְשָׁנוּ חֲכִתָּה לַיהוָה עֲזָרְנוּ וּמִגִּנְנוּ הוּא: (כא)  
כִּי־בֹ יִשְׁמַח לִבְנוֹ כִּי בָשָׂם קִדְּשׁוֹ בְּטוֹחָנוּ: (כב) יְהִי־חֲסִידְךָ יְהוָה עָלֵינוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר  
יִתְּלֵנוּ לָךְ:

Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous, praise is comely for the upright.

Give thanks unto the Lord with harp, sing praises unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings.

Sing unto Him a new song; play skillfully amid shouts of joy.

For the word of the Lord is upright; and all His work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord.

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

He gathered the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it stood.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; He makes the thoughts of the peoples to be of no effect.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of His



heart to all generations.

Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord; the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance.

The Lord looks from heaven; He beholds all the sons of men; From the place of His habitation He looks intently upon all the inhabitants of the earth;

He that fashioned the hearts of them all, that considers all their doings.

A king is not saved by the multitude of a host; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength.

A horse is a vain thing for safety; neither doth it afford escape by its great strength.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is toward them that fear Him, toward them that wait for His mercy;

To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

Our soul hath waited for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.

For in Him doth our heart rejoice, because we have trusted in His holy name.

Let Thy mercy, O the Lord, be upon us, according as we have waited for Thee.

### *Words of Praise about the Deceased*

At this point it is proper to speak words of praise and reminisce about our beloved. Everyone is encouraged to express themselves, including children. It is important to give permission to those present to express how they feel in their own words. Here are a few questions you might want to ask those present.

- What were the three gifts that you received from your beloved?
- How are you different for the good because you knew this person?
- What stories stand out which express something significant about this person?
- If you could tell them something now, what would you say?
- What Biblical verse or figure are you reminded of when you speak of your loved one?

## *Lighting the Yahrzeit Candle*

*The light of the candle represents the soul of a human being, which according to Jewish tradition is immortal. The following is a suggested litany.*

Reader: *Ner Hashem Nishmat Adam* – The candle of God is the soul of a person (Proverb 20:27). As we light this candle, I remember my loved one, who was a source of light

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: I gaze into the heart of the flame, and try to recapture the essence of my beloved. My beloved was my spouse, my parent, my child or my friend. I feel these bonds stronger today than ever before.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: I remember the light, the joy, the comfort, the support, the smiles and the gentle touch of my loved one. As I gaze into the essence of the flame, I can hear the voice of my loved one.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: I remember that just as this flame brings warmth and illumination during this long dark night I must travel, I hope to feel the soul of my beloved in ways large and small, reminding me that I am not alone.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: I remember that although our loved one no longer has a body, his or her spirit is eternal. As I gaze into the flame, I experience the loss, but also the consolation in the knowledge that my beloved will endure.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: I realize that my beloved is like this flame, reaching upwards and heavenward, searching and seeking its source.

I feel the responsibility today of carrying the light of my loved one with me, sharing it with all. In this way too, the soul of my loved one will endure the inexorable passage of time.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: In my dark places, I will remember this candle, this light, and I will be graced with hope. I will carry the light of my loved one with me throughout my life.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

Reader: In lighting this candle, I pray that God will accompany me with His light, blessing me with the knowledge that in spite of the pain I feel, I feel God's hand on my shoulder, as I travel the road towards wholeness and renewal. I pray that I feel God's comforting light today and every day of my life.

Response: *The Candle of God is the Soul of a Person*

-Rabbi Frederick L Klein

## *El Maleh Rachamim*

This prayer is recited at funerals, Jewish holidays, and other occasions when we want to remember our loved ones. (Note the Hebrew is in the masculine form.)

אל מלא רחמים שוכן במרומים, המצא מנוחה נכונה על כנפי השכינה במעלות  
קדושים וטהורים כזוהר הרקיע מזהירים את נשמת פלוני בן פלוני שְהֵלַךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ,  
בְּעֶבֶר שְׁנָדְבוּ אֶדְקָה בְּעַד הַזְכָּרַת נִשְׁמָתוֹ, לְכֵן בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים יִסְתַּיְרָהוּ בְּסִתְרֵי כְנָפָיו  
לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצָּר בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ, ה' הוּא נִחְלָתוֹ  
וְיִנּוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן

God filled with mercy, dwelling in the heaven's heights, bring proper rest beneath the wings of your presence, amid the ranks of the holy and the pure, illuminating like the brilliance of the skies to \_\_\_\_\_ [son/daughter] of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ who has gone to his/her eternal place of rest. May You who are the source of mercy shelter him/her beneath your wings eternally, And bind his/her soul among the living, that he/she may rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

## *Departing Cemetery*

As one leaves the cemetery, it is customary to place a stone on the grave. This demonstrates the fact that the person has been visited. As ancient graves were often simply piles of stones, to place a stone is to tend to the gravesite.

Another interesting custom practiced by some is to detach some grass and throw it behind one's back, saying "Remember God, we are but dust of the earth."

*The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
the wind blows over it and it is gone*

*-Psalm 103:15*

## *Giving Tzedakah (charity)*

In Jewish tradition, prayer is a prelude to action, and therefore it is an accepted custom to give *tzedakah* in memory of a loved one. Through the acts of kindness and good deeds, the soul of the loved one is elevated.

*May the memory of your loved ones be a blessing to you and  
to all whom they touched.*