

NEW RITUALS FOR NEW LIFE STAGES

*A SELECTION OF NEW RITUALS AND PRAYERS CREATED TO RESPOND TO
NEW LIFE SITUATIONS ENCOUNTERED AS A RESULT OF OUR INCREASING
LONGEVITY*

Jewish
Sacred
Aging®



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* "To Honor and Respect" (URJ Press)

** "Where Healing Resides" (CCAR Press)

+ "R'fuat Ha Nefesh: Caring for the Soul" (URJ Press)

++ CCAR Journal: Summer 2012

+++ KULANU. (URJ Press)

Creating New Rituals for Our Extended Life Span

Simchat Chochmah/The Blessing of Wisdom⁴

River of light and truth, You have sustained me these many years and brought me to this place in my life's journey. Let me look out with wisdom, from the high ground of my years and experiences, over the terrain of my life. Let me gaze out toward the past and the future with a heightened sense of Your presence as my Guide. Let me see that growth is not reserved for any one season, and that love and fulfillment are not the exclusive provinces of the young.

As today I celebrate my life's continued unfolding, I am awestruck by the wonder of my being. And so I pray that kindness and compassion may be on my lips, that strength and courage may be with me in my comings and my goings, and that I may continue to learn from and to teach those dear to me.

O God my Creator, as You are the first and the last, may my life ever be a song of praise to You.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁנָתָן מִחֲכָמָתוֹ לְבָשָׁר וָדָם.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,
shenatan meichochmato l'vasar vadami.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You give
of Your wisdom to flesh and blood.

Amen.

A Ritual for Leaving a Family Home
By Michael Howald,

Today, we close one chapter of our lives and begin another.
Every life of accomplishment contains many such passages
And our tradition marks these transitions with ritual and prayer.
When students complete a book of the Talmud
They often linger and celebrate the fulfillment of their efforts
In a lifetime filled with many chapters and completions.
Like them, we linger and celebrate all we received in this house
As we close one chapter of our lives and begin another.

We remember with gratitude the many blessings
We enjoyed under the shelter of this roof.
In this home, we built a haven from the outside world
Its walls protected us from the elements
Its light drove away the darkness that crouched at night
Its warmth nurtured our love and gave us proof against the cold.
We remember with gratitude these many blessings.

We celebrate with joy the family we built upon this foundation.
Into this home, we poured our dreams and efforts
We shared our love and filled these rooms with youthful laughter
And an argument or two along the way.
We saw our children's feet slowly gain their footing
As they learned, all too quickly, to call another place their home.
Across these floors we walked and ran and danced in equal measure
We celebrate with joy the family we built upon this foundation.

We honor with affection all those who crossed this threshold with us
From the time we first turned the key in the lock until today
Through these doors we brought our children
And welcomed our friends and family.
With those who crossed this doorway
We celebrated our triumphs and joys and shared our sorrows and fears.
With them, we marked the holidays and the milestones of our lives
They helped make this house our home.
We honor with affection all those who crossed this threshold with us.

Today, we close one chapter of our lives and begin another.
May it be your will, Adonai our God, that just as you have helped us
Complete the chapter inscribed in walls, foundation and gates of this home
That you will help us to begin a new chapter in a new home.
When Jacob journeyed from Gilead, the angels of God encountered him.
When he saw them, Jacob said: "This is God's camp."

By leaving one home and making another we know do not leave God.
As we begin a new chapter of our lives,
We pray that our new home will provide us with the all the fulfillment
We enjoyed under the shelter of this roof and upon this foundation.

Cain Y'he Ratzon

All

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu
v'higianu lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are you, O God, sovereign of the universe, for granting us life, for
sustaining us, and for bringing to this time.

BLESSINGS UPON SIGNING YOUR ADVANCED DIRECTIVE/HEALTH CARE PROXY

1. Blessed is the Eternal who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this season.

God who has given me the power of choice and who has brought me the strength to make these decisions today. Thank you for granting me the wisdom to think ahead and to understand the great range of possibilities that could come in the future.

When the time comes that I am no longer able to make decisions on my own behalf, may my wishes be carried out by those who are close to me.

I have been blessed with so much and, may my family be at peace with my decisions. May we love one another and cherish our time together.

Tess Levine

2. Eternal God, in this time that _____ has made his/her wishes known we are reminded that life is in partnership with You. While so much is out of our control, we are grateful that we can make choices in our life, make them known and have them acted out in the event we no longer have the ability to do so ourselves. *Baruch Atah Adonai*, who has given us free will and agency in our lives.

Rabbi Dan Fliegel

A Sacred Conversation *Havdala*

*A Jewish ritual to sanctify the conversation about end of life care
drawing inspiration from the havdala ceremony (Rabbi Zoe Klein)*

Havdala separates the sacred from the mundane. Today, we move from the wonderful busy clatter of everyday life to enter a new space. We are grateful to share the intimacy of our hopes and our fears.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּי וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam,
shechechiyanu v'kiyamanu lazman ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the world,
Who has sustained us, supported us and brought us to this moment.

Thank you for being such a meaningful person in my life.

Wine - פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

As we prepare for this conversation of meaning, we express gratitude for the sweetness of our time together. We raise our glasses in tribute to the mysteries of life and death. What a wonder it is to bear witness to the world! And how pleasant to share the journey with ones we cherish.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, Borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the World, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

With the taste of wine on our tongue, and the warmth of togetherness in our hearts, we step into this special moment of understanding and love.

Conversation is devoted to the naming of a trusted person who could make medical decisions for you, if you were not able, based on your expressed wishes and documented preferences. Consider what special instructions should be given and what limits should be observed by this person who would act as your “healthcare agent.” Think about choosing a physician who would be the right one to guide your agent and to act upon the decisions made for your care. This conversation may be revisited and the decisions reconsidered as needed.

Spices - בְּשָׁמִים

Neshama is the Hebrew word for both soul and breath. God breathed our soul into us, making our lives God’s exhalation. Our deeds spice and perfume the air. Each facet of life is to be breathed in and appreciated, from our first breath to the moment the world kisses us and takes our breath away.

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא מיני בשמים.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, Borei minei v'samim.

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the World, Who creates a variety of spices.

Conversation is devoted to the issues surrounding end-of-life decisions including such as the limits to care in settings in which a return to baseline health status is not likely. Consideration is also given to the balance between the burden of care that would be acceptable in settings in which a return to baseline quality of life might not be not possible. Organ donation is discussed. This conversation may also be revisited and decisions reconsidered.

Thank you for respecting and heeding my wishes, and imbuing my spirit with dignity.

Candle - מאורי האש

The Life of Eternity - Gates of Prayer

Life is finite. Like a candle, it burns, it glows, it is radiant with warmth and beauty; then it fades; its substance is consumed, and it is no more.

In light we see; in light we are seen. The flames dance and our lives are full. But as night follows day, the candle of our life burns down and gutters. There is an end to the flames. We see no more and are no more seen. Yet we do not despair, for we are more than a memory slowly fading into the darkness. With our lives we give life. Something of us can never die: we move in the eternal cycle of darkness and death, of light and life.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, Borei m'orei ha-aish.

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the World, Who creates the light of fire.

חתימה - Signature

A ritual for when you are ready to sign the Advanced Healthcare Directive:

Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name excels them all.
(Pirkei Avot 2:17)

When the person to act as healthcare agent has been chosen and goals and preferences have been outlined, the advance directive form can be signed. To become effective, it can be notarized or signed by two witnesses. In the latter case, the healthcare agent cannot also serve as a witness. The directive should be supplied to the primary care physician, to the agent and to key family members who may also wish to discuss the directive. It can be revised as needed if preferences evolve or circumstances change.

Thank you for the seal of your good name. May your

name be a blessing for all time.

המבדיל - Blessing of Separation

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם, המבדיל בין קדש לחול, בין אור
לחשך, בין ישראל לעמים, בין יום השביעי לששת ימי המעשה. ברוך
אתה יי, המבדיל בין קדש לחול.

*Barukh Atah Adonai, Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam hamav'dil bein kodesh l'chol bein
or l'choshech bein Yisra'eil la'amim bein yom hash'vi'i l'sheishet y'mei
hama'aseh. Baruch Atah Adonai, hamav'dil bein kodesh l'chol.*

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the World, Who separates between sacred and secular, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between work and rest. Blessed are You, God, who separates between sacred and secular.

We conclude our ceremony with song. The music of our lives is part of the great symphony of eternity.

עשה שלום במרומי, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו
ועל כל ישראל, ואמרו אמן.

*Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru, amen.*

Maker of abundant peace, God will make peace for us,
for all Israel, and for all the world. Amen.

A Sacred Conversation Hagaddah

*A Jewish ritual to sanctify the conversation about end of life care,
drawing inspiration from the Passover Seder (Rabbi Zoe Klein)*

Searching for Chametz - **בְּדִיקַת חָמֶץ**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בְּעוּר חָמֶץ.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu al biyur chametz.*

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the world,
Who sanctifies us with mitzvot and calls upon us to remove *chametz*.

As we prepare for this conversation of meaning, we
search out all the little crumbs that hinder our connection.
We sweep up specks of worry, scraps of anxiety, and
ingrained fears. We acknowledge them as we step into
this special moment of understanding and love.

Candle-Lighting - **הַדְלַקַת נֵרוֹת**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חַיִּים.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, l'hadlik ner shel chayim.*

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the world,
Who sanctifies us with mitzvot and calls upon us to ignite the light of life.

With light enter sacred time. With clarity of

communication we dispell shadows. We illuminate a path into our future, radiant with peace.

Choosing - בְּחִירָה

Conversation is devoted to the naming of a trusted person who could make medical decisions for you, if you were not able, based on your expressed wishes and documented preferences. Consider what special instructions should be given and what limits should be observed by this person who would act as your “healthcare agent.” Think about choosing a physician who would be the right one to guide your agent and to act upon the decisions made for your care. This conversation may be revisited and the decisions reconsidered as needed.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמָּנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam,
shechechiyanu v'kiyamanu lazman ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the world,
Who has sustained us, supported us and brought us to this moment.

Thank you for being such a meaningful person in my life.

Parsley - פֶּרֶס

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, Borei p'ri ha-adamah.

Blessed are You, our God, Soul of the world,
Who creates the fruit of the ground.

The world is lovely and temporal. Hopeful greens spring through the soil, and salty tears polish our sight. Our senses awaken to as we look backward and forward. Each facet of life is to be tasted and appreciated, from our tender beginning to our thoughtful consummation.

Life Care - פְּקוּחַ נַפֶּשׁ

Conversation is devoted to the issues surrounding end-of-life decisions including such as the limits to care in settings in which a return to baseline health status is not likely. Consideration is also given to the balance between the burden of care that would be acceptable in settings in which a return to baseline quality of life might not be possible. Organ donation is discussed. This conversation may also be revisited and decisions reconsidered.

Thank you for respecting and heeding my wishes, and imbuing my spirit with dignity.

Signature - חתימה

Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name excels them all.
(Pirkei Avot 2:17)

When the person to act as healthcare agent has been chosen and goals and preferences have been outlined, the advance directive form can be signed. To become effective, it can be notarized or signed by two witnesses. In the latter case, the healthcare agent cannot also serve as a witness. The directive should be supplied to the primary care physician, to the agent and to key family members who may also wish to discuss the directive. It can be revised as needed if preferences evolve or circumstances change.

Thank you for the seal of your good name. May your name be a blessing for all time.

Holiness - קדוּשָׁה

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, Borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Soul of the world,
Creator of the fruit of the vine.

We raise our glasses in tribute to the mysteries of life and death. What a wonder it is to bear witness to the world!
And how pleasant to share the journey with ones we cherish. *L'chayim!*

Praise - הַלֵּל

Taking turns, place your hands on the head of the other and recite the priestly benediction in Hebrew, English or both, and/or share your own personal blessing of peace and serenity.

יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶכָּ
יְאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶכָּ
יֵשֶׁא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיָּשֶׂם לָךְ שָׁלוֹם

*Y'varech'cha Adonai v'yishm'recha
Ya'eir Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka
Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom*

May God bless you and keep you.
May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
May God show you compassion and grant you peace.

Conclusion - נְרָצָה

We conclude our ceremony with song. The music of our lives is part of the great symphony of eternity.

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְמִיּוֹ, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

*Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru, amen.*

Maker of abundant peace, God will make peace for us,
for all Israel, and for all the world. Amen.

Removing the Wedding Band Following the Year of Mourning

Removing the wedding band after mourning a spouse can be a heart-wrenching experience. However, if the following ritual accompanies the act, the surviving spouse is allowed an outlet to express his or her feelings. Both of these prayers can be recited in front of family and friends, either at home or during a service at a congregation. The first of these prayers emerged from the request of a congregant to his rabbi following the year of mourning. The member and the rabbi worked to develop a ritual of closure that spoke to the member. The second prayer emerged from one of the pilot project discussions that took place as the Sacred Aging project developed. These are meant to be examples of what some people may need to move on. Obviously, these are intensely personal choices that need to be discussed and worked through with clergy.

*With This Ring*¹⁵

With this ring I was betrothed to you,
According to the laws of Moses, Miriam, and Israel.

Ecclesiastes teaches me that there is a time for everything,
Especially for birth and for death.

From our heritage I learned the importance of reaffirming our faith
Even at the most difficult times,
Even when in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

With the removal of this ring, I acknowledge again
That I am losing your companionship.
But the memories and love will always remain
Dear to my heart.

May they continue as an inspiration to me
And to those you touched.
May they remain a blessing,
And may we always praise God
For the gifts of life and patience,
And for the righteous judgments made.

God asks that we walk in the way of Torah.
May that continue to be my will. **AMEN**

*This Precious Ring*¹⁶

This precious ring you slipped on my finger as we stood under our chuppah
I took to my heart as a continuous circle of love.
It remained a symbol of our unity as we held our babies,
celebrated our milestones, and soothed our hurts.
A witness to all of our married days, it was once new and shining.
With the passing of years the color deepened and warmed,
As did the exquisiteness of our life together.
Now I am without you and I must move to another way of living.

I must begin a new life.

As I remove this circle of love,
I know it is not easy to let go
And surrender into memory what once was
And can no longer be.
As I heal and go forward,
I will always be strengthened by a life we cherished,
And that part of my heart that is forever yours.

Amen.

Mi Sheberach for Chronic Illness

Eternal God, we ask mercy and compassion

For those who are burdened with chronic illness.

Give them strength and courage

To face the daily challenges in their lives.

Compassionate One, give them and their loved ones hope for the future

And at the same time, acceptance of the present.

Help them find a path towards spiritual wholeness. Be by their side.

Help them to know that You are with them at all times, even in times of doubt.

Source of Healing, comfort them and bring healing to their souls.

Amen

Rabbi Michele Medwin.

Mishkan R'fuah: Where Healing Resides. CCAR Press. 2012. p.79

Mi Shebeirach

May God who blessed our fathers and mothers,
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah,
grant blessed healing to all those members of our congregation
and members of our families
who struggle with mental illness.

May God be with them in their illness
and give them patience, hope, and courage.

May God so endow their attending physicians and therapists with insight and skill
that they be soon restored to health and vigor of body and mind.

May God be with their families too
and grant them patience, hope, and courage.

May God remove their anger and wipe away their feelings of guilt.

May God endow them with a full life and with love
that they too enjoy health and vigor of body and mind.

May God bind up their wounds
that they may enjoy many a *simchah* and thank God
for the blessings of health, let us say, Amen.²⁰

cheresh, a *shoteh*, or a

on to teach us that it

¹⁷Tr
katan
¹⁸Gi

is forbidden to injure a *cheresh*, a *shoteh*, or a *katan*? Wouldn't the latter be included in the former? Perhaps it is necessary to remind us that it is forbidden to hurt a *shoteh*, for example, because caring for a *shoteh* can make one angry or frustrated enough to want to hurt him. Or perhaps it is necessary to remind us that even though the *shoteh* does not behave as a "normal human being" none the less he is entitled to be treated as a human being and not as somehow less than human.

¹⁹WMCH, p. 219.

To Honor and Respect

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׁהֵינִי וְקִימִנִי וְהִגִּיעִנִי לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam,
shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.*

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe,
for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season.

Senior Cohabitation

An opportunity to create new rituals based on changing lifestyles is presented by the number of older adults who choose to be together without the benefit of a formal marriage ceremony. As we live longer, these circumstances may increase. The situation is familiar to many of us: the widow or widower or the divorced man or woman who meets someone special and the couple, for a wide variety of reasons, choose to be together but not be legally married. They come to their clergy person and ask for a blessing that will sanctify their being together. There is no issue of children. There is an issue of intimacy as one ages, the security of a caring partner and the need to thank God that two people have found each other and to ask for peace and comfort in the years that may be granted.

These types of living arrangements are no longer unfamiliar to us. As a result, congregations should provide rituals that take into consideration the very human need for intimacy and relationships. Genesis 2:18 is correct when it reminds us that it is not good that we go through life alone. The extended life spans that are now emerging will allow for more of these types of situations. Shall we just ignore them? Or shall we see in many of these relationships unique opportunities to develop something sacred and special to the many people who choose to come to their faith community and have this new relationship blessed? This ceremony is not a marriage, and this fact must be part of the discussions that lead to the ceremony. However, it is a ritual of thanks that people have found each other and a hope that they may find peace and security in the years ahead. In the end, the openness to the development of such unions allows for the continuing evolution of faith communities to the new realities presented by the dynamic changes in life spans and lifestyles.⁶

We have included here two rituals that can be used to bless a union between two people who together have decided to share their lives with one another. These two prayers were created after much consideration was given to the Jewish marriage ritual and prayers and to traditional Jewish views on cohabitation. Our hope is that congregations will develop programs exploring these traditions as congregants and clergy create additional, meaningful cohabitation rituals.

A Blessing for Love⁷

Today we sanctify the union of _____ and _____, and
we recall another sacred beginning, that of creation itself. God created the heavens,
and earth was formed. Life was granted on the land and in the sea. Genesis tells of the

6. Adapted from Richard F. Address, "Creating Sacred Scenarios," article submitted for publication to *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*.

7. By Rabbi Benjamin David, from an assignment for "The Changing Jewish Family," taught by Richard F. Address at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY, Spring 2003.

sanctity of human companionship, of togetherness in the holy union of two people. In sanctifying this union today, we foster the long-standing emphasis on togetherness. _____ and _____ have found one another and now seek to come together. May their union animate the divine in each of them and help the other to grow in the likeness of God.

Do you, _____, promise to support and comfort _____, providing him/her with love and compassion, from this day forward? *(Repeat for both individuals.)*

May the union of _____ and _____ be for a blessing, and may they find health, love, and happiness in their days together.
Amen.

A Commitment Blessing⁸

Today we celebrate the loving commitment of _____ and _____ to each other, and we share in their joy.

In the Song of Songs we read אָנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי (Ani l'dodi v'dodi li), "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." This represents not only God's relationship with Israel, but also the commitment that is shared between _____ and _____.

Love lives as long as the human heart beats, as long as we draw breath. The soul reaches out to another, recognizing a kindred spirit, a receptive companion to share life's vicissitudes. Age is meaningless, for the mysteries of the heart know no temporal boundaries.

Today we acknowledge their love for each other, and bless their commitment:

- May they be healthy and lead productive lives.
- May they find sustenance in their relationship.
- May they find enjoyment in each other.
- May their physical presence strengthen their spiritual growth.
- May they nurture their fragility and rely on their strengths.
- May their days be full, and inundated with love.

Amen.

A New Ritual for Healing and Well-Being

Geri Newburge

On Rosh HaShanah of the year 5611 Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise faced what must have been the greatest challenge of his personal and rabbinic life. The president of his congregation in Albany, New York, Louis Spanier, wished to damage Wise's career, culminating in Spanier's assault on him on the bimah, in front of the entire congregation. While there had been difficulties between the two men prior to Rosh HaShanah, a punch in the head is hardly something one could anticipate. Such a traumatic event brought not just physical pain to Wise, but great emotional trauma and grief.¹ As rabbis, hopefully we will never have such an egregious encounter, but certainly we have all had our individual and professional challenges.

It is the same for the people we serve. Life takes unpredictable twists and turns. Some of these unanticipated events yield joy, learning, and satisfaction, while others yield hurt, embarrassment, and existential crisis. Divorce, economic crisis, loss of a friendship, loss of health, difficulties with a child or spouse, and a demotion at work are just a few of life's challenges that many of us encounter. One can never fully know how any given situation will affect our lives or our attitude toward it or the experiences we have had.

During the Days of Awe we focus on the concept of *t'shuvah*, of turning away from our own problematic behavior or actions and seeking forgiveness for any wrongdoing. While *t'shuvah* offers a means for reframing the past, and moving toward a new, hopeful future, it sometimes does not fully speak to the emotional and spiritual difficulties that many face. Additionally, *t'shuvah* and the accompanying prayers of this liturgy, for example *Un'taneh Tokef*, address personal responsibility, and to a certain extent account for

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the unpredictability of life or our lack of control over it (with our prayers and liturgy acknowledging intentional and unintentional sins). Yet, this does not allow the individual to focus on a particularly difficult event or time. Coupled with the personal and professional trials of the rabbinate, this led me to examine various existing ceremonies and, eventually, to create a new ritual that would enable an individual who has experienced a traumatic event, beyond one's control, to acknowledge and process their anguish Jewishly and then move beyond it emotionally and spiritually.

Jewish tradition is rich enough to offer insight and wisdom through the trials and tribulations of life. The scientific community recognizes it too; there were more than twelve hundred studies published during the twentieth century that attest to the relationship between religion and mental health.² In fact, a majority of the studies examining the association between religious practices and behavior and indicators of psychological well-being report at least one significant positive correlation between these variables:³ "Public and private religious practices can help to maintain mental health and prevent mental diseases. They help individuals cope with anxiety, fears, frustration, anger, anomie, inferiority feelings, despondency and isolation."⁴ Or in a more positive context, "Religious involvement is correlated with: well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction; hope and optimism; purpose and meaning in life; higher self-esteem; adaptation to bereavement; greater social support and less loneliness; less anxiety, etc."⁵

With Job, who literally loses everything he has but keeps faith in God, we find a correlation with our reactions to our own life struggles. Even with his tenacious hold on faith, Job cries out, both in anguish as well as in anger to God, "Even today my speech is bitter; my wound is heavier than my sigh."⁶ Like Job we are left bereft, disheartened, and broken after one of these trials. Understandably one can feel stuck when confronted by life's tests. To allow others or circumstances to control our lives or our happiness is a posture that must be rejected, and in actuality our tradition teaches us that just as we say a benediction for the good in life we must also say a benediction for the bad.⁷ A significant trauma requires time for healing, whether it is of a physical, mental, or spiritual nature. According to the scholars and rabbis at the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, "As we have discovered, and as our sages have long known, there is no experience in

the life of a Jew that cannot be marked in Jewish ways. There are times when the available Jewish rituals just don't seem to fit well enough to use, and we need to adapt them. There are also times when there really isn't an obvious Jewish way to mark some of the events of our lives, and we work together to develop new rituals that are deeply based in tradition."⁸

Judaism has long recognized the significance of rituals, and over the course of time and circumstance many rituals have evolved. All major milestones are essentially marked by ritual: bris, bar mitzvah, weddings, funerals. If a ritual did not exist one was created—like the baby namings for females and bat mitzvah we do today, or even the use of a *mikveh* after an illness or surgery. So too in the case of marriage, the ritual has evolved over time. While Rabbinic in origin, it used to be two separate ceremonies and with no *ketubah* reading. The *ketubah* was instituted two thousand years ago; it was formulated to protect a Jewish bride from financial hardship in the event of a divorce or her husband's death, making it among the first documents conferring legal status and financial rights on women.

This historical perspective is significant; it reminds us that our religion and its traditions are malleable. Yet, "performing new rituals, even as they serve to repair, heal, and reclaim tradition, can still feel both dangerous and paradoxical to those performing them."⁹ This should not inhibit us from using Jewish symbols, rituals, or objects in creative and meaningful ways when we need to do so.

In fact, when we see the positive impact it can have on our outlook and sense of well-being, we should race to embrace such ritual. Professor Judah Goldin brilliantly observes, "To change we are all subject, perhaps most profoundly when we offer greatest resistance; adaptation, on the other hand, requires genius."¹⁰ It is when we are suffering from one of life's traumas—feeling despondent, insecure, and lost—that we are most resistant to change. We don't want to face another defeat, or suffer another loss. The most unanticipated loss we experience is the loss of ourselves, "of earlier definitions that our images of self depend upon. For the changes in our body redefine us. The events of our personal history redefine us. The ways that others perceive us redefine us. And, at several points in our life, we will have to relinquish a former self-image and move on."¹¹

The void left when we abandon our self-image can be consuming. We feel frightened, confused, or despondent when the reality of

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our lives changes, especially when it changes unexpectedly or suddenly. I discovered, from personal and professional experience, that when we must "relinquish a former self-image" due to a challenging event, our tradition did not present an appropriate ritual, though prayers and rituals exist for some other life-changing moments; for example, a *b'rachah* for parents when their child becomes a bar/bat mitzvah or a dance for parents when their last child marries and their primary focus is no longer raising children. What *b'rachah* or prayer could ease the pain? What might be offered that could be done in a nonthreatening way, cost no money, and allow the individual to put the heartbreaking event into a spiritual and temporal framework and then walk away from it? After perusing various texts, websites, and siddurim I came up short on a rite that created a time and space for a person to address a challenging event in her or his life in a religiously meaningful way. While there are a plethora of beautiful and insightful readings and prayers available, almost none offered a ritual experience. The closest such opportunity is found in *On the Doorposts of Your House*, which contains responsive readings for two people to recite "After a Trauma."¹² The pitfalls of this ceremony lay with some of the readings as well as the conclusion. The readings make an unnecessary distinction between man and woman, suggest that the distressed individual might not be able to help others or love, and do not give space for personal thoughts or feelings; the conclusion can be fulfilling if you are at the *mikveh*, a suggested possibility, but without a *mikveh* or its equal there is no real sense of closure to the ritual. Other resources felt incomplete because they (1) failed to include a communal element, (2) failed to include an intentionality about location of prayer, (3) failed to address the specific reality of the individual, and/or (4) failed to bring about a definitive culmination of the ritual. These are really about personal preference, but ultimately that is what this creative ritual provides—a broad-based approach to acknowledge, to place into context, and to bring an end to the suffering.

In the end I was inspired by the Jewish bill of divorce, the *get*. The delivery of a *get* involves both a document as well as a ceremony that dissolves a marriage, a symbolic and literal end to a period in one's life. It prompted me to craft a "ritual of release" that would act as a divorce from the painful experience.

This ritual of release is meant for anyone suffering emotional and spiritual pain from a situation or circumstance that was

beyond their control; it can be utilized at any time when the individual wants to close that particular chapter of her or his life. The section of the ritual for the individual to offer personal remarks, prayers, or reflections is critical. In his article "On Private Prayer: A Covenantal Experience" our colleague David Lieb wisely points out, "It may be that the script of the prayer book does not reflect our own identity as we come before God in the private, prayerful moments of our life...The words of prayer at such a moment should be as authentic and as personally accurate as they can be. They should say what we need to say and make us feel as if they could accomplish and articulate the task we address."¹³ Of course we can offer suggestions for additional prayers or readings, but in the middle, individualized section provides the kind of opportunity stressed by Lieb, whether the words are spontaneously spoken by the person or taken from readings or prayers selected by the individual. The individual enacting this ritual can conclude it in a number of ways; the document can be burned, shredded, kept on file as a reminder of the finality of the incident, or even used as the "crumbs" for *Tashlich*. Essentially, using a document with a ritual instead of just a prayer, will allow the individual to place the traumatic event within a time and space that brings a conclusion to the distress. Finding the personal touch that will provide the bookener is important and allow for that critical sense of finality and closure.

I've offered or performed this ritual with individuals who ended a relationship, endured an untenable work environment, experienced a harrowing divorce, and who suffered severe discrimination within the confines of the Jewish community. Of course one could utilize it at other times as well after physical or psychological abuse, a debilitating accident, a traumatic experience with a sibling, etc. Can Jewish ritual offer a sense of healing and closure to the pain suffered? As rabbis it is part of our mission to provide prayers, rituals, and traditions wherever we can as a way to mend the emotional and spiritual wounds suffered. After all, one cannot expect depression or existential pain to heal on its own. Judaism and its rituals, traditional and creative, offer a means to the end—a sense of a peaceful whole self.

The ritual of release is an interactive experience taking place in front of a few witnesses, who will be a source of support and sign this ritual document, essentially a personal "get" from the hurtful event. The document and ritual can be modified according to individual

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needs and circumstances. While this ceremony can be conducted anywhere, ideally it should take place where there is a sense of peace, privacy, comfort, and spirituality (e.g., a chapel or sanctuary).

Ritual of Release

Even today my speech is bitter; my wound is heavier than my sigh.¹⁴

Rabbi:

Life takes unpredictable twists and turns. Some of these unanticipated events yield joy, learning, and satisfaction, while others yield hurt, embarrassment, and existential crisis. We can never fully know how we will react to any given situation, and our Jewish tradition is rich enough to offer insight and wisdom throughout our lives.

Congregant:

Past events dictated that my life changed. These changes, while beyond my control, have taught me that I must mourn the loss of my self in some way. At present, I must look within to redefine myself, and for the future move forward from these difficulties to embrace a full life. I know this is not an easy task, but one that needs to be addressed for my health and well-being.

Rabbi:

The journey of life differs from one person to another, and meaning and faith are unique and deeply personal. You stand here today to recapture your sense of purpose and make a separation from past events. "Consider nothing impossible because there is no one who does not have her/his time, and no thing that does not have its place."¹⁵ This is your time to conquer fears and disappointments, to create a sacred moment moving you to wholeness and peace.

Congregant:

(Time to share personal words/prayers/reflections)

I seek refuge in You, *Adonai*;
may I never be disappointed.
As You are beneficent, save me and rescue me;
incline Your ear to me and deliver me.

Be a sheltering rock for me to which I may always come;
decree my deliverance,
for You are my rock and my fortress.
My God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and the lawless.
God, do not be far from me,
My God, hasten to help me.¹⁶

Congregant:

ברוך אתה, אדני אלהינו, מלך העולם, הגומל לְחַיִּים טוֹבוֹת, שְׁגֻמְלֵנִי כֵּל טוֹב.
*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, hagomeil l'chaiyavim to
vot, sheg'malani kol tov.*

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe, who be-
stows goodness upon the responsible, who has bestowed every
goodness upon me.

Witnesses:

אמן. מי שְׁגֻמְלֵךְ טוֹב הוּא יְגַמְלֵךְ כֵּל טוֹב. סְלַח.

Amen. Me sheg'maleich tov hu yig'maleich kol tov. Selah.

Amen. May the One who has bestowed goodness upon you con-
tinue to bestow every goodness upon you forever.

וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֵךְ.
יְאֵר יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְיִחְנֶנֶה.
יֵשׂא יי פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְיִשְׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Y'varech'cha Adonai v'yishm'recka.

Ya-eir Adonai panav eilecha vichneka.

Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's presence shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May God's presence be with you and grant you peace.

Meaning is possible even in spite of suffering.¹⁷

Self

Witness

Witness

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Ultimately, I hope that this ritual will provide a comforting Jewish ceremony or service for emotional and sacred healing. Knowing we cannot change past events, we must empower ourselves to bring relevant aspects of our tradition to provide a mechanism to move beyond the past in order to embrace the present and future. Whether it is this ritual or another, let Jewish tradition seep into these cracks in life's journey.

In the book *Necessary Losses*, Judith Viorst wrote, "We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation we are challenged to change ourselves,"¹⁸ or find a course of action that will allow us to feel that sense of closure or triumph.

In one of Shel Silverstein's poems, "If the World was Crazy," he writes:

If the world was crazy, you know what I'd do?
I'd walk on the ocean and swim in my shoe,
I'd fly through the ground and I'd skip through the air,
I'd run down the bathtub and bathe on the stair...
And the greatest of men would be silly and lazy
So I would be king . . . if the world was crazy.¹⁹

Sometimes the world we live in is crazy, as Silverstein's composition so creatively points out. Life doesn't follow predictable rules like those of gravity or physics. Instead we are subject to the randomness of people, personalities, and circumstances. It is when we collide with these in challenging ways that Jewish tradition and ritual can become most helpful and meaningful. Ritual is not a cure-all, but it can be an act of empowerment, comfort, and peace. The rituals we incorporate into our lives must fulfill certain needs—like "meaning and community"²⁰—even, as Arnold Eisen articulates, "in the absence of God's felt presence." However, we must compensate for that absence with the invocation of God's felt presence in song, text, and blessing.²¹ As rabbis we can draw upon tradition to help others, as well as ourselves, find resolution

to what ails us spiritually in order to create healthy, whole individuals and communities.

Notes

1. Isaac Mayer Wise, *Reminiscences* (Cincinnati: Leo Wise and Company, 1901), 155-172.
2. Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Francisco Lotufo Neto, and Harold G. Koenig, "Religiousness and Mental Health: A Review," *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry* 28, no. 3 (2006): 243.
3. Harold G. Koenig, Michael E. McCullough, and David B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 214-15.
4. *Ibid.*, 228.
5. Moreira-Almeida, et al., *Religiousness and Mental Health: A Review*, 247.
6. Job 23:1.
7. T B'rachot 60b.
8. Irwin Kula and Vanessa L. Ochs, eds., *The Book of Jewish Sacred Practices: CLAL's Guide to Everyday and Holiday Rituals and Blessings* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 1.
9. E.M. Broner, *Bringing Home the Light: A Jewish Woman's Handbook of Rituals* (San Francisco: Council Oaks Books, 1999), 2.
10. Judah Goldin, "Of Change and Adaptation in Judaism," in *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature*, ed. Barry L. Eichler and Jeffrey H. Tigay (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 215.
11. Judith Viorst, *Necessary Losses* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 266.
12. Chaim Stern, ed., *On the Doorposts of Your House* (New York: CCAR Press, 1994), 148-50.
13. David Lieb, "On Private Prayer: A Covenantal Experience," *CCAR Journal* (Fall 1998):45.
14. Job 23:1.
15. *Pirkei Avot* 4:3
16. Ps. 71:1-4, 12.
17. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 113.
18. Viorst, *Necessary Losses*, 112.
19. Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 146.
20. Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 256.
21. *Ibid.*, 262-63.

A Coming-Out Prayer for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Those Who Love Them

O God of truth and justice, the evasions and deceptions we practice upon others and ourselves are many.

We long only to speak out and to hear the truth, yet time and again, from fear of loss or hope of gain, from dull habit or from cruel deliberation, we speak half-truths, we twist facts, we are silent when others lie, and we lie to ourselves.

Whether we are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning, family or friends, we sometimes feel forced to pretend to be that which we are not, to present ourselves in ways which are not truthful, and sometimes with outright lies.

But as we stand before You, our words and our thoughts speed to One who knows them before we utter them. We do not have to tell untruths to You as we are often forced to do in the world. We know we cannot lie in Your presence.

May our worship help us to practice truth in speech and in thought before You, to ourselves, and before one another; and may we finally complete our liberation so that we no longer feel the need to practice evasions and deceptions.

Adapted from the siddur of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav (San Francisco, CA; www.shaarzahav.org), "Prayers, Poems, and Songs."

A Blessing for Transitioning Genders

Rabbi Elliot Kukla

Jewish tradition teaches us that we should be saying a hundred blessings a day to mark all the moments of *kdushah*, “holiness,” that infuse our lives. There are blessings to recite before eating and drinking; performing religious commandments; witnessing rainbows, oceans, thunder, or lightning; seeing old friends; tasting new fruits; and arriving at a new season. And yet many of the most important moments in the lives of transgender, intersex, and gender-queer Jews are not honored within our tradition.

I wrote this blessing for a friend who wanted to mark each time that he received testosterone (hormone therapy), but it could be used for any moment in transitioning such as name or pronoun changes, coming out to loved ones, or moments of medical transitions. Jewish sacred texts such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, midrash, and classical legal codes acknowledge the diversity of gender identities in our communities, despite the way that mainstream Jewish religious tradition has effaced the experiences of transgender, intersex, and gender-queer Jews. This blessing signals the holiness present in the moments of transitioning that transform Jewish lives and affirms the place of these moments within Jewish sacred tradition.

This blessing takes the same form and grammatical structure as classical blessings that mark wondrous occasions. “The Transforming One” as a name for God appears in the traditional blessings of gratitude that are recited each morning. The Hebrew verb root of this word, *avar*, has multiple layers of meaning within Judaism. Most literally it means to physically cross over; however, it also implies spiritual transformation in High Holy Day prayers. It lies at the root of the word *Ivrim*, Hebrew people. We are the *Ivrim*, the crossing-over people, because we physically crossed over the Jordan River to escape from slavery and oppression and we spiritually transformed ourselves. At its core, our ancestral sacred memory holds this moment of painful and yet redemptive physical and spiritual transition. In Modern Hebrew, this same verb root is used to form the word *maavar*, which means to transition genders.

The second blessing is also taken from morning liturgy. It is based on the Book of Genesis, which teaches that male and female bodies were equally created in God’s image. The midrash, classical Jewish exegesis, adds that the *adam harishon*, the first human being formed in God’s likeness, was an *androgynos*, an intersex person. Hence our tradition teaches that *all* bodies and genders are created in God’s image whether we identify as men, women, intersex, or something else. When we take physical or spiritual steps to more hon-

estly manifest our gender identities, we are fulfilling the foundational mitzvah, religious commandment, to be partnered with God in completing the work of Creation.

The final blessing is classically recited each time we reach a new event or season. Saying it at moments of transition celebrates God's nurturing and sustaining presence in allowing us to reach this moment of self-transformation. However, this blessing is in the first person plural and also marks our collective transition as a people as we begin to transform our tradition in order to honor and celebrate the lives of transgender, intersex, and gender-queer Jews.

- This blessing may be recited before any moment in the transitioning process:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, המעביר לעוברים.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam, haMaavir l'ovrim.

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, the Transforming One to those who transform/transition/cross over.

- Afterwards recite:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שעשני בצלם אלהים.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, she-asani b'tzelem Elohim.

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, who has made me in God's image.

- For special events taking place for the first time or for the first time in this season (e.g., a name or pronoun change, beginning hormone therapies or surgeries), add:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחננו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, who has kept us alive and sustained us and helped us to arrive at this moment.

Spouses in New Relationships Due to Dementia

Another suggestion for new rituals and ceremonies is, perhaps, the most difficult. It stems from the increasing challenges that are presented in dealing with the issue of a loved one who is institutionalized with Alzheimer's, suffers from dementia, or is in a persistent vegetative state.

The scenario may be familiar to some. It is the well spouse who comes to the clergy-person to seek counsel. He or she has met someone, and that someone provides a sense of comfort and intimacy (which may or may not be sexual in nature). There is no talk of abandoning the spouse who is ill. However, there is the argument that, given the nature and duration of the illness, should not the well spouse be free to find someone with whom he or she can share life and find support?

The rituals for cohabitation, therefore, could be supplemented with additional prayers recognizing the emotional strain that one faces when his or her loved one is suffering from dementia. The well spouse is comforted in knowing that the union is receiving a special blessing, while at the same time the spouse with dementia is not being abandoned.

In many of the pilot Sacred Aging workshops conducted by the Department of Jewish Family Concerns, this scenario arose with astounding frequency. What seems to be true is that this is a very real issue for many of our congregants and, given the longevity revolution, may become a reality for many more in the years ahead. The question was always raised as to the wisdom of having this issue discussed by the congregation. Should the caring community provide educational programs that would seek to raise this issue of the well spouse who seeks emotional, physical, or spiritual comfort from another? Should a congregation develop a document that would give "permission" for those who find themselves in this position to be permitted to seek such comfort from someone other than their spouse? Or should this remain a private matter to be discussed between the congregant and the rabbi? What is clear is that the issue is real. There are serious issues here that go to the heart of relationships, needs and wants, and one's view of self and family. We urge the discussion of this issue. We need to send the message that our communities understand that new life stages have created new demands for the embrace of community.

A look at the impact of ritual in the area of sexuality and intimacy can be obtained from "With Eyes Undimmed and Vigor Unabated: Sexuality and Older Adults," by Richard F. Address (CCAR Journal, Fall 2001, pp. 58-67).

O Source of Healing⁹

Our God and God of all generations, in our great need we pour out our hearts to You. The days and weeks of suffering are hard to endure. In our struggle, let us feel that You are near, a presence whose care enfolds us. Rouse in us the strength to overcome fear and anxiety, and brighten our spirits with the assurance of Your love. Strengthen and encourage us. Let your spirit be with our loved one, _____, and give us strength through these days, to continue our lives with loving-kindness and joyfulness.

בָּרַךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, רוֹפֵא הַחַיִּים.

Baruch atah Adonai, rofei hacholim.

We praise You, O God, the Source of healing.

Sustain Our Love¹⁰

We are grateful, O God, for the gift of life and for the sustaining powers that You have implanted within Your creatures. Be with _____, our loved one, through these days, months, and years of illness. Implant within him/her the courage and fortitude he/she needs to endure weakness, loss of memory, and pain. Help us to

continue to find ways to show our love and concern for him/her, so that we both may be an influence for good in his/her time of need.

And may all others who suffer illness of body or mind know that You are with them, giving them strength of spirit as they struggle to recover. May their afflictions soon be ended, and may they return in health to family and friends.

בָּרַךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, רוֹפֵא הַחַיִּים.

Baruch atah Adonai, rofei hacholim.

We praise You, O God, the Source of healing.

Marking a Significant Transition

Upon Retirement

This ceremony is divided into several readings and may all be read by one leader or by several people. It can be said during a special ceremony at the synagogue or even at a gathering of people celebrating the retirement (such as a retirement party). The leader can be a clergy member or even a coworker.

The Retirement of a Friend¹¹

Leader: Retirement is cause for both celebration and reflection. In coming together for this ceremony in honor of _____'s retirement, we create a sacred time and place to honor his/her contributions and to support him/her in making this significant life transition.

Retiree: Jewish life has much to teach us about time and transitions. Not only major life transitions are acknowledged in our tradition, but even the setting of the sun each evening is cause for thanks and for taking a few moments to notice the passing of a day and the appearance of the stars. Like the stars, which can only be seen in the dark, some elements of life shine brighter when other elements are no longer present. Let retirement be for me an ending and a beginning, and may I find many parts of my life shining brightly in the time to come.

Congregation/Group:

We are loved by an unending love.
We are embraced by arms that find us
Even when we are hidden from ourselves.
We are touched by fingers that soothe us
Even when we are too proud for soothing.
We are counseled by voices that guide us
Even when we are too embittered to hear.
We are loved by an unending love.

All: Amen.

11. Anonymous.

By Rabbi Richard F. Address

Till Death Us Do Part? A Look at Marriage Rituals When a Partner Has Alzheimer's Disease

Clergy and therapists must consider how to help couples navigate complicated situations within marriage—ones that are becoming more common, even controversial.

As you read this, somewhere a man or woman is sitting alone in their car, having just left their spouse—a life partner who resides in a long-term-care facility for people with Alzheimer's Disease. Navigating traffic, he or she decides the time has come to seek spiritual advice. When the appointment time arrives, the person sits down and looks anxiously into the eyes of the priest, minister, rabbi, or imam. Slowly, the story unfolds.

"You know," the person says, "I love my spouse and visit almost every day. And when our kids come home they visit, too. Last year, when the stress of working and caregiving became too much, my kids gave me a trip and on that trip I met someone who, coincidentally, lives near here, and we became friendly. So when we got home, we exchanged e-mails and then we met and our friendship grew. It became very important, as I was feeling alone, and gradually the friendship evolved into something more and, to tell you the truth, we have become intimate."

They go on. "And I am overwhelmed with conflicting feelings. I cannot talk about this with my children. I am uncomfortable talking about

this with our friends with whom we shared years of dinners, engagements, trips, and the like. I need to know if I am doing something wrong. My spouse hardly knows who I am. I am a healthy seventy-year-old, I go to work several days a week and have my life, and I am lonely and have needs. So tell me, am I wrong? Am I committing adultery?"

People Seek Guidance, Not Forgiveness

In my work with the Union for Reform Judaism's Sacred Aging Program, I have come to learn that this scenario is more common than many would admit. Various questions come to mind: Do religious congregations and denominations have a responsibility to address this issue? Do they have a responsibility to speak about this issue openly and to create a document or ritual that would, in certain contexts, permit the well spouse to seek a relationship outside of the traditional understanding of marriage?

Would this be a proper use of ritual, or does it demean and cheapen the concept of what a religious ritual should be? As some have suggested, is it such a personal matter best left

time after his wife's diagnosis and move into the local Alzheimer's facility. His children had difficulty in dealing with and accepting their father's companion, creating stress as a major family event approached. That was the reason for our conversation.

Here was a man conflicted; he loved and cared for his wife, he needed his children and the sense of family, and yet he also yearned for intimacy and companionship. He made his choices and noted to me that "this is our family's journey, and although there may be similar touch points, no two journeys are the same."

Caregiving and the Pain of Isolation

Being alone can be destructive to anyone, especially a caregiver. But is there any way to have a religious community be open to intimate relationships outside marriage in the case of the well spouse? An article in the *Wall Street Journal* (Mundy, 2009) explored this issue from the perspective of various religions. The article mentioned the rise in the number of Alzheimer's cases, and the fact that people were often seeking relationships outside of marriage in response to their isolation. The director of the New York chapter of the Alzheimer's Association noted: "Alzheimer's causes a profound loss—that of the marital partner.... While spouses may still feel their old bond in the disease's earlier stages, once it progresses, that connection

isolation that is not uncommon to individuals in extended caregiving situations. It is not good, or natural, for us to remain in such a state. The issue of caring for a spouse is never in doubt; the issue of caring for one's self is.

The book of Ecclesiastes (4:9-11) elaborates: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and had not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, they are warm; but how can one be warm alone?"

As you might expect, there is no unanimity on this. Rev. Richard Gentzler, who directs the Center on Aging and the Older-Adult Ministries for the national United Methodist Church, was quoted as saying that: "We have made the marriage vows for 'better or worse.' That holds in sickness or in health. I recognize the pain of the wife or husband, but sexual [relations] would be adultery" (Mundy, 2009).

The question of how a religious community can or should respond to this new and growing reality is no longer hypothetical. These situations are taking place now in every one of our communities. Are things so clear, so concrete in life, that clergy and congregations can close off all dialogue? Or can they remember that while certain actions or rituals may not be for everyone, each family, and each case, represents a nuance on what it means to be a caring human being.

The workshops on ritual creation that were part of the development of the Sacred Aging project formed the foundation for our approach to the subject. In discussions with people from around North America, the

struggle of caregiving always came up, especially in dealing with Alzheimer's. At every session, someone would speak to me privately or volunteer the information that they, or their friend, had lived the reality of seeking intimacy while still married to their institutionalized spouse. Invariably a heated discussion would ensue, with many seeing this action as disloyal,

'Could the scenario of the spouse with Alzheimer's or severe dementia give rise to a reinterpretation of adultery?'

is lost too.... It's not sex as much as special friendships, such as being held at night, that the well spouses miss most" (Mundy, 2009).

Genesis 2:18 reminds us that it is not good that we are "alone." The Hebrew word used in the text, *l'vado*, contains within it much more than a feeling of being by one's self. It also speaks to a sense of psychological and existential

adulterous, and sinful. And, as the discussion waned, those who had experienced this reality—or were currently living with it—quietly spoke up and said, in so many words, that “until you have to experience this and live with it, perhaps it is best to reserve judgment.”

A New, Novel Agreement: The Open Letter
“An Open Letter to My Spouse,” created by a psychologist in California, is a formal attempt to create a document that would address the issue of “permission” to seek relationships outside of

The question of how a religious community can or should respond to this new, growing reality is no longer hypothetical.

marriage in the context of advanced Alzheimer’s Disease. The document, structured as an agreement to be jointly signed by husband and wife, recognizes that if such a catastrophic situation should come to pass, that mutual respect and love will allow for care, and it also provides permission for the other spouse to seek comfort from someone else.

The document acknowledges the love and commitment the partners have for each other and allows for open dialogue between spouses. In the event it is determined that the case is not reversible and the other spouse is alive in body “but significantly compromised mentally or physically,” the statement is made to “please find someone you like who will be available to provide the emotional, intellectual and physical support and companionship that I then cannot provide you” (Fitzgerald, 1999).

The “Open Letter” is designed to be reviewed and signed jointly and could, with clergy involvement, open the possibility of new forms of pastoral counseling. There would be challenges to consider, however. When should a husband and wife sign this? How often should it be reviewed? Is this concept just as applicable for the thirty-year-old whose spouse is injured in an

accident and remains in a persistent vegetative state? Is there a difference between such a person and the seventy-year-old confined to the Alzheimer’s facility?

Defining a State of Limbo

The attempt to redefine adultery in light of Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementias presents the religious community with an interesting challenge. How do you try and reinterpret one’s tradition in light of such a new reality?

One colleague offered a suggestion that is drawn from classic Jewish tradition. He sought to review and re-imagine the concept of the *agunah*, which refers to a legal category within Judaism. It defines a status of a wife

whose husband has disappeared. The usual context was within wartime, with a husband who has not returned. This leaves the wife in a state of limbo, unable to acquire a bill of divorce, since the husband cannot be present.

My colleague sought to reinterpret the concept of this legal limbo state as allied with the well spouse whose husband or wife has “disappeared” into the limbo of Alzheimer’s or another dementia. The ritual sought to create a bridge that would allow the well spouse to cross between his or her two worlds of reality.

As he explained it, the ritual was “close to divorce because it serves as a way of freeing an individual from certain bonds, but in other ways it serves as a renewal of marriage vows because it reaffirms the promise to take care of their partner.... The primary purpose of this ritual is not meant to give someone the authority to go out and seek an extramarital relationship, [but] it is a way to ritually acknowledge that the person they married is no longer present, even though their body is still very much alive.”

Designed to be done with the well spouse and the rabbi present, the ritual goes on to affirm one’s commitment to care for the spouse who is ill and to “ensure that he [or] she has the

resources that [they need] to survive, despite the fact that our lives now take different paths” (Bazeley, 2009).

A Controversial Discussion

Such a discussion may not be for everyone or every religious tradition. Yet to ignore the reality that an increasing number of people who are members of church, synagogue, and mosque communities are now or will be dealing with this situation is to perhaps deny them the opportunity to seek comfort, support, and guidance from their tradition. How then can we approach such circumstances within a sacred framework?

A fellow rabbi, writing on this issue for a class on “Judaism and Aging,” noted that “one truly needs to understand that the case in point is not necessarily that of an adulterous partner, but rather of a transition in life, one in which the nature of the relationship between two spouses changes profoundly; a healthy partner assumes the role of caregiver in what once may well have been a loving, supportive relationship. In that case, as in every other major crossroads in life,

clergy should support the healthy spouse in every possible way—be it to enlighten him, relieve his guilt, or even bring the subject out into the public discussion arena; simply engaging in the conversation—the breaking of the bond of silence around the issue can itself be of tremendous help” (Shmilovitz, 2005).

In the coming decades, this issue of caregiving for a spouse with severe Alzheimer’s or other dementia will raise profound challenges for individuals and families, and the clergy that support them. The power and importance of religious ritual, as a means to bring a sense of meaning and spiritual foundation, cannot be underestimated. In the aloneness of the struggle, the oasis of faith and tradition can bridge the chasm of doubt, fear, and isolation.

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DEMENTIA

Upon Receiving a Diagnosis of Dementia

God of compassion, in this moment of fear and dread I turn to You. Lead me through the wilderness; speak to me with tenderness—for You are my hope.

Here, in a foreign land of illness, I long for the familiar: the gentle comfort of loved ones, places I know, things I enjoy. May these sustain me and keep me connected to the world. Bless my days with tiny joys.

And let there be unhurried time with family and friends. I pray that, when I am weak, their arms will embrace me. I pray that, in my silences, they will understand me. In valleys of darkness, may their voices guide me and reassure me. I give thanks for the gift of their patience and love.

May solace come in the sweetness of song, in the beauty of nature, in feelings too deep for words. God, be with me when I feel alone. Accompany my loved ones as they walk in the shadow of my illness.

When confusion takes hold, soothe my spirit, calm my fears. My God of compassion, answer me. And even when I cannot ask, answer me. Heal and comfort those who are ill. Lead us through the wilderness—for You are our hope.

Facing Dementia

My God, I am about to enter a wilderness.
All that I have thought is me—
my voice, my thinking, my memories—
will slip away, and I may not even comprehend it.

As I enter this wilderness my step quivers and my soul hurts.
In this leap of faith I will come to rely on so many,
and we will all rely on You.

Whom will I recognize? Who will recognize me?
Even though my mind will change, please do not let
the knitting of my soul unravel.
Only You will know me, even if I do not know myself.

Please help me to remember that others before me
have found You in the wilderness.
I am not sure I will know to look for You.
But please, look for me.

END OF LIFE

Entering into Hospice

God of Acceptance,

I am about to surrender. I will move from the land of medical cure into the land of complete comfort. I am grateful for all that the miracle of medicine has offered me. I know I am at the edge of its capacity. And now I step into the place in which everything lives with Your vision. I want to take Hope with me. I know that Hope before this moment was for the miracle of a full and complete recovery. I have prayed for a *r'fuah shleimah*, a recovery of the body and soul. Here I am, before You, my soul filled with a different hope. I hope that You will stay with me. I hope that my soul will know peace. I hope that my body will know no pain. I hope that my life will be seen as valuable. In this moment I give myself to You and all those who will ensure my comfort. My journey continues now into a realm I do not know. When the moment arrives, I will give my last breath to You. Please receive me. Please hold all who care for me. Please hear my voice, even as my speech becomes silent.

Upon Entering into Hospice

God of All Being,

The well of cures has run dry.
My physicians have been focused,
My caregivers diligent,
My family tireless
In their efforts to help me battle this disease.
The horizon of my life nears.
There is a single destination.

Ancient One,

God of our mothers,
God of our fathers,
I surrender my days to You,
As I must,

With the hope of a graceful death,
A dignified death
A loving death.

I make this choice for my own sake,
For the sake of my family and friends,
And for the sake of honoring the life You have given me.

Bless those around me with courage and strength,
 Just as I ask You, Holy One,
 To grant me the wisdom and ability
 To show them my steadfast love,
 An inheritance for the generations.
 Whatever remains,
 The journey hasn't ended.
 Ease my pain.
 Reduce my suffering.
 And bless me, God of my heart,
 With fullness of spirit
 With moments of faith,
 With glimpses of awe and wonder.

Hospice Prayer

Avinu shebashamayim, God in the heavens,
 We ask You to look upon _____ and bless him/her.
 Let _____ feel Your presence at this time of transition.
 Send down Your shining light and fill _____ with that
 light to give him/her peace and comfort.
 Shelter _____ from pain.
 Guide _____ with Your wisdom and eternal love on
 this final journey.
 Let _____ know that he/she will live on in the hearts of
 his/her loved ones.
 Bless this family too in this time of deep need. Support
 them when they falter from pain.
 Hear our prayer God, for You are a loving God.
 Amen.

Ritual for Going on Hospice

When a doctor determines that a person has less than six months to live, palliative care through hospice becomes an option. It can be a fraught decision because, to many people, going on hospice means "giving up."

Yet going on hospice can also be the point at which a patient and his/her family can stop battling a disease and turn their focus to the question: what do you want to do with the rest of your life. As Fran Smith and Sheila Himmel write in their book, *Changing the Way We Die*, "[H]ospice is much more than a way to relieve the discomforts of dying. It is a way to live."

At this critical life-transition, the following ceremony provides an opportunity for a patient (hereafter referred to as the VIP) and his/her loved ones to honor the love they have for one another and to be inspired to spend the rest of their time together creating meaning.

Purpose: To mark the transition from *fighting against* a disease to *living for* the remaining time.

Outcome: The patient feels enveloped in the love of family, friends and tradition and is more accepting and ready to begin this last stage of life.

Process: The following is a suggested outline for an approximately 30-minute ceremony. The offerings of blessings to the VIP can be omitted to shorten the ceremony.

Items needed: *Tallit*, beads (preferably beautiful ones) that snap into a bracelet. Invited participants are asked to prepare a *brief* blessing to offer to the VIP during the ceremony.

1. After a short *niggun* to get everyone into a ceremonial mood, the leader formally welcomes everyone and says to the VIP:

As you enter this next stage of life we are here to envelop you in our love. This *tallit* symbolizes not just the love that we in this room have for you but the love and connection that we Jews have to our ancestors across the generations.

VIP is wrapped in the *tallit* by a few people in the room and is invited to say the blessing for putting on the *tallit*.

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו, וציונו להתעטף בציצית.
Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hitatef ba'tzitzit.

2. **Reader 1:** Tradition holds that, on Shabbat evening, angels accompany us home from synagogue and to them, to our Heavenly guests, we sing *Shalom Aleichem*. This song has four stanzas, the first welcomes the angels and the last wishes them well as they depart. Today we are marking the beginning of a most sacred time in your life. We sing to the ministering angels to ask them to accompany you on this holy journey.

3. Leader leads the singing of the first verse of *Shalom Aleichem* (sung three times, ideally to Debbie Friedman melody):

שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם, מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרַיִת, מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, מִמְּלָכָהּ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
Shalom aleichem, malachei ha'sharayt, malachei elyon, mi'melech malchei ha'mlachim, HaKadosh Baruch Hoo.

Peace to you, ministering angels,
Messengers of the Most High,
Sent by the sovereign, the sovereign of all sovereigns,
The Holy One, whom we bless.

4. Reader 2: As Jews our most sacred time comes once a week on Shabbat. God created the world in six days and on the seventh God rested because the work was complete. The Hebrew word for complete is *shaleim* – a word that shares the same three-letter root as *shalom*, peace. One is at peace when one is complete.

5. Leader leads the singing of the second stanza of *Shalom Aleichem*:

בּוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, מִמְּלָכָהּ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
Bo'achem l'shalom, malachei ha'sharayt, malachei elyon, mi'melech malchei ha'mlachim, HaKadosh Baruch Hoo.

Come in peace, angels of peace,
Messengers of the Most High,
Sent by the sovereign, the sovereign of all sovereigns,
The Holy One, whom we bless.

6. Reader 3: Yet we know that creation renews itself every day, in goodness. (*Uv'tuvo m'chadesh b'chol yom tamid ma'asei v'reishit.*) Every day, every moment, is available to us to make it a blessing. We now offer our individual blessings to you.
7. Leader: As each person offers a blessing we will attach our beads together to make a complete circle. This bracelet will represent our complete love for you; we hope that when you look at it or wear it you will be reminded of our loving presence in your life. Leader invites those gathered to recite or say their prepared blessings and facilitates the creation of the bracelet.
8. When the last person has offered a blessing, the leader leads the singing of the third stanza of *Shalom Aleichem*:

בָּרְכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאָכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, מִמְּלָכָהּ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.
Barchunee l'shalom, malachei ha'sharayt, malachei elyon, mi'melech malchei ha'mlachim, HaKadosh Baruch Hoo.

**Bless me with peace, angels of peace,
Messengers of the Most High,
Sent by the sovereign, the sovereign of all sovereigns,
The Holy One, whom we bless.**

9. Leader invites the VIP to recite the following and then to bless everyone in the room (this would also be the appropriate time for the VIP to say anything else):

**May the angel Michael be at my right,
And the angel Gabriel be at my left,
And in front of me the angel Uriel,
And behind me the angel Raphael,
And above my head the Shechinah**

**יְבָרֵךְ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶהָ.
Yivarek'kha adonai v'yishm'rekha.
May God bless you and protect you.**

**יֵאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחַנֶּה.
Ya'eir adonai panav eilakha vikhuneka.
May God show you favor and be gracious to you.**

**יֵשָׁא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיַשֵּׁם לָךְ שָׁלוֹם.
Yisah adonai panav eilekha, v'yasem l'kha shalom.
May God show you kindness and grant you peace.**

10. Leader: The beads of your new bracelet are not just reminders of our love but also represent the angels who we ask to hold you and escort you on this holy journey.

Leader leads the singing of the final stanza of *Shalom Aleichem*:

**צִאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם, מַלְאַכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם, מַלְאַכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן, מִמְּלֶכֶת מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרַךְ הוּא.
*Tzaytchem l'shalom, malachei ha'sharayt, malachei elyon, mi'melech malchei
ha'mlachim, HaKadosh Baruch Hoo.***

**Go in peace, angels of peace,
Messengers of the Most High,
Sent by the sovereign, the sovereign of all sovereigns,
The Holy One, whom we bless.**

For One Near Death

Adonai, God of our ancestors, all is now in Your hands.
Forgive and release any hurts or wrongdoings done
consciously or unconsciously.
Lift up all _____'s worries and fears. Wash them away.
Let goodness flow over him/her and surround him/her now.
Help him/her as he/she readies for his/her next passage.
May his/her worries for us be eased.
Let him/her know You will walk alongside, and be present
for us, for his/her soul is entwined with ours.
As he/she comes close to You, bathe him/her in Your light.
Love him/her and carry him/her.
Shelter him/her under Your wings.
Ready a place in Your garden for him/her.
Into Your hand we trust his/her soul.
Gently, lovingly, tend him/her now.
Adonai blesses you and watches over you.
Adonai's Presence shines upon you and sheds grace
all around you.
Adonai garbs you in light and bestows peace upon you.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד.
יְיָ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים.

*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.
Adonai hu ha-Elohim.*

Hear O Israel, Adonai our God, Adonai is One.
Adonai is God.

May Your angels come to _____'s sides.
On his/her right, Michael, carry our prayers;
on his/her left, Gavriel, protect him/her;
before him/her, Uriel, light his/her way;
behind him/her, Raphael, heal all hurts;
and over his/her head and all around him/her, Shechinah,
may he/she rest within your wings.

לְדוֹלֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם.

Leich/I'chi I'shalom.

Go in peace.

Ending Life Support / Making an End-of-Life Decision

Adonai, please help us as we face this terrible decision. Bring us close to You so that we feel less alone. Holding on and letting go are two impossible opposites, and yet here we stand, at the bedside of the one we love so much, trying to do both.

Please, God, take gently, enfold him/her under your protective wings and care for him/her always, even as we tried to do in life. Give us strength as we prepare to meet the world without him/her, and guide us as we face the days ahead.

שמע ישראל, יהוה אלהינו, יהוה אחד.
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.

Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va-ed.

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.
Blessed is God's glorious majesty forever and ever.

PART II: *Entering a Tent of Healing*

Prayer for the End of Life

Master of life and death:

I acknowledge that life and death are not in my hands.

As I did not seek to be born,

so I do not seek to leave this beautiful world.

Many times I have been healed;

and I have treasured each day of my life.

But if I am not to be healed of this illness, then I accept death,

and will try to end my days with dignity and courage.

I know that I have not lived a perfect life.

I am sorry for my mistakes, the wrongs I have done and any pain I have caused.

As I ask forgiveness from those I have hurt,

I bestow my forgiveness on friends and family members

for words uttered thoughtlessly, impulsively or in anger.

Let no one suffer on my account.

My God and God of my ancestors:

Be with my beloved family when I am gone.

Watch over them and help them.

May the memory of my love bring them comfort and healing.

May they find strength in caring for one another, as I have cared for them throughout my life.

I have cherished my husband, my daughters, and my precious grandson.

They are my immortality.

I know that I have been deeply blessed.

I am grateful for the gift of my life,

and the chance to use my gifts in service to others.

But if my life becomes a burden, may I lay it down and find peace.

As I came into this world from the unknown,

I will try to prepare myself once more for the unknown,

as I enter into the peace that lies beyond this life.

Eloheynu vellohei avoteinu – My God, God of my people:

You breathed a soul into me as my life began;

Soon I will breathe it back to You and return it to Your care.

I am not afraid.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu, Adonai Echad.

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God; Adonai is One.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Koyzk taught:

אין דבר שלם יותר מלב שבור

Ein davar shaleim yoteir mileiv shavur

“There is nothing more whole than a broken heart!”

And Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught:

כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאד והעקר לא לפחד כלל

Kawl ha-olam kulo gesher tzar m'ohd v'ha-ikar lo l'facheid k'lal

“We travel through this world on a very narrow bridge;
what matters most is that we overcome our fear!”

Blessed is the path to acceptance -

very near, and sometimes distant as the horizon.

We pray, as one voice, as one heart beat:

*That our moments of joy surpass the times of struggle,
that we taste the sweetness of each precious day,
that the work of our hands brings fulfillment.*

Blessed is the life of every human soul -

pure and bright, the breath of God within us.

We pray, as one voice, as one heart beat:

*Help us to know the Infinite Wisdom that gives life
and takes it away.*

Forgive us for anger, bitterness and selfishness.

Teach us the language of memory and healing.

Blessed is the pilgrimage from grief to gratitude -

precious are the sights along the way.

We pray, as one voice, as one heart beat:

For humility: to see, in all things, the Creator's gifts;

For generosity: to respond to the gift of life by

giving of ourselves.

For strength: to hold on to life - and, to let it go!

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים

Baruch attah Adonai m'kor ha-chayyim.

Blessed are You, Holy One, the Source of Life.

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
And youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
And then, perhaps, to wisdom.

*From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness -
And, often, back again;
From health to sickness
And back, we pray, to health again.*

From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding -
From fear to faith.

*From defeat to defeat to defeat -
Until, looking backward or ahead,*

*We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in our having made the journey, stage by stage,*

A sacred pilgrimage.

"THESE ARE THE WAYS WE REMEMBER"

יש פוכבים שאורם מגיע ארצה	רק באשר
הם עצמם אבדו ואינם.	יש אנשים שזיו
זכרם מאיר	באשר הם עצמם אינם עוד
בתוכינו.	אורות אלה המבהיקים בחשכת
הליל	הם הם שמראים
לאדם את הדרך.	

"There are stars up above whose radiance is still visible on Earth, though they had long ago been extinguished. And there are people whose brilliance continues to illumine the World even though they are no longer among the living. And the stars that light up the darkest night, these are the lights that guide us. As we live out our days, these are the ways we remember!"

(Hannah Szenes)

תהילים כ"ג - PSALM 23

מזמור לדוד.
יהוה רעי לא אחסר.
בנאות דשא ירביצני על מי מנחות ינהלני.
נפשי ישועב ינחני במעגלי-צדק למען שמו.
גם כי אלה בגיא צלמות לא אירא רע
כי אתה עמדי. שבטה ומשענתה המה ינחמני.
תערה לפני שלחן נגד צררי.
דשנת בשמן ראשי כוסי רועה.
אה טוב וחסד ירדפוני כל-ימי חיי.
ושבתי בבית יהוה לארץ ימים.

The *Shechinah*, The Divine Sheltering Presence, makes
me feel whole, causing me to rest in fields of green,

leading me to calming waters, replenishing my soul,
and empowering me to make affirming choices
in celebration of God's Creation.

Now, as we walk in darkness, our loss so present and so keen,

we will not despair, for we know that You are with us!

Your Guidance and Nurturing Spirit sustain me.
You have set a full-table for me whenever I have been
hurt and alone; you have conferred upon me unique
potential which, though I strive always to realize, I
sometimes have difficulty attaining.

*From the deep-core of our being we are filled with gratitude for
Your Goodness and Loving-kindness which, we know, abides
within us, as we live out our own finite-days within Your
Sacred Space, seeking our hope and our comfort within Your
Embrace .*

A TIME FOR PRIVATE THOUGHTS

Blessed are the memories -
holy and cherished the love they reveal.
We pray, as one voice, as one heart beat:

*May our sorrows soften and diminish in intensity,
May our pain grow gentler with time.
And may our memories keep us close to one another.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים

Baruch attah Adonai m'kor ha-chayyim.

Blessed are You, Holy One, the source of life.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Sh'ma Yisraeyl Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad!

A Time to Prepare

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
And youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
 And then, perhaps, to wisdom;
From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness—
 And, often, back again;
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 And back, we pray, to health again;
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From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding—
 From fear to faith;
From defeat to defeat to defeat—
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage,
 A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage—
 To life everlasting. (Alvin Fine)

Gates of Repentance, Chaim Stern, ed. (New York: CCAR, 1978), pp. 283–284

You can shed tears that he is gone,
Or you can smile because he lived,
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back,
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared,
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember him and only that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on,
You can cry and close your mind be empty and
turn your back,
Or you can do what he would want:
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

He Is Gone – By David Harkins

The Second Half of Our Life

The Second Half of Our Life

In the second half of our life we yearn for wholeness. We yearn to remember the parts of ourselves that we have forgotten, to nourish those we have starved, to express those we have silenced, and to bring into the light those we have cast into shadows.

We yearn for the parts of ourselves that have been in the dark to find sunlight, and those that sunburned to find shade. We yearn for the parts that have been undeveloped to grow, parts that have been silent to speak, and those that were noisy to be still. We yearn for the parts that have been alone to find companionship, and those that have been overcrowded to find solitude.

We yearn to live our unlived lives.

Mark Gerzon, Shambala Sun 2000

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