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נחמו נחמו עמי
Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people
Isaiah 40:1

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From Our President

עת ספוד ועת רקוד

A Time for Mourning and a Time for Dancing

By Carol Kaufman Newman

Until I was married, I had not encountered death close up. No funerals, no *shiva* calls. Some time during the first few years of my marriage that changed. It was a very difficult transition. In those years I was terribly shy and insecure. Going to pay a *shiva* call was almost unbearable. Where do I sit? What do I say? If I send my husband more than once, will they notice that I did not come at all?

Then, when I was 34 years old, my father died. I was the one sitting *shiva*. In those seven days I became an adult member of the Jewish community. During the year of mourning I learned to be comforted and also how to comfort. Funerals no longer frightened me. I no longer felt ill at ease when I paid *shiva* calls to people I hardly knew. Suddenly I seemed to know what to say. I could offer to make meals, to take care of children. I became a member of a *hevra kadisha* with the most wonderful, caring women. I learned what it meant to come late to a show or miss a dinner completely in order to perform the *mitzva* of preparing the dead for burial.

When my father died all those years ago, there was very little my sisters and I could do to engage in the mourning process. Though we asked whether we could say *kaddish*, it was almost unheard of for a woman to take on that obligation. When my mother died in 1999 however, things had changed. Now my sister and I decided to say *kaddish*. The daily *minyan* I went to at Kehilath Jeshurun was warm and welcoming. The men cared about us, worried about us when we were away (tell us when you go, they said), and never forgot to pass the *tzedaka* plate to us. Not so in most of the other synagogues I went to. One had to be really dedicated to take the pain that was often administered. I will never forget the man who was putting on *tefillin* in the women's section of one shul and would not move to make a place for me. So I sat outside and listened through the window. Nor will I forget the many times I knocked on the *mehitza* to ask them to pass the *tzedaka* box to me.

I remember a number of men telling me how hard the year of mourning was and how they couldn't wait for it to end. For me the ending was the hardest. How would I get up every morning and not put aside time to think of my mother? Would I now forget her? That last *kaddish* of the year felt as if my clothes were being torn once again—the pain was so intense.

This issue of the Journal is filled with personal stories and articles about individual and communal mourning. There is much to learn about the role of mourning in Jewish life, but I hope you will also take away something else. When my sister Judy died, my eldest daughter was about to be married. How could I make a wedding in 9 weeks when I was in mourning for my

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Women, Funerals, and Cemeteries

By Zev Farber

We have all heard about women in Israel being stopped from attending the funerals or burials of their loved ones. Yet, it is clear that in Talmudic times and during much of the Middle Ages women took part in funeral processions. This article focuses on the development of the tradition for them not to attend funerals and the reasoning behind it.[1]

The Early Sources

It says in the Jerusalem Talmud *Sanhedrin* 2:3 (see also Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 20a),

> *Certain texts say: "Women walk in front and the men behind them." Other texts say: "Men walk in front and women behind them." Those who believe women walk in front, is because women are the cause of death in this world. Those who believe men walk in front, is out of respect for the daughters of Israel, so that [the men] can't watch the women [walking].*

Similarly, in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (version 2, 2:9), we read, "Why do women walk before the coffin? For they say: 'We caused death to come here.'"

From the above sources, it is clear that women took part in funeral processions, with the only question being whether they should walk in front or behind. The custom of having the women walk behind is explained as being due to modesty. The custom of having the women

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From Our President

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sister? How could I send out invitations as if nothing had happened? And then I remembered the words of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes):

לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים...
עת ספוד ועת רקוד...

To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven...A time for mourning and a time for dancing…

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)

A full life will, by necessity, include sad times; times for weeping. I hope that we will continue to be a community that gives and gets comfort at those times, and that after the healing we will not forget to take the time to celebrate the joys of life.

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Women, Funerals, and Cemeteries

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walk in front is explained as being due to the sin of Eve, who, by eating the forbidden fruit and giving it to Adam, caused death to be a part of this world. Either way, it is clear that women did participate, which brings up the question: What is the origin of the shift from participation to non-participation?

Tractate *Berakhot* (51a) states the following:

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: "The Angel of Death told me three things:
- *Do not take your cloak from the attendant in the morning and put it on.*
- *Do not let someone who hasn't washed his hands wash your hands.*
- *Do not stand before women when they are returning from [handling] the dead, because I am dancing in front of them, sword in hand, and I have permission to do harm."*

If one comes across [these women], what should one do? Jump four cubits away. If there is a river—cross it, if there is another road—take it, if there is a wall—stand behind it, and if none of this is possible, he should turn his head back and recite (Zechariah 3:2) "God said to Satan – God will admonish you…" until they have passed.

Again, one sees here that women were involved in the burial rituals in some form. However, there is also a fear of some sort of danger present among women who have dealt with a corpse, and the Talmud warns men to avoid them. The onus, here, is on the man. There is no sentiment that women should not be at funerals.

In a more comprehensive articulation of the above matters, the Zohar (Exodus, *va-Yakhel*, 194b), states,

Rabbi Simeon said: "Truly most people in this world do not die before their time, except for those who do not know how to protect themselves. For at the time when a corpse is brought from his house to the cemetery, the Angel of Death can be found among the women. Why among the women? For this is his way from the time when he seduced Eve and through her caused death to be part of the world... He has permission to kill people; he looks in the face of those he sees on the way to the cemetery and on the way back… How can one avoid this? When the corpse is being brought to the cemetery, the men should turn their backs and let the women walk behind them. If [the women] walk in front, [the men] should walk behind them so as not to look at the face to face. And when they are returning from the cemetery, they should not return on the same road upon which the women are returning, and they should not look at the [women] at all. But since people do not know this, and give no thought to it, most of the world is caught in this judgment and pass on before their time." Rabbi Elazar said: "If so, it would be better if men didn't attend to the dead [at all]!" [Rabbi Simeon] responded: "No! Since a man who protects himself in these situations is fit for a long life, and even more so for the 'World to Come'."[2]

The Zohar, in its usual elegant style, has combined the Jerusalem Talmud text about women being the cause of death in this world with Rabbi Joshua ben Levi's statement about the Angel of Death in a unique synthesis. According to the Zohar, the Angel of Death is found among the women because their involvement with the corpse "reminds" God of Eve's sin and causes Him to allow the Angel of Death to execute summary judgments against anyone he looks in the eye.

However, it is important to note that, even in the Zohar, the onus is still on the men to avoid either walking with the women during the funeral procession or looking the Angel of Death in their midst face to face![3] There is no practical difference between the Talmudic passages and the Zohar and no mention of women not being permitted to attend funerals. The Zohar merely crafts a coherent mystical explanation to tie the two passages together.

Rabbi Joseph Karo

This general trend to understand the "danger" of funerals to men changes

with Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488–1575). In the *Beit Yosef*, his commentary on the *Tur*, he writes (*Yoreh De'ah*, 359):

> *In the Zohar,* Parshat va-Yakhel, *the following is written: "Women should be prevented from going to the cemetery, because if they go they cause injury to the world." Hence, it is proper to stop them.*

Rabbi Karo goes on to concretize this in his *Shulhan Arukh*: "One should prevent women from going to the cemetery behind the coffin."

This momentous decision to prevent women from attending funerals at all, as opposed to just having them walk in front or in back, is seconded by such eminent authorities as Rabbi Moses Isserles, Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, Rabbi Joel Sirkes, Rabbi Joshua Falk-Katz, and Rabbi Shabtai Cohen, all citing the *Beit Yosef*'s "paraphrase" of the Zohar as the source, despite the fact that it is the complete inverse of what the Zohar actually says!

This problem was articulated best by Rabbi Johanan ben Meir Kreminitzer in *Oreh Mishor* (pub. 1691/2), his commentary on the *Darkhei Moshe ha-Arokh* of R. Isserles:

> *Our teacher is following the* Beit Yosef, *after whom all of the recent authorities have followed. I am totally astonished, for the Zohar does not at all say what the* Beit Yosef *claims it does...*[4] *The fact that the* Beit Yosef *and all the recent authorities who have followed him did not pick up on this is completely bewildering.*

The *Aharonim* (Later Authorities): Four Models

Having made the essential distinction between the onus being on the women and the onus being on the men, one can distinguish four main models, the first two banning women from funerals and the latter two allowing their attendance:

Women should be banned to protect men from danger.

An example of this is the custom of Safed, mentioned by Rabbi Abraham Adadi (Tripoli 1801-1874) in his *Va-Yikra Avraham* (p. 126b):

> *I can testify that in the city of Safed, not only do women not join the procession at all, either in front or in back, but for every procession there is an attendant who walks before the coffin and calls out in a loud voice:* "Mitzva! Mitzva!" *All the men who hear his voice come to join the procession, but all the women who are at a place in the market close to where the coffin will be carried, or in their gardens or outside their yards [leave and] go far inside, as if fleeing from a serpent.*[5]

It is fascinating to see how the original custom of the Talmud and the Zohar has been totally reversed. Now, instead of the men jumping aside, the women are jumping aside. Further, the women are banned from attending the funeral altogether, something that was not true for the men referred to in the Talmud and the Zohar. Rabbi Adadi himself suggested a compromise:

> *Recently, we announced a policy [of not allowing women to attend funerals] with all our might, with the exception of relatives, for this is impossible to accomplish, since they are very passionate [about attending their relative's funeral] they pay no heed either to the announcement or the prohibition.*

S. L. Liepmannssohn, *Betrachtungen und Gebete,* Minden and Leipzig,1838.
Image provided by The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The frontispiece of this German book of prayers and devotions shows a woman visiting the cemetery. Ashkenazic women traditionally visited the cemetery a great deal throughout the year in times of sickness, hardship and particularly during the month of Ellul to ask deceased family members, ancestors and famous rabbis to pray for them. There were many prayers and *tekhines* for women to recite on such visits.

Women should be banned due to immodesty and decorum.[6]

Rabbi Joseph Kapih (1917–2000), in his essay on Yemenite customs (*Collected Writings*, p. 922), states the following[7]:

> *[In Yemen,] women did not participate in funeral processions or burials at all. The procession was carried out with quiet dignity. The faces of the participants demonstrated acceptance and mourning, while their eyes expressed pain and sadness—a dignified and controlled pain, as is befitting a holy people.... But what is the situation—to our dismay—nowadays? Women pile in alongside the men,*

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Hevra Kadisha: An Appreciation

By Blu Greenberg

I came to a new appreciation of the *hevra kadisha* after the death of my son JJ in September 2002. My previous experiences were indirect: when my parents-in-law and then my father died, one phone call was made to their synagogues, and everything was set in motion.

But JJ did not die in his home community. He died suddenly in Israel, at age 36, when a van struck him on his bike. JJ was bicycling from Ra'anana with his brother David and a friend to visit their sister Goody in Zikhron Yaakov. He had arrived in Israel the previous night, and the rest of us were to join him a few days later for Sukkot.

The accident occurred early Friday morning. We, the parents, were in New York. By the time we understood the gravity of the situation, it was too late to travel. Moreover, no flights were scheduled for Saturday night, as Sunday was Yom Kippur eve and the airport closed early, a precaution taken after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Friends offered the use of their private jet, but postponed the flight upon learning the airport might be closed. As we could not travel until after Yom Kippur, the funeral was held over until Tuesday. This delay was highly unusual for a Jerusalem *hevra kadisha* with its tradition of burying even late at night so as not to delay interment. But the *hevra* understood we could not travel because of Shabbat and Yom Kippur and exerted no pressure. It may have helped that Rabbi Seth Farber, who arranged matters with the Jerusalem *hevra*, was a close friend of JJ's and our family.

A *hevra kadisha* is responsible for doing everything, not only the *tahara* but also the *shmira* with its component of prayer and learning. Though JJ was out of reach of his home community, his brother and sister each had strong communal ties in Israel, and he himself had many friends all over the country. These friends and cousins constituted themselves as the initial *hevra kadisha*. They undertook the *shmira*, rotating watches for four days, studying *mishnayot* and reciting *Tehillim*. They never left his side. On the last day, the *hevra kadisha* of Jerusalem took over and performed the *tahara*. By the time we arrived, everything was in place.

We went directly to the cemetery. We were led by the *hevra* rabbi through the crowd to a private room where JJ's body lay, giving us an opportunity to say a few parting words. Our family was standing all together. We did not have a lot of time before the funeral, for by the time we arrived, more than a thousand people had assembled and were waiting. JJ would have been concerned about keeping people standing in the hot sun. He was often late and kept others waiting, but never in a place of physical discomfort to them. He was highly sensitive to the comfort of others. With all these people waiting, I could almost hear him say, "We have to get started; people are hot and standing," just as when I wasn't quite ready with Shabbat lunch, he would quietly remind me that our guests were hungry.

A personal thought about the *tahara*: Although I have always been impressed with the work of our local *hevra kadisha*, I was never fully at ease with the idea of washing the body before burial. Part of me would ask, Why bother? The body will decay in a few days, maybe a few days longer in a plain pine box. Why pull people out late at night and early morning to do work that hardly makes a difference?

Moreover, privacy was an issue. I know this concern is odd—because what does it matter when you are dead whether or not you maintain your privacy; still, I did not like the idea that either people I barely knew, or people I knew well, would view my body.

All that changed when JJ died. Though he had been cleaned up in the hospital after the accident, and then again after his organ donation surgery, and though his body was missing kidneys; lung, liver, pancreas; skin (for Israel's burn units) and bone (for cancer treatments)—the fact that his body was treated as a whole and purified after its ordeal somehow mattered to me. It was comforting that there was no distinction between his altered body and the body of one who had died a normal death. That his whole body, his whole self so to speak, was treated with dignity helped me put organ donation into the right perspective. For although I wrote that he donated his organs, it was we who made that decision. We based it on his

Hevra Kadisha shel Rehitza
Membership plaque of *Hevra Kadisha* for Washing the Deceased, Rome, 1816.
Image provided by The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

values and his wishes, but I am sure he never imagined that he would be donating his organs so early in life. The fact that his body was purified before burial was one more connection to his real life, his corporeal whole life. By the time we got to the cemetery, he had been washed and wrapped and somehow looked tall and whole and, in an odd sense, quite regal—not a shell with missing parts or a frame mangled from an accident.

The rabbi of the *hevra kadisha* lifted the wrappings for us to identify him. We saw only a corner of his face, and after four days the signs of death were there. I understood why a *hevra* does its work as soon as the call comes in to allow for burial as quickly as possible. We often forget that a *hevra kadisha* must keep the same hours as an ambulance driver or emergency room doctor. There is little room for delay in the *tahara*, which means members must always drop their ordinary schedules and rise to the call.

Why do *hevra* members take pride and feel a sense of privilege in their work? Why do we never hear a grumble? Why do they feel a holiness about the act of washing a dead body? In JJ's burial, their actions seemed to constitute a loving link between life and death. It was as if the entire interval between his accident and the hospitals and organ removal was overridden in the act of *tahara*. Somehow, this was the most appropriate ritual for the ending of JJ's life. JJ always loved water and especially showers. His showers were legendary. He was an environmentalist and a conservationist, long before these words entered the national consciousness. He used every piece of office paper on both sides; paper plates and napkins could potentially be used again; he conserved water in many ways. But he allowed himself long, hot showers. The *tahara* was, in a sense, the last washing of his life before being placed in the ground. It was a loving act that would have been far more difficult, even lacerating, for someone grieving, someone so close. But the *hevra kadisha* members, following a set of compassionate rules, could give this gift of cleansing and purification to JJ as he exited earthly life, which is sacred, and entered the realm of death which involves mysteries we cannot begin to fathom. I believe that *hevra* members intuitively understand that their work, with its measure of *kedusha* (holiness), bridges these two realms.

I have always appreciated how brilliantly the rabbis understood human needs at a time of death of a loved one: the *hevra kadisha* is but one piece in the spectrum of laws of grief and mourning. Yet we must ask: are there new tasks for this ancient institution? I believe so as I consider JJ's life and death.

JJ had a great, good heart. Donating his organs was a way of extending his essential generosity and kindness beyond his life. We knew without doubt that this would have been his choice. Today, everyone recognizes that organ donation saves lives and that halakha has been interpreted to permit it, even within Judaism's strong parameters of honoring the dead. Yet, while the Orthodox community accepts organs at the same rate as others, it has a lower donation rate than any other community. Where does the *hevra kadisha* come in? In many instances, *hevra* members are friends of the dying person or his or her family. Making a decision about organ donation is a weighty one, and often a family is helped by thinking the matter through in conversation with others. Where possible, a *hevra* should connect to hospital transplant teams and medical ethicists to become a knowledgeable resource on organ donation; *hevra* members should also study the sources in Jewish law so as to be able to reinforce the new halakhic teachings concerning this act of kindness.

***Takkanot* (Ordinances) of the *Hevra Kadisha* for Deeds of Lovingkindness of the Ashkenazic Community of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Jacob Proops, 1776.**
Image provided by The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

A second new task for the *hevra kadisha* is to update its views on women and their place in grief and mourning rituals. I felt total sensitivity and compassion from the Jerusalem *hevra* in JJ's burial. Yet, one incident gave me pause, perhaps because of my prior experience with traditional *hevra kadisha* attitudes and practices. For example, women are often told that they may not eulogize and may not shovel the earth at the cemetery, and pregnant women are discouraged from attending funerals or going to the cemetery altogether. Moreover, an incident that took place a few years earlier involving the same *hevra kadisha* and the same Jerusalem cemetery had lingered in my memory. When my aunt died,

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Sometimes the Chaplain Is the Only One Who Can Mourn

By Margaret Frenkel Goldstein

In 2002, I began studying to become a chaplain. This entailed taking a 1,600-hour series of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) courses. In addition, since I am neither a rabbi nor a *hazzan*, but rather an Orthodox laywoman, it was necessary for me to obtain a degree "equivalent" to *semikha*.

I no longer recall what my expectations were when I began my chaplaincy journey, but I do remember being surprised at what I learned. First, I found that I needed to become much more self-aware, that I could not be an effective chaplain unless I recognized my own vulnerabilities, fears, and prejudices. In addition, I learned that as a chaplain I must be able to (1) "walk" with patients in their suffering, (2) help them express what is true for them, and (3) lift my voice in prayer for them. In other words, it is not enough to come smiling into a room, say "How are you today?" and a moment later, "*refu'a sheleima*, may you have a complete recovery." I must instead be prepared to invite disclosures, confidences, complaints, and laments. Upbeat friendly chatting may be a goal of a *bikkur holim* visitor, but it is not the chaplain's.

I also learned that the chaplain does not only serve the patients. Family members, hospital staff, visitors, and companions of the sick person often also require my services. When death is approaching, or has already occurred, the chaplain serves everyone in the vicinity.

Once a patient has died, the body of the deceased must be dealt with: Tubes must be removed, a Jew (perhaps me, for a while) must remain with the body at all times, the *hevra kadisha* and the funeral parlor must be called. These practicalities are the easy part.

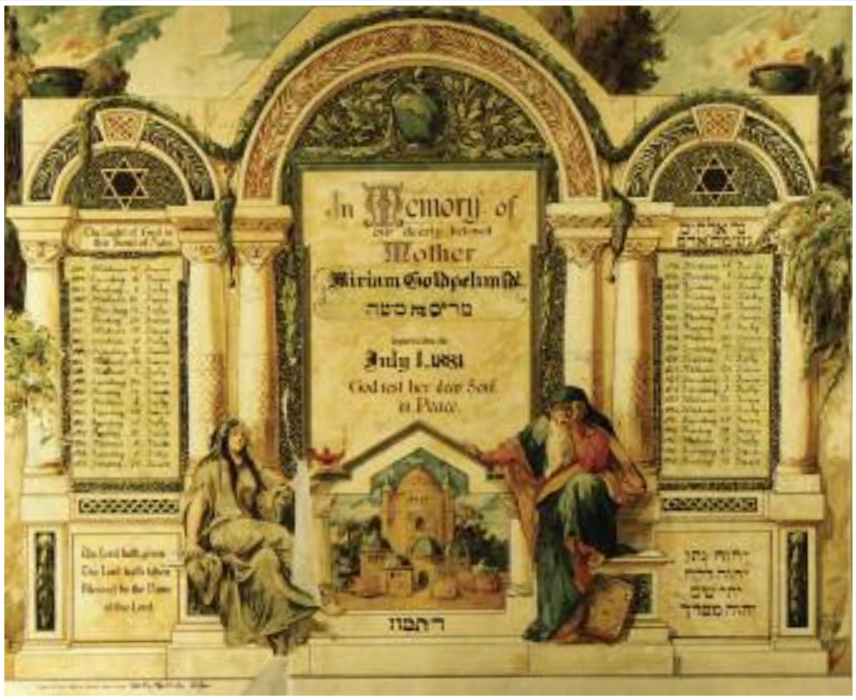
Far more difficult is the task of interacting with and comforting the survivors. Relatives and friends who are present may be in shock, in deep grief, or only a bit sad. They may feel relieved that the end has finally come. They may even be indifferent—but assume that they must feign sadness. Beyond the friends and families, we cannot forget the people on the staff—nurses, aides, doctors, and others—who may have spent time with the patients, worked hard to improve their health, clean and feed them, make them comfortable; all these people experience a range of emotions that the chaplain may have to confront.

While I am with the person I am serving, I must suspend my own emotional responses so that I can fully understand his or hers. After I leave the person, I must reflect: How did I feel? Why did I feel that? What was it about my own past that evoked the emotions I had during the encounter? Also, did I serve the person well? What could I have done better? What should I not have done at all?

One particular experience sticks with me. This happened in 2004, when I was a chaplain-intern at a small Catholic hospital in New York. I have changed the names of the people involved.

One morning, the Director of Pastoral Care of the hospital asked me to see Selma, an 81-year-old Jewish woman, who had been comatose for a week and was going to be extubated that afternoon. This would in all likelihood result in her death within twenty-four hours. I got my *siddur* in hand and took the elevator up to Selma's floor. I was apprehensive. The family is probably not Orthodox, I thought to myself. Will they reject me, either because I'm a representative of religion and they are secular, or because, on the contrary, I am only a layperson and not a rabbi? Will they consider me intrusive? Will they make demands on me that I will have trouble meeting? Will they be on good terms with each other, or will I walk into a family quarrel?

I approached Selma's room nervously, peeked in, but saw no one there beside the bed. I walked over to Selma's side. She was a small, heavyset woman with dull gray hair, and clear, soft skin—all in all unremarkable looking. As expected, she was hooked up to numerous tubes and monitors. We were alone, and though she was not conscious, I held her hand and began to sing to her. I chose Jewish tunes that I thought she might recognize from her youth: *Adon Olam, Day-day-yeinu, Shema Yisrael*. I spoke to her: "I'm sorry you've been through



Yahrzeit Calendar
In memory of Miriam Goldschmidt, died July 1, 1881
New York, ca. 1905.
Image provided by The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

such a tough time. I hope you're feeling calm and have no pain. I'd like to say *vidui* with you. *Vidui* is a prayer of confession that Jews say when they're very sick. Many people who have said *vidui* have gotten better, so don't be scared about my saying it." I then recited *vidui*. "I have to leave for a little while, but I'll be back soon," I assured her.

I visited other patients. A couple of hours later I returned to Selma's floor. As soon as I got off the elevator I saw her family at the door to her room. They stood at the entrance, but did not enter the room. The key player was clearly the short, attractive middle-aged woman in the center; both the young man on her left and the middle-aged man on her right had their arms around her and were rubbing her back soothingly. I had to wonder why these people made no move to enter the room. I had enough experience by this time to realize that some people have difficulty with illness and death. They're probably squeamish about getting too close to a dying relative, I thought.

I went up to them. "Hello, I'm Margaret Goldstein, the Jewish chaplain-intern here."

"Oh, hello, I'm glad you came," said the middle-aged man. "This is Doris, Selma's daughter, I'm Doris' husband Ted, and this is our son Arthur. We were just going to lunch, but Doris says she's not hungry. Maybe you can stay with her?"

"Of course," I said.

Doris continued to stand at the doorway as her husband and son left.

"Why don't we sit?" I suggested, and quickly dragged chairs to the doorway.

"Okay, that would be good, but could we just sit out here?" Doris asked, as I was about to position the chairs an inch into the room.

So we sat, in the hall right outside Selma's room, and talked. Doris told me about her husband, an engineer, and her son who was finishing college with honors. They lived in upstate New York. Her mother, she said, lived in a nursing home in Queens and had become sick only recently. The doctor had advised that her mother was going to die soon and they decided to take his advice and extubate her.

"This must be very difficult for you," I said.

"Yes. Well, yes and no."

"I can't imagine what you've been going through," I said.

"No, I guess you can't."

"Tell me about it."

Doris sighed. Tears appeared in her eyes and she slumped forward slightly.

"No one outside my family knows anything about this."

I thought, she's referring to the extubation. She must be ambivalent about her decision.

"You haven't told anyone," I said.

"No." Doris sighed again, and now began to weep. "I'm not crying because she's dying. I'm crying because of what she's done to me."

And to my great surprise Doris told me that her mother was an embittered, angry woman. She poured out stories of cruelty and abuse inflicted on her over the years by her mother. Selma's husband ran away from her when Doris and her brother were still very young. He died shortly thereafter, so that there was no longer anyone to protect the children from Selma.

"Every time my mother got mad at me, she'd say she wished she'd had an abortion so she wouldn't have to deal with me. And she was mad at me all the time. She beat me, she called me names. I don't know how I got through it. But the one thing I cannot forgive her for is what she did to my brother. He did not get through it. She was even worse to him than she was to me—and he committed suicide because of her. So I'm not crying because she's dying. I'm crying because of what she did to me, and what she did to him."

"It sounds as if she was a very, very sick woman," I said. And, though my heart was in my throat, "I want to pray for you, and for your family, if that's all right?"

"Okay."

"*Keil maleh rahamim*, I am here with Doris, whose life has been filled with suffering since she was a child. She lost her father, she lost her brother. Thank you, Hashem, for giving Doris a loving husband and son. Please let them continue to give her comfort and joy. Let the next days be the start of a happier life for Doris, a life of *nachas* from her son, and peace, and calm. Thank you."

"Oh, thank you so much. That was so wonderful," Doris said. I think she was relieved that my prayer validated her and did not ask for reconciliation with her mother.

We continued to talk, about her husband and her son, and she faced them with equanimity when they returned from lunch. I said goodbye. When I came back after my own lunch, the family had left. I returned to Selma's side, hardly knowing what to do or say. I mourned her *yiddisha neshama*, her life that had gone so wrong, her imminent death that would come without love or grief. I wished her peace and left.

Selma was extubated later that day and died a few hours later.

The visit with Doris affected me profoundly and I spent some time analyzing my reactions to it. I also had to consider whether I had helped Doris as much as I might have, what else I might have done or said, or what I perhaps should not have done at all.

Four years later, I still think about Selma and I still mourn her.

Sometimes, the chaplain is the only one who can mourn.

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UNDO IT, TAKE IT BACK

Undo it, take it back,
make every day the previous one
until I am returned to the day
before the one that made
you gone. Or set me on an
airplane traveling west,
crossing the date line again
and again, losing this day,
then that, until the day of loss
still lies ahead, and you
are here instead of sorrow.

Nessa Rapoport

Dignity in the Face of the Holocaust

By Rochel U. Berman

A cornerstone of the *tahara* prayers is the invocation of the name of the deceased several times during the ritual. We do so as we begin the *tahara* (literally "purification"—the process of preparing a Jew for burial according to Jewish law and custom), when we advocate for his or her soul before the Almighty, and finally when we ask forgiveness for any errors of omission or commission during the *tahara*. This positioning of the deceased in center stage underscores the undeniable identity and uniqueness of that individual.

Safeguarding individual identity has deep roots in Jewish tradition. Biblical commentaries compare the people of Israel to stars named by God. The Holocaust robbed the Jewish people of six million of its shining stars. They went to their deaths without shrouds, without memorial prayers, and without gravestones. Denied any form of individuality or dignity, most victims were sent nameless into mass graves. In researching my book on participation in *hevra kadishas,* I came across stories of women doing *taharot* and caring for the dead victims during the Holocaust under the most terrible conditions. Isolated incidents of individual burials accompanied by *taharot* represented a stunning departure during the Holocaust, a repudiation of the Nazi campaign of depersonification.

I discovered that when a formal *hevra* ceased to exist, family members or friends assumed this responsibility as best they could. Traditionally, the details of *tahara* were kept within the *hevra kadisha*; this lack of knowledge presented problems when there was no *hevra* available and members of the community had to attend to the dead themselves.

Eyewitness accounts of valiant attempts to do *taharot* and provide a proper Jewish burial in the Holocaust are an affirmation of faith and deserve to be heard.

* * * * * * * *

Rose Meth is a seventy-nine-year-old survivor of several concentration camps, including Auschwitz, where, as a teenager, she was a member of a Jewish resistance group. Before the war, Rose's father was head of the *hevra kadisha* in Zator, Poland, where he would accompany every deceased person to the cemetery, even when he was sick, because he considered the *mitzva* so important. During her internment in the Neustadt-Glewe concentration camp, Rose drew inspiration from her father's memory, when called on to bury another inmate.

She recalls:

Odessa, one of the girls in the concentration camp, got up early one morning to look for food. She found a beet in a field and was returning to the camp when she was confronted by an SS officer who shot her on the spot. Word about her death soon reached the camp. The Kapo, who was responsible for guarding us, came and asked for volunteers to bury the girl. We were all starved, cold, and hungry and naturally reluctant to volunteer. But, I never forgot my father's dedication to and reverence for the dead, and so I said I would help. Once I had volunteered, little by little, another seven girls said they would go.

The guard told us where we could find a board to carry Odessa and led us to where she had fallen. Dressed in her striped prison uniform, she had been shot in the head. We picked her up and placed her on the board. We divided into two teams, with four of us carrying the body at any given time. The distance we had to carry her was probably not very far, but we were in such weakened condition it seemed like an eternity. We changed places three or four times until we brought her to the corner of a cemetery.

We could see immediately that this was a Christian cemetery, but we had no choice. This is what we were ordered to do. Our guard supplied us with shovels, and we began to dig the grave. The digging also seemed endless. When we were through, we were ordered to throw the body into the pit. We then covered her with dirt and were escorted back to the camp. I felt a degree of satisfaction inasmuch as she was buried with at least some dignity, instead of simply thrown into a mass grave. However, I was very distraught about the fact that she was buried in a Christian cemetery.

At that time, I knew nothing about Jewish burial practices, except that my father was very respectful of the dead. I felt that by volunteering to bury her, I was following in his footsteps and honoring his memory.

* * * * * * * *

In my research, I found that some survivors became involved in the *hevra kadisha* after the war as a direct response to their wartime experience, in addition to being motivated by the great value placed on *hesed* in their pre-war homes. Lori Oppenheimer is one such example. A survivor from Germany, she remembers that during an air raid in 1941, the family hid in the *mikva*. Her father suffered a massive heart attack and died. As there were no *takhrihim* (burial shrouds), he was buried in a large white shirt instead.

Hevra Kadisha/Burial Society Pitcher, glazed earthenware, Austria-Hungary, 1780. Collection of The Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, California.

After the war, she went to Amsterdam where the Organization for Rehabilitation and Training (ORT) taught her to be a seamstress. The family ultimately settled in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan in New York City, an enclave of German Jews, where she was approached by the president of the sisterhood of her synagogue to become a member of the *hevra kadisha*. Mrs. Oppenheimer clearly remembers the well-intentioned, but somewhat insensitive approach:

"Since you have seen so much death in the concentration camps, maybe you wouldn't mind participating." I agreed to do it. The after-effects of doing tahara *were almost antiseptic compared to what I had witnessed dur-*

ing the war. I recalled specifically a young man who had stolen a piece of bread and was hanged in the marketplace. Seeing him hanging from the noose is something I will never forget.

Because I am an accomplished seamstress, I was soon approached to become the community takhrihim macher[1]. *There was no pattern. But my ORT training came in handy, because I had also been taught to make patterns. I copied the pattern from a sewn set of* takhrihim. *Thirty years later, I still use the same pattern, even though it's old and tattered.*

In summing up her years in the *hevra* in America, Mrs. Oppenheimer said, "In the camps, death was a daily occurrence. You simply didn't mourn, no *shiva*, no nothing. Dealing with death in a *tahara* is completely different—there is dignity and respect. In the ghetto and the concentration camp, people died deprived of any sanctity."

* * * * * * * *

Nelly Blumner, an eighty-one-year-old Holocaust survivor now living in Queens, New York, spent the war years in five different concentration camps and on a death march. Her mother, a member of the *hevra kadisha*, died before the war. After liberation, Mrs. Blumner returned to Poland where she had last lived, but found no trace of her family. She received word that her three sisters, the only members of the family to survive, were in a hospital in Czechoslovakia. After much difficulty, Mrs. Blumner arrived at the hospital to find her sisters in very poor medical condition. The youngest, only seventeen, died of pneumonia. Mrs. Blumner, who was twenty-one at the time, recalls her dilemma:

So, what was I supposed to do? I remembered that my mother, who was a member of the hevra kadisha *in Germany, had told us about washing the body. I also recalled that when she died the* hevra *ladies took care of her and that my older sister and I were only permitted to put the booties on her feet. As best as I knew how, I did the* tahara *on my little sister and then buried her. All by myself, I washed her with a sponge and water and then wrapped her in a piece of sheet I was able to get. The people of the village of Volary gave us one side of their church graveyard to bury our dead. Over ninety Jews are buried there.*

My feelings at the time were indescribable. I was scared, worried and angry. You name it —I felt it. I did it because I knew something had to be done. I cried and talked to her while I did it. I was angry because I felt so alone. My other sisters were in the hospital, but they were not up to this task physically or mentally. I simply took over at that time. I was inspired to do it, and this inspiration enabled me to do it. The Red Cross and the American Army helped me to get the body to the churchyard. When I buried her I put a twig into each hand[2] *and covered her with another sheet. I think I also put a pebble on each eye. The American soldiers gave me a little prayer book and I said* kaddish *at the gravesite.*

Mrs. Blumner returned to visit her sister's gravesite, many years later after her husband retired.

Her grave was marked "Unknown." I knew exactly the spot in which I buried her, so I had planned to have a stone

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Hevra Kadisha in Jewish Tradition

Preparing the dead for burial is one of the most important *mitzvot* in Judaism. It has always been considered a source of great merit and honor to serve on the *hevra kadisha* — the holy society that prepares the body for burial with the utmost dignity in accordance with Jewish custom. The body is carefully washed, purified and dressed in burial shrouds. The task is gender specific for obvious reasons of modesty — women attend women and men attend men. In the 16th century, the work of the *hevra kadisha* was formalized. At that time, while women undertook the ritual preparation, they were not accorded full membership privileges or the status that came with such membership. Today, women serve within a division of *hevra kadisha* as equals with men.

Andi Arnovitz, "Two Should Never," mixed media, 1999.

In describing her piece, Jerusalem artist Andi Arnovitz writes:
"Two Should Never" juxtaposes Jewish customs in life against Jewish customs in death. There is a *halakha* which tells us that two people should never dress a child or a third person at the same time. The reason for this is that the only time multiple people dress or prepare a third is within the *hevra kadisha,* when a group of people lovingly and carefully prepare a body for burial. Doing so in life may tempt the evil eye and could bring about illness or death. In this piece I have a pair of baby shoes over which hover two hands, and a thin whisper of a child's garment. The hands represent both a child's parents and *hevra* members preparing a woman's body before burial. Behind this is the writing from the lid to a box which contains a woman's burial shroud used by a modern-day *hevra kadisha.* There is a sense of time passing, from the child to the old woman, as well as the contrast of life with death.

Mourning the Loss of a Baby

By Dvorah Levy

Last year, I was privileged to attend my sister's birthing of her first child. I stood at her bedside, gripping her hand as she labored, while both the nurse and the doctor encouraged her with "push!" She was straining so hard that blood vessels looked like they would burst with her effort. The baby's head crowned with each contraction and then receded from view in between. A quarter of an inch of cervix framed the wet, matted hair, making all the difference as the baby balanced between a life *in utero* and the world. Time stood still, and her pushing grew weaker. The nurse assisted my sister until finally, with a gushing, slippery flow, she birthed her son. It was only after he cried that I could once again breathe.

The birth process is an awesome and spiritual experience; a healthy baby is a blessing. Unfortunately, not all babies are born healthy, and at times, the gestational period ends not with a passage that is life-giving, but rather in death. Many women experience stillbirths, miscarriages, or the deaths of their infants shortly after birth. A baby's death upsets the natural order of life. A baby is the promise of wondrous and mysterious potential, an actualization of one's self, the fulfillment of an innate need to love, give, and nurture—except for the times when the unimaginable happens and something goes wrong.

I remember, like it was yesterday, when I went into labor eighteen years ago on a cold night in February. We called a friend to stay with our two-year-old Amichai, feeling apologetic to have awakened her, and rushed to the hospital with excitement and some nervousness. I labored through the night, assisted by demerol, until finally I pushed and strained and pushed out a slippery, rubbery, gray baby girl. There were no cries; there was no breath; there was no life. There was only a nurse holding my hand and she was crying. "What?" I asked, "What is it?" The doctors tried to resuscitate my baby, but apparently she had been dead for some time *in utero*. I held her, and I cried and continued to cry without stopping for a very long time. I was 26 at the time.

Halakha is so brilliant and supremely sensitive to the psychological needs of the mourner, yet in this case, and others like it, there is a hole in the halakhic fabric: for a baby younger than thirty days old, there are no prescribed mourning rituals. There was nothing for me, an observant Jewish woman, to lean on, to busy myself with, or to comfort myself by doing. My husband, Rabbi Yamin Levy, writes in his book, *Confronting the Loss of a Baby,* "Years ago infant death, although devastating, was commonplace. Disease was rampant and children were vulnerable. Perhaps it was because infant deaths were so frequent that our sages chose not to apply the laws of mourning to such tragedies." However, there are optional mourning practices one can take on, such as reciting the *kaddish* as a voluntary mourner, lighting a seven-day memorial candle, and allowing for family and community to provide for one's needs emotionally and physically. These practices and others can be discussed with one's own halakhic authority.

Even though there is no formal *shiva* practice for the loss of a baby younger than thirty days old, it is important for community members to be there to offer comfort to the grieving parents. Although others cannot take away the pain a woman feels when she suffers the loss of a baby, Hashem made us in a way that healing is facilitated through connection with other people. Many women say they feel awkward around people who have lost a baby. In the absence of knowing what to say, eye contact, an arm, a hug, can all help a woman who is grieving feel that she is not alone.

When the loss is an early miscarriage, the woman's pain is invisible, and others may not be aware of what she is experiencing. Walking around, acting normal, yet feeling one's loss inside can be emotionally draining. When greeting a woman who has suffered a miscarriage, it is alright to inquire how she is doing without fear of stirring up her pain; for many women, such an inquiry provides an opportunity to express their true feelings.

When I was eventually able to resume everyday activity, many interactions were initially very difficult. There was the checkout girl in the supermarket who asked "What did you

The Need to be Proactive

When loss occurs, people are at their most vulnerable. Women tend to rely on male family members or on rabbis to organize the funeral and *shiva* and then later the unveiling of the *matzeva*. But a woman can organize a funeral and deliver a *hesped* at a service. A woman in a leadership position in a synagogue may help the mourners, deliver the eulogy, and write the tombstone text.

A woman wanting to find comfort in the public rituals of loss that Judaism provides may choose to approach the grave at the cemetery and share in shoveling the final earth onto the grave which is considered an act of great merit.

There are many *shiva* homes where women mourners are still asked to leave the room during *davening*. The tendency then becomes for women to congregate in the kitchen or another room and not pray at all. But a *shiva* room can be set up with a totally equitable division of space whether or not the female mourners are saying *kaddish*. Women can also lead the learning of *mishnayot* in memory of the deceased and talk about the person who has died. Women who want to participate in these ways must be prepared to be proactive, difficult as it is at a moment of bereavement.

NAME

The baby bears an old name, of one who lived for almost a hundred years. That one is gone; this one will grow, nourished by sepia photographs and books, hungry to partake of what was treasured by her namesake. In the mysterious chemistry of love, the child takes on the attributes of the one who's gone, and bestows upon the rest of us an arduous happiness.

Nessa Rapoport

have?" and others who inquired with friendliness and curiosity only for me to respond, "A stillbirth." After a first look of surprise, awkwardness filled the space between us. It is difficult to know what to say in the face of such pain. A common response of reassurance that I heard was, "Don't worry; you will have another." This attempt to take away the pain only seemed to invalidate or minimize the loss.

It is important for women who are attempting to heal from the loss of a baby to recognize and understand the depths of their loss and subsequent feelings, which along with sadness may include anger, jealousy, and fear that other terrible things can happen. Being kind to ourselves, requesting help when needed, withdrawing from others when that feels right, and reaching out when ready are vitally important.

Time does do wondrous things. There is something to be said for the adage, "time heals," as trite as it may sound. Torah and religious teachings are other powerful sources for healing. I can recall, two years after my loss, sitting on the desk in front of a ninth-grade *Navi* class. We were learning the twelfth chapter in Samuel II in which the first child of King David and Batsheva was seriously ill and David prayed, fasted, and lay on the ground, refusing his servants' urgings to get up and eat. On the seventh day, the child died, and the servants were afraid to inform David of the death because they feared his reaction. But David understood that the child was dead, got up, prayed to God, and went home to eat. His servants were puzzled by his behavior and asked him, "While the child was alive, you fasted and wept but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food!" He replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought, 'Who knows? Hashem may have pity on me, and the child may live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me." It was David's acceptance of God's will and the awareness that there is more to life than this world that brought me great solace and was a turning point for me in reconciling to my own loss. At the right time, it was possible for me to take inspiration and comfort from this and other sources.

Remembering and affirming a baby's life, however short, are important to grieving parents. Many of the rituals that Judaism provides for mourners were especially designed to encourage remembering, which can lead to healing and acceptance. Every family has a different way of remembering a fetus or a baby who has died. Many choose to name their stillborn baby before burial. We particularly appreciated the *siddurim* donated to our synagogue in memory of our baby, and the friends who have remembered the anniversary of her death over the years.

Not long after the loss of my daughter, I created a painting of a large hand and in the palm of the hand is the form of a baby resting. On the side of the painting are written the words in Hebrew from Isaiah 49:15-16: "Yet I will not forget you. Behold I have graven you upon the palms of My hands." At the bottom of the painting I wrote the words "*le-zekher biti*–in memory of my daughter." This picture hangs on the wall of our dining room.

Baby Resting in Palm of Hand.

Painting by Dvorah Levy

Although the pain of losing a baby never goes away, it can become integrated into the person that the mother becomes. Having gone through such an experience, we may find that we are better able to help others with their pain. Having tolerated our own, we are better able to offer support to others and open our hearts lovingly. I have come to appreciate how loss is an inescapable part of life. Our awareness that pregnancy does not always have a happy ending makes every baby born alive and healthy infinitely precious.

I am writing this as we are preparing to celebrate the *bar mitzvah* of our third son. I often wonder about the baby girl that I lost. I am constantly reminded of her by the six-year gap between our oldest son and our next son. Much time has passed since she died, but I continue to strive for a meaning of the loss in my life and in the life of my children—those who are with me here and our daughter who is with us only in spirit.

Dvorah Levy *is a clinical social worker at Sephardic Bikur Holim in Brooklyn and maintains a private practice with offices in Brooklyn and Long Island.*

Editor's Note: *Shelley Cohen's son Nathaniel passed away on April 12, 2007, from Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a progressive deteriorative condition that ultimately rendered him a quadriplegic. The article below was adapted from a talk she gave at* se'udah sh'lishit *at Lincoln Square Synagogue when she finished saying* kaddish *for him.*

A Mother's *Kaddish*

By Shelley Cohen

It is very hard to believe that it is almost a year since Nathaniel's passing. I still feel his presence throughout the day and miss his warm, smiling face and upbeat outlook. When Nathaniel died, we in his immediate family said *kaddish* for the *shloshim*, the thirty-day period of mourning. My husband Ruvan, our children Jonathan and Jackie, and I, were all steadfast in taking on this obligation. After all, didn't Nathaniel deserve this last act of devotion?

As the days of that first month dwindled and we were getting close to its end, Ruvan told me that he wanted to take on the *hiyuv* or obligation of saying *kaddish* for the full eleven months (even though saying *kaddish* beyond the *shloshim* is only mandatory for the loss of a parent, not for the loss of a child or of siblings). The minute he said that, I knew that I wanted to take on the obligation as well. The desire to do for one's child does not die with that child. Had Nathaniel had the *zekhut*, the privilege of living a full healthy life, chances are he would have had children to say *kaddish* for him. Since that was not to be his fate, who would be more appropriate to say *kaddish* for him than his mother? I carried him in my womb, I birthed him, and I orchestrated the life he led. For his 21 years, our lives—his and mine—were inextricably bound together. Although his father, brother, and sister were extraordinarily active members of Nathaniel's life, I was his primary caregiver. It was out of a profound sense of loss that I took on the *hiyuv* of saying *kaddish*.

It was not easy. For those who know me, punctuality has never been my strong suit. As a dear friend told me when I started, "It's like running to catch a train three times a day." Despite this challenge, I rarely missed a *kaddish*. What I did not expect was the sometimes hostile reactions I experienced being a woman saying *kaddish*. I can gladly say that, for the most part, those negative experiences did not occur at my synagogue, Lincoln Square Synagogue (LSS), but at other shuls where either no one answered my *kaddish* or a man stood on the other side of the *mehitza* and tried to drown me out by loudly saying some other prayer so that I could not be heard.

When I started saying *kaddish,* it just so happened that I was the only woman at the time saying it at LSS, though there were many women who had said *kaddish* here before me. I did not know that a woman reciting *kaddish* was controversial and I said *kaddish* out loud. We now have as many as six women saying *kaddish*, some out loud, some in a low voice, according to the way they are comfortable, not dissimilar from the ways different men say *kaddish*.

> "The desire to do for one's child does not die with that child."

On that note, I would like to address the "controversy" surrounding the recital of *kaddish* by women. Though the discussion goes back to the time of the *Ge'onim*, the seminal text in this controversy in more modern times comes from seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Rabbi Yair Bacharach in his work, *Havot Yair*, writes of a man who, on his deathbed, asked the rabbis of his town that a *minyan* be provided in his home so that his daughter would be able to say *kaddish* for him, for he had no son. The rabbis of the town agreed with his request. Rav Bacharach states that because a woman is also commanded in *kiddush hashem* and because the purpose of the *kaddish* is to comfort the soul of the deceased, the daughter's *kaddish* is purposeful. Nevertheless, Rabbi Bacharach states that the practice should not be encouraged, lest it lead to a general weakening of the customs of the community.

Not much has changed in this debate since the seventeenth century. Those who support women saying *kaddish* point to the fact that it seems permissible on the basis of Jewish law, as noted by the *Havot Yair*. Those who oppose the practice base their arguments on public policy concerns—the old "slippery slope" argument—as noted by the *Havot Yair*.

Still, it seems that most of the *poskim* or halakhic authorities to whom our community looks for guidance seem to support a woman's *kaddish*. Allow me to summarize their positions:

1. Rav Ovadia Yosef has an extensive *teshuva* (responsum) about women saying *birkat hagomel* (the blessing of thanksgiving for having come through a potentially life-threatening experience) from the women's section during the Torah reading. In the same *teshuva*, he dismisses anticipated objections such as *niddah*, issues of modesty, or *kol isha*. He concludes "*l'khol hadayot* - to cover all opinions" that a woman should say *birkat hagomel* out loud from the women's section and that the congregation should answer her *berakha*. This is certainly our practice at Lincoln Square. I remember saying *birkat hagomel* here on the Shabbat after Nathaniel's birth.

2. Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin has an extensive *psak* that says that a woman should say *kaddish* from the *ezrat nashim* (women's section) while a man is saying *kaddish* simultaneously.

3. Rav Moshe Feinstein in a *teshuva* in *Iggrot Moshe* is asked whether a woman may sit in the front of the men's section if there is no *ezrat nashim*. He replies that she can because perhaps she is a mourner coming to say *kaddish*.

4. Rav Aharon Soloveitchik writes, "Nowadays, when there are Jews fighting for equality for men and women in matters such as *aliyot,* if Orthodox rabbis prevent women from saying *kaddish* when there is a possibility of allowing it, it will strengthen the influence of Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is therefore forbidden to prevent daughters from saying *kaddish*."

5. Finally, the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, is quoted by Rav Ezra Bick of Yeshivat Har Eztion as saying, "I spoke to the Rav about the question of a girl saying *kaddish*. He told me that he remembered being in Vilna at the 'Ga'on's Kloiz' and a woman came into the back of the *beit midrash*, where there was no *ezrat nashim*, and said *kaddish* after *ma'ariv*. I asked him whether it would make a difference if someone

were saying *kaddish* along with her or not, and he replied that he could see no objections in either case."

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein is quoted as having a similar discussion with the Rav, who said that a woman should say *kaddish* from the *ezrat nashim*.

One of the most interesting points of view is that of Rabbi Moshe Leib Blair of Chicago, who considered that saying *kaddish* is an integral part of mourning for which a woman is *hayav* or obligated, rather than an integral part of *tefilla b'tzibur* (public prayer), for which she is *patur* or exempt.

Although I am no halakhic authority, let me add a personal reflection about what the experience of saying *kaddish* has meant to me. Starting with *shiva*, through *tefilla* and saying *kaddish,* I found I was able to reconcile myself to the concept of a "merciful God," a formulation that I had a great deal of difficulty with ever since I learned about Nathaniel's diagnosis, despite being aware of the abundant blessings that I had in my life. Through *tefilla b'tzibur*, and participating in it by saying *kaddish* out loud and having it responded to, I was able to reconnect to a relationship with Hashem that I was not sure that I would ever be able to achieve. In a fundamental way, that is the very purpose of *tefilla*, whether one is a man or a woman.

Too many times in the Orthodox world, a woman can get the feeling that she is just an observer of the men's *tefilla*. I urge all of you to look at our *davening* in a *minyan* and consider that, regardless of which side of the *mehitza* one is on, people who come to *daven* are striving to find their connection to and peace with Hashem—equal in intent, equal in merit, and equal in importance.

May Nathaniel's *neshama* have an *aliya* to the highest level where it so richly deserves to be.

***Shelley Cohen** is a wife and mother living in Manhattan. She formerly worked as a political consultant advocating on behalf of Israel and Soviet Jewry.*

Mourning Practices in the Syrian Jewish Community

By Linda Shamah

As a young married woman (and I was young) in the Syrian Jewish community of Brooklyn in the late 1960s, I do not recall going to funerals. Once a body was prepared for burial, there was a tradition of women wailing very loudly as the deceased was driven past the house to the synagogue where most funerals take place and then to the cemetery. Women did not go to the cemetery either for the burial or on *yahrzeits* (even though *yahrzeit* is an Ashkenazi word, we do not have another word with the same meaning so we use this word to mark the anniversary of a death, as if it were an English word) or other occasions. Some families adhered to the custom of not visiting a house of mourning if they had not been to that person's home previously for another occasion.

Forty years later, I can now see that there have been many changes in mourning practices. Today, Syrian women do attend funerals and houses of mourning and go to the cemetery for burials and *yarzheits*. The choice for a woman mourner to go to the cemetery is an individual decision. Today in this community there are often eulogies at the funeral given by family members, but women who write speeches almost always have them delivered by a male member of the family.

I have mourned for both parents and a sister in a way that is traditional in the Syrian Jewish community. My mother passed away in 1990 and my father in 1995. My older sister's death occurred more recently, just three years ago. I did not go to the cemetery for the burials. I waited at the house of mourning for the men to return from the cemetery. After their return, our shirts were torn, we sat on the floor on pillows, and ate a hard-boiled egg in pita bread. The men would fill the house twice a day for morning and evening prayers. I would be present when *kaddish* was said, but did not recite it myself. *Hashkava*, which is equivalent to *Kel Maleh Rahamim* for Ashkenazi Jews, is recited at the end of the service and has three parts. The first part accepts death as God's decree; the second recites the name of the deceased using the mother's name, and not the father's which is the Ashkenazi custom; and the third gives consolation to the mourners. The *Hashkava* is also recited at the end of the *shloshim* and on *yahrzeits*. The names of mothers are sometimes engraved on tombstones in the Syrian community.

Today, women visit during *shiva* even when the person "sitting" is not someone very close to them and regardless of whether they had visited that person's home previously. When visiting a *shiva* house, a guest is served a drink. There are fruits and nuts and a plentiful amount of other food on a table for the purpose of encouraging visitors to recite a *berakha*. This is different from the Ashkenazi custom of visitors not eating or drinking anything in a *shiva* house except if they have come from very far. Often, computerized notes with the Hebrew name of the

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Origin of *Yizkor* Prayer in Ashkenazic Communities

The concept of honoring the dead with prayer has early origins in our liturgical history, but the formal introduction of the familiar cycle of *Yizkor* on the festivals began in Rashi's time. While it is unknown when the *Yizkor* prayer was first composed, the general assumption is that *Yizkor* as well as *El Maleh Rahamim* were both written at the same time as *Av Harahamim*—the prayer commemorating and honoring the martyrs of the First Crusade (1095 CE). Even though in our time the connection of *tzedaka* and *Yizkor* may seem tangential, in fact some scholars believe that *Yizkor* was added to the existing obligation to give charity as part of the repentance process on Yom Kippur and to provide for the meals of the needy on the Festivals. The *Machzor Vitry* (a collection of laws, liturgy and customs written in the generation of Rashi) explains that we mention the dead when giving charity to "elevate the souls of the deceased," and on the holidays because of the Torah portion read on the Diaspora's added festival day, which contains the phrase *'Ish kematnat yado'* - 'Each man shall give according to his financial ability' (Deut.16:17).

Editor's Note: *According to Jewish practice, a body is not left alone from the time of death to the time of burial as a mark of respect for the dignity of the individual. Traditionally, a person "sitting* shmira*" will recite passages from the book of Psalms—*Tehillim *in Hebrew. Because there were many Jews among the victims at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, there was an effort to provide volunteers to "sit* shmira*" both at Ground Zero and at the Medical Examiner's office where remains of the victims were brought. Sitting* shmira *was also a way of paying tribute to the victims of all faiths who died on 9/11. For almost eight months, volunteers participated in this* mitzva *around the clock, including Shabbat and festivals.*

I Will Watch Over You

by Jessica Russak-Hoffman

Staring into the pages of my *Tehillim*, it occurred to me that I had just reread the same verse several times. It was four in the morning on Shabbat, and I had a few hours until someone would come to take over my shift. Inside the large tent, police officers mingled and nibbled on the cookies my friend had brought earlier. I looked up from my book, and a state trooper smiled warmly at me. Despite being an outdoor temporary morgue, the atmosphere was one of comfort and camaraderie.

Suddenly, the quiet was shattered by the blast of sirens. We knew what that sound meant. We all stood up from our benches and peeked out the tent entrance. The flashing lights coming up 1st Avenue toward 30th Street could mean only one thing. More bodies of firefighters had been found at Ground Zero. There were no cars on the street, but the sirens blared anyway. The police officers and firefighters took off their hats and held them to their chests, while I recited the opening verse from Psalm 130: *From the depths I called you, Hashem, my Lord, hear my voice; May Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas*. The officers removed the barricade, and the ambulance pulled slowly into the cordoned-off outdoor morgue. *If you protected injustices, O God, who could survive?* Medical examiners and volunteer medical students opened the ambulance doors and pulled out the stretchers. *For with you is forgiveness, that You may be feared. I put confidence in God, my soul has put confidence, and I hoped for His word*. But no bodies emerged from the doors. I saw only what appeared to be garbage bags of different colors. "One color for larger body parts, one for small parts," I heard someone say. *I yearn for my Lord, among those longing for the dawn, those longing for the dawn*. "Small parts?" I asked. "Well firefighters are mostly intact because of their suits, but the small parts are just as important. Anything to identify someone who's missing," he answered. The officers wheeled stretchers filled with bags into the large well-lit tents across the way. It was a cold night, and the doors of the tents closed after them. *Let Israel hope for Hashem, for with Hashem is kindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all its injustices.*

> " I had to believe that God would take care of these souls."

Questions clouded my head. How, in any way, were my words relevant at this time? Could I truly put confidence in *Hashem*? God had allowed a great injustice, which took the lives of more than 3,000 people, possibly 400 Jews among them. Where was the redemption? Where was the kindness? Where was the dawn? And then I realized—these words aren't for me! There are hundreds of souls for whom I am reciting them. They were longing for the dawn, for there would be no peace until there was a proper burial. Families could not properly mourn for their lost loved ones until they were found, identified, and given a funeral. And despite whatever injustices I had seen in the last few months, I had to believe that God would take care of these souls. With that realization, my reciting *Tehillim* took on a new, more meaningful fervor, and I allowed myself to establish a tangible connection with the souls of those I had never met.

I thought back to the previous Thursday night. Rabbi Allen Schwartz of Congregation Ohab Zedek had been organizing Jews to sit *shmira*—keeping watch over the body of someone who has died—for the victims of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001, in four-hour shifts at the tented morgue. Dr. Charles Hirsch, Chief Medical Examiner, supplied the volunteers with passes and full access. Words are inadequate to express our gratitude to Dr. Hirsch for all his efforts. The only obstacle in this process was the lack of Jews within walking distance of the morgue, which would affect the *shmira* shifts for Shabbat. A friend of mine on the Upper West Side realized that Stern College for Women was nearby, and he contacted me for assistance. It was just at the time that Stern students would be coming back from late classes or heading out for the evening, and so I planted myself at the entrance to the Schottenstein dormitory, the closest to where the temporary

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NO ONE AHEAD OF ME

No one ahead of me on the front line, standing before the fire, willing to be consumed to give me life. No larger shadow daunting me, no one to emulate or to disdain, no body that birthed me growing older in my sight. Now I can look; there's nothing to deflect or mask my vision. On the far side of the chasm is the place where you have gone. For the first time, you will not reach out to save me.

Nessa Rapoport

The Death of Miriam

By Dr. Erica Brown

The Book of Numbers records the death of one of the outstanding figures of our Exodus history: Miriam. Miriam is somewhat of an anomaly in terms of the role established for women in the Book of Genesis. We know nothing of her own family life, with the exception of the names of her brothers. She is neither identified in the biblical text as a wife nor a mother; in Exodus 15 she is only identified as a sister and as a prophetess.

In Numbers 12, Miriam's story takes another unusual turn as she suffers a disfiguring illness for speaking ill of Moses. This illness prompts Moses' simple and powerful petitionary prayer: "God, please heal her." Although Miriam is sent out of the camp for the requisite time during her illness, all of the Israelites await her return before moving the camp. This act of compassion for a leader belies the difficulty that emerges in the description of her death a few chapters later.

In *Bamidbar* 20:1-2 we read,

> *The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. The community was without water and they joined against Moses and Aaron.*

The children of Israel arrive at a new destination where Miriam dies and is buried, but instead of mourning her, the people complain to her brothers about their thirst. Where are the same patient people who waited for her illness to pass? The small-mindedness of the people—their almost obsessive complaint about thirst—has colored their judgment. Why were they unable to put aside their material needs to properly mourn for Miriam? As a way to justify the minimal amount of attention given to Miriam, we might argue that death generally does not feature highly in biblical narratives. However, in the very same chapter we find that Aaron dies and is mourned collectively:

> *The whole community knew that Aaron had breathed his last. All the house of Israel bewailed Aaron thirty days (Bamidbar 20:29).*

The description of Aaron's death and of the communal grief that ensues highlights the scant information provided about Miriam's passing. Not even her brothers are recorded as mourning her. Rabbinic literature, however, does try to fill in some of these empty spaces by adding its own account. Specifically, according to Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra*, Miriam is one of six biblical figures, and the only woman, who dies with a divine kiss.

Moreover, in a medieval collection of Midrash, the *Yalkut Shimoni*, Moses is depicted as carrying Miriam's head and, Aaron, her feet. Both Moses and Aaron are engaged in Miriam's burial and grieve privately over her death. The *midrash* creates a portrait of a tripod that has lost one of its legs. Instead of this sibling triumvirate standing together, now two stand vertically and support the third who lies lifeless, horizontally. It is an omen of the upcoming death of the brothers. The structure of leadership is changing; the wilderness is swallowing it. Not only does Aaron die in this chapter, but Moses receives his forewarning of death after striking the rock. The tripod is losing its legs, one by one.

In another *midrash* in *Yalkut Shimoni*, Moses and Aaron are mourning for their sister when God comes to chastise them, telling them, "Servants of the community, leave here with speed. My children are dying of thirst and you are mourning over this elderly woman?" The conversation initially seems harsh until one frames it as a leadership dilemma: What takes precedence in a time of crisis: the leader's personal suffering or communal needs? It was easier to justify mourning Aaron after God brought water out of a rock than mourning Miriam when the Israelites could think of nothing but their own possible deaths.

The most famous *midrash* about Miriam's death is connected to an aphorism in Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 that claims that a miraculous well was created on the eve of the first Sabbath of creation to accompany the Israelites on their future journey in the desert. The Talmud states that this gift was given in honor of Miriam. Why did the people complain about water immediately after Miriam died? It was only then that they realized that her death brought about the loss of the miraculous well:

> *The well was in the merit of Miriam... for when Miriam died the well dried up because it says, "Miriam died there," and right after that, it states, "And there was no water for the congregation" (BT Ta'anit 9a).*

As is often the case, death's profound impact and the full weight of loss are only really understood with time. When Miriam died, the children of Israel placed their immediate, urgent needs first. The *midrash* suggests that with time, the Israelites realized how indebted they were to Miriam, whose life was integrally connected to water. Miriam watched out for her brother on the Nile and sang for joy at *Yam Suf* (the Reed Sea), and so a gift of water was taken away when she died. Her name, "bitter water," arguably symbolizes her death and hints at the one body of water she did not cross, the Jordan River.

In this brief study of Miriam's death, one cannot help but notice the discrepancy between the biblical and midrashic accounts. In the Book of Numbers, Miriam's death is told with a raw lack of emotion. Later rabbinic literature softens the picture, offering stories of personal loss and emotional complication.

Perhaps the relationship between the text and the Midrash mimics death itself. The actual moment of death is, for most, not a staged beautiful closure. It is a jarring, abrupt cessation of life that leaves a wide, inexplicable gap for those left behind. But life and the biblical narrative continue despite the loss, as depicted in the text. The Midrash offers death what the passage of time offers it—hindsight, reflection, and a fuller, more gentle measurement of individual worth. Helen Keller once said, "Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know, because in that other room I shall be able to see." In our "other room" of Midrash, we are able to see Miriam's death and the heaviness of her loss at a distance. The two portraits of death, that of the text and that of the Midrash, stand side by side. Her immediate loss is eclipsed by the urgent needs of the collective, but her death ultimately exacted a far deeper grief. The moment we lost Miriam, we also began to celebrate her life.

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Women and Asceticism in the Talmudic Tradition

By Sara Epstein Weinstein

Many readers of this journal may have heard that their grandmother or great-grandmother fasted "*alle Montag und Donnerstag*" (every Monday and Thursday). This popular Yiddish saying actually reflects an ancient halakhic tradition, namely, the Talmudic "*ta'aniyot bahab*"—the fasts of *bet–hey–bet* (*Yom bet* is Monday and *Yom hey* is Thursday)—that were first associated with prayer for rain during the month of Heshvan (M. *Ta'anit* 2:9). For a variety of reasons, later generations expanded the "*bahab*" fasts in Heshvan to include non-obligatory fasts in other months as well. The fact that non-obligatory fasts were observed by Jews—both men and women—for nearly two thousand years seems to reflect an enduring desire on the part of at least some of the Jewish people to express their devotion to God ascetically. Those who fasted on these days were indeed considered especially pious.

Frequent fasting and other ascetic practices, however, were not necessarily viewed positively in Talmudic times.[1] Female asceticism was, in particular, singled out for special censure by R. Joshua in the Mishna. Thus, R. Joshua lists the "*isha perusha*" (ascetic woman, or literally, the "separatist" woman) as one of four types of people who actually bring destruction upon the world. The context of the Mishna suggests that her "separatism" is of a sexual nature,[2] which presumably involved refraining either from sexual relations with her husband or from marrying altogether.

Because ascetic behavior involves abstention from otherwise permitted physical pleasures in order to achieve a higher spiritual state, one would expect to see a connection between sexual abstinence, fasting, and praying. This connection is, in fact, made by parallel *baraitot* in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud explaining the term "*isha perusha*" as a "*betula tzaymanit*–a fasting virgin" (JT *Sotah* 3:4 [19a]), or a "*betula tzalyanit*–a praying virgin" (BT *Sotah* 22a).[3] Thus, in addition to the sexual abstinence already alluded to in the Mishna (and by the usage of the term "*betulah*" in the *baraitot*), the "*isha perusha*" manifests her ascetic lifestyle by devoting herself to continual fasting and/or praying.

Neither the Mishna nor the *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud explains how the "*isha perusha*" destroys the world. Six possible explanations for this condemnation are suggested below.[4]

1. R. Joshua seems to have objected to asceticism in general, for both men and women. After the destruction of the Temple, many Jews became ascetics, refusing to eat meat or drink wine, because meat and wine had formerly been used in Temple ritual. R. Joshua convinced them that according to their own logic, even bread and water, the very staples of life, should be avoided as well because they too had been used in Temple ritual. The ascetic position, carried to its logical conclusion, would then have led to massive starvation of the remaining Jewish people. R. Joshua therefore taught that, instead of adopting an ascetic lifestyle, Jews should mourn in a more moderate fashion, by simply leaving a section of their house unplastered, in memory of Jerusalem (*Tosefta Sotah* 15:11-12).

> "Female asceticism was….singled out for special censure…"

2. Aside from objecting to asceticism in general, R. Joshua held that female asceticism was particularly intolerable, as we saw in the Mishna above.[5] One reason for this position may have been his belief that sexual abstinence was unnatural for women. Thus, earlier in the Mishna, he describes women's "true nature," stating, "A woman prefers one *kab* (a small amount of food) and *tiflut* (frequent sexual relations), to nine *kab* (a large amount of food) and *perishut* (separation from her husband)." Because women, by their very nature, prefer sexuality over food, then women who so denied their nature by abstaining from sex would eventually sin. Not being able to live up to their unnatural goals of sexual abstinence, they would be overcome by their true nature and find sinful outlets for their desires. According to this view, R. Joshua's condemnation was motivated by a desire to prevent sinful behavior.

3. Sexually abstinent women would either have fewer children or none at all. Frequent fasting, causing physical weakness, would reduce women's childbearing potential as well. Because children ensure the continuity of the world, female asceticism would, consequently, contribute to the world's destruction. R. Joshua is indeed quoted elsewhere in the Talmud as emphasizing the importance of having many children: "If a man has children in his youth, he should continue to have children in his old age" (BT *Yebamot* 62b). R. Joshua's condemnation, then, would have been motivated by fear that female asceticism would lower the Jewish birth rate.

4. The fasting virgin is condemned by the *baraita* because excessive fasting would literally cause her to lose her virginity (the continuation of the passage in JT *Sotah* cited above states, "*Betula tzaymanit, metzayma ovedet betuleha*–a fasting virgin loses her virginity." In Talmudic times, extreme emaciation caused by excessive fasting was believed to cause the loss of the hymen.[6] The young girl's virginity would then be suspect because there would be no bleeding on the wedding night. R. Joshua's condemnation, as understood by this *baraita*, would have been motivated by a desire to protect young women with ascetic tendencies from false accusations of not being virgins.

5. We do not know whether the Talmudic condemnation of female asceticism was merely a theoretical, ideologically based condemnation or whether it was addressing a specific historical phenomenon. We do, however, know that in the times of the *Tanna'im* (first to second century CE) there were at least three groups of female ascetics: two Jewish and one early Christian. It is possible that the criticism of the "*isha perusha*" was an attempt to curb the extreme ascetic behavior that existed in this time and to protect normative Judaism from this type of behavior.

The first Jewish ascetic group was the Essenes. Although the Essenes, an ascetic sect, generally lived in communities of abstinent men, Josephus speaks of an order of "marrying Essenes" who married in order to have children. Because procreation was deemed the only legiti-

mate justification for sexual relations, these Essene women would then have lived celibate lives as soon as they became pregnant, as well as once their childbearing years were over. Textual and archaeological findings indeed suggest that women lived at Qumram and, presumably, shared in the ascetic lifestyle of the sect living there.

The second Jewish group, comprised of both men and women, were Jewish ascetics known as the Therapeutaue who lived near Alexandria in the first century (Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa*). These Therapeutaue renounced their property and left their families (either before or after marriage) to devote themselves to study and spiritual contemplation. They lived in seclusion for six days a week and ate very little. On the seventh day they gathered together to study, pray, sing, and partake of a Sabbath feast, consisting only of bread, salt, and water. Philo, in describing this Sabbath feast, portrays the women of the sect: "The feast is shared by women also, most of them aged virgins, who have kept their chastity…of their own free will in their ardent yearning for wisdom. Eager to have . . . [wisdom] for their life mate, they have spurned the pleasures of the body."[7]

The third group of female ascetics living in this time period were early Christians, who considered virginity and fasting to be great virtues. For early Syrian Christians, virginity was even considered "a prerequisite for the adoption of the Christian faith." This explains why the term "virgin" (*betula* [male] and *betulta* [female]) is used synonymously with the term "Christian" in some early Christian sources.[8] The usage of this term in these Christian sources as well as in the *baraitot* cited above (*betula tzaymanit/ betula tzalyanit* – fasting or praying virgin) suggests that the *baraitot* might actually have been referring to these early Christians, many of whom were in fact Jews. One such person may have been "the prophetess Anna," described in Luke 2: 36-37 as an elderly widow who could be found, day and night, fasting and praying in the Temple.

Perhaps the extreme rabbinic condemnation of this type of behavior was then meant to distance normative Judaism from both extreme Jewish sectarian behavior and early Christian asceticism. Interestingly, both the Essenes and the Therapeutaue disappeared after the Temple's destruction. Christian asceticism, in contrast, proliferated over the next few centuries. Female Christian ascetics, in particular, were encouraged to endure especially extreme fasts,[9] and early Christian women were encouraged to become sexually abstinent, even if they were already married.[10] Talmudic condemnation of this type of behavior, thus, may have been influential in allowing no place in Judaism for these extreme behaviors.

6. The Talmudic *sugya* in BT *Sotah* 22a limits the condemnation of the "*isha perusha*" to hypocritical women who used their ascetic behavior as a cover-up for witchcraft and/or promiscuous behavior. Only women like "Johani the daughter of Retibi," who, according to Rashi, secretly practiced witchcraft (BT *Sotah* 22a) would destroy the world. Likewise, the "fasting virgin" was interpreted as a woman who fasted only as a pretense of piety, so that no one would suspect the promiscuous behavior that actually led to the loss of her virginity (*Tosafot*, *Sotah* 22a s.v. *kol*).

The association between fasting and hypocrisy is supported by a shocking aggadic passage, in which a woman called Miriam "*berat alei betzalim*"–Miriam of (or daughter of) the onion bulb" is seen hanging in Gehinom by the nipples of her breasts (or, alternatively, by the hinge of the gate of Gehinom that was set in her ear) for the crime of fasting and publicizing her fast, or fasting for one day and calculating it as a two-day fast (JT *Hagigah* 2:2 [77d]). Her crime, at first glance, seems to be one of insincere piety, because she was using her fasting to gain respect.[11] Immediately after this passage, however, the Talmud continues with a discussion of the hanging of eighty witches in Ashkelon by Simeon b. Shetah. This juxtaposition suggests that perhaps Miriam "of the onion bulbs," who was punished so severely, was not simply a "fasting hypocrite," but, instead, was somehow associated with witchcraft. In any event, the condemnation of the "*isha perusha*," according to this interpretation, was intended only for insincere women, whose ascetic behavior was at best hypocritical and at worst used to mask witchcraft or promiscuity.[12]

According to most of the reasons listed above, R. Joshua may not, in fact, have condemned our grandmothers who fasted "*alle Montag und Donnerstag*." This is because these fasts did not generally involve sexual abstinence, nor were they connected to any separatist ascetic sect or Christianity. Likewise, their fasting did not appear to be hypocritical and certainly was not related to witchcraft or promiscuity. Ashkenazic women who fasted throughout the ages were (generally) married or widowed, devoted to raising their families and observing the commandments, and fasted and prayed as an expression of piety. If R. Joshua would have objected to these fasts, his objection might have been based only on the first and third reasons suggested above, namely, his objection to asceticism in general or to the concern that frequent fasting would lead to decreased childbearing potential.

One wonders how R. Joshua would have reacted to a remarkable woman who lived in seventeenth-century Poland: Beilah Falk, wife of R. Joshua Falk, author of *Drishah uPerishah*. She lived as an extreme ascetic both before her marriage, as well as during her seventeen years of widowhood. Her son writes that his mother's life was devoted to daily fasting, praying, studying Torah, and acts of *hesed*, and he praises her as a role model of piety for all daughters of Israel. Ironically, though, he also attributes her death at the young age of 58 to extreme physical weakness caused by her continual fasting, "motivated by her intense desire to spurn this world, in order to attain the World to Come" (introduction to the *Drishah, Tur Yoreh De'ah*). Her early death did not in any way diminish his admiration for her. Would R. Joshua, though, have shared in this enthusiasm, or would he have objected to her asceticism, just as he objected to asceticism as a reaction to the destruction of the Temple? Would R. Joshua, perhaps, while recognizing her piety, have nevertheless considered her an "*isha perusha*"—who "destroyed" her own world—by hastening her own death?

Sara Epstein Weinstein teaches Talmud,
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The First *Matzeva*

Rachel died and was buried on the road to Efrat, that is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; the same is the pillar on her grave unto this day.

Bereshit, 35:19-20

Individual and Communal Mourning

R. Shimon Ben Gamliel says: Anyone who eats or drinks on the Ninth of Av it is as if he ate and drank on Yom Kippur (Ta'anit 30b).

Our Rabbis have taught: All the restrictions that apply to the mourner hold equally for the Ninth of Av. (ibid.)

Observing Tisha B'Av is considered by the rabbis to be as serious as observing Yom Kippur, though the mood of the day and the purpose of the fasting are very different. We fast on Tisha B'Av as a sign of mourning; we fast on Yom Kippur in order to transcend the physical realm to achieve forgiveness for our sins. Thus the rabbis considered Yom Kippur a joyful day, while Tisha B'Av is entirely sorrowful though there is an element of future consolation.

Many of the other restrictions we observe on Tisha B'Av and in the period preceding it are very similar to those observed by an individual mourning after the death of a close relative. Indeed, the rabbis used individual mourning as a model for the days of national mourning, as evident from the discussion in Tractate *Ta'anit*. Thus on Tisha B'Av we sit on low chairs, don't wear leather shoes, don't wash, and only study sad texts related to our sense of loss. It is also noteworthy that our words of comfort to a mourner at a *shiva* are: "May the Almighty comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem"- words that are echoed in the "*Nachem*" prayer on Tisha B'Av recited during the afternoon service. Again, the two forms of mourning are linked.

According to the Rav, Rabbi Soloveitchik, Tisha B'Av can be seen to reflect the days of *shiva*, the Nine Days are similar to the *shloshim*, and the 3 weeks are like the yearlong period that is observed by an individual who has lost a parent. The Rav explains that a major difference between the two is that in the case of individual mourning, the most extreme restrictions apply at the beginning and then decrease as time passes. In the case of the mourning for the Beit *Hamikdash*, the restrictions increase and build up to Tisha B'Av. He explains that we are so far removed from the destruction that we have to build up our mourning to be able to truly grieve; whereas when a close relative dies, the loss is so immediate that the most intense grief is at the beginning. As time goes on, the sorrow abates and the level of mourning is reduced. The Rav also notes that Jewish law places limits on individual mourning because the death of an individual, however sad, is a natural event in the life cycle. The destruction of the Temple, however, was so cataclysmic an event for the Jewish people, that we are encouraged to cry and mourn. Indeed, the rabbis called Tisha B'Av, the Day of Tears.

One practice to mark the destruction of the Temple that was also imported from laws of individual mourning is the historic practice of tearing one's clothes when one sees the ruins of Jerusalem as one does after the death of an immediate family member. In the Talmud there are many references to the requirement of tearing one's clothing on seeing the different levels of destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Because of the emotional component of both individual and national loss, mourning for both is heavily enmeshed in custom even more than in law (with very different practices among Sephardim and Ashkenazim). It would seem that in both areas, people over the centuries sought to take on more restrictions than halakha requires to express their feelings of sadness and loss.

''כל המתיר עגונה אחת כאילו בנה אחת מחורבות ירושלים העליונה''

Whoever frees one *agunah* it is as though that person has built one of the ruins of heavenly Jerusalem.

Rabbinic statement often utilized from the early seventeenth century on to show importance of striving to release *agunot*.

Mourning for Jerusalem Through the Centuries

After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 CE, the city was no longer the physical center of the Jewish world. A new Roman city was built by Hadrian on its ruins and Jews were forbidden to enter it. For many centuries, Jews were not allowed to live in the city legally and there were harsh restrictions on Jews even entering it. Jews were only allowed to come to Jerusalem on Tisha B'Av to mourn for the destruction. They would come and mourn for their inability to fulfill so many of the commandments that were only relevant in Jerusalem and in the presence of a *Beit Hamikdash*. Traditionally Jews would stand on the Mount of Olives and tear their clothing to fulfill the rabbinic obligation of mourning, but even that contained an element of hope following the rabbinic statement, "One who merits to see Jerusalem in her ruin will merit to see her rebuilt and repaired when the Divine Presence returns to her."

The destruction of the Temple resonates through much of our liturgy and informs many practices. There are traditions of leaving a small part of one's house unplastered as a remembrance. At weddings, there is a tradition of bridegrooms wearing ashes on their head; the breaking of the glass at weddings has been associated with memories of the destruction. The Talmud also says that, "when a women adorns herself with jewels, she should leave something off in remembrance of Jerusalem." In Talmudic times, it seems that women would wear a special piece of jewelry on which a picture of Jerusalem was engraved in memory of the destroyed city. We know from Tractate *Nedarim* (50a) that Rabbi Akiva promised to make one for his wife Rachel. It was called a Jerusalem of Gold or City of Gold. Because of the importance of music and song in the Temple rituals, the rabbis initially imposed a total ban on instrumental music following the destruction, but this has been interpreted fairly leniently.

It is clear that the remembrance of Jerusalem and the Temple is something that is not limited to the period of the Three Weeks but resonates throughout the Jewish year and throughout the life of a Jew in different ways.

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deceased and her/his mother's name as well, are placed around the room to inform the visitor of the proper way to say the blessing, in the merit of that person. It is interesting to note that Syrian Jews do not have a *yizkor* service in synagogue on the holidays as do Ashkenazi communities, but on Yom Kippur the names of scholars of the community who have died are recited out loud.

Both at the end of the *shiva* and at the end of the *shloshim*, there is a tradition called an *Arayat* (reading). Family and friends gather at the synagogue before evening prayers. *Tehillim* are recited by the men usually sitting around a long table on which are placed some fruits, nuts, and drinks for the purpose of saying *berakhot* in the merit of the deceased. Several times I have been present when a separate women's reading took place in another part of the synagogue. Before the service, speeches are made in memory of the deceased. I have heard that on occasion women will read what they wrote while standing in the women's section. At the time of my sister's death, my son read what I had written about her and about our relationship. I felt the need to be heard in some way because I had been her caregiver during eight years of illness. Looking back, I feel that it would have been much more meaningful both to me and the listeners if I had read my words myself.

When I was a mourner, I personally did not feel the need to say *kaddish* because there were several male members saying it. In contrast, one woman I spoke to said she did feel the need to say *kaddish* for her father because she was an only child. My experience is that generally women in the Syrian community are involved in activities that are more communal and traditional, such as organizing and preparing meals during the *shiva*, as well as making sure the mourners' needs are properly taken care of.

Women's involvement is often multi-generational. Women take on charitable causes and organize events to raise money in memory of a loved one, especially during the year of mourning. One example is a foundation that was established about twenty years ago when a young women died at the age of 19, before she was married. Every year in her memory there is a luncheon where funds are raised and the money goes to support brides in Israel.

> "At times of loss, women in the community tend to cling to our traditions..."

This community stresses that despite the regular strictures on mourning practices, many leniencies are allowed for single women of marriageable age. During the year of mourning, even for a parent, a young woman can date and participate in events that a regular mourner does not. She can wear makeup, get haircuts, and purchase new clothing, which other mourners might not do. If the woman should marry during the year she can fully participate in all festivities, including having music and dancing at the party.

The Syrian community is a close-knit one that is very attached to tradition. Although at times there are departures from the traditional way of mourning, the emphasis in general is communal, and it provides most mourners with a sense of being taken care of during this difficult time in one's life. At times of loss, women in the community tend to cling to our traditions even as we strive as individuals to express ourselves spiritually and ritually.

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Women and Asceticism

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[1] See for example, the quote of Samuel, the third-century Babylonian *amora*: "Whoever sits and [afflicts himself with] fasts, is called a sinner" (BT *Ta'anit* 11a).

[2] Rashi and *Tosafot, Sotah* 21b, s.v. *rotza isha bekav vetiflut*. This is not, however, the only explanation; see Maimonides *ad loc*.

[3] These *baraitot* also include the "*almana shovavit*–gadabout widow" in their definition of the "*isha perusha*." Rashi interprets this phrase as referring to a widow who is always visiting her neighbors, feigning piety (s.v. *ve-almana shovavit* and *harei elu mevalei olam*.) Her asceticism, then, may simply reflect the fact that she remains a widow, hence abstaining from sexual relations. Due to space limitations, the meaning of this term is not further developed in this article.

[4] The ideas in this article are based on my book, *Piety and Fanaticism: Rabbinic Criticism of Religious Stringency* (Jason Aronson, 1995), especially pp. 107–44.

[5] R. Joshua in the Mishna explicitly condemns extreme ascetic behavior in general, stating that "*makot perushim*–the wounds of the separatists" destroy the world. The term "*perushim*," however, can apply to both men and women, whereas the term "*isha perusha*" refers only to women (BT *Ketubot* 10b, *Tosafot Sotah* 22b s.v. *kol*).

[6] BT *Ketubot* 10b, *Tosafot Sotah* 22b s.v. *kol*.

[7] Philo, *The Contemplative Life*, trans. F.H. Colson (Harvard University Press), vol. IX, p. 155.

[8] Arthur Voobus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1958), vol. I, pp. 103–04.

[9] Gail Paterson Corrington, "The Defense of the Body and the Discourse of the Appetite: Continence and Control and the Greco-Roman World," *Semeia* 57 (1992), pt. I, p. 71.

[10] Karen Jo Torjesen, "In Praise of Noble Women, Asceticism, Patronage and Honor," p. 58.

[11] The very name, Miriam "of the onion bulbs," suggests hypocrisy because onion bulbs cover the bitterness of the onion and can be peeled away; see S. Lieberman, *On Sins and Their Punishments*: *Texts and Studies* (Ktav, 1974), pp. 35–36.

[12] The extent to which female as opposed to male ascetics were suspected of hypocritical and even malevolent intent is an issue deserving of further study.

Winding and Weaving: The Threads of Life

By Fanya Gottesfeld Heller

There are many stories of how life is woven, how life is threaded, how wearing strings or connecting the dots through the generations can – and may – reveal the truth about life. There are also many stories, many significant points in history that do not deserve to be interpreted as a stitching of a thread. There are moments in Jewish history that are generators, that are branches of creation of the threads of our very own lives to date. I see women practicing their crocheting on the train, women knitting sweaters and scarves and socks, and I wonder to myself if they aren't somehow connected more directly than others to the threads of life, to binding and winding and weaving the love with which they wish to warm us, their loved ones.

And there are threads of time. Times of joy, times of trial and doubt, and times of terrible mourning and loss. We now approach the Three Weeks, the twenty one days when the fate of the Jewish people was tied, knotted, and cut off for centuries – lasting until today – with the destruction of their truest source of their connection to God, the Holy Temple.

Three weeks of mourning and loss; but what does that mean to us? It is now the year 2008 - or 5768 - and how are we to understand, to feel, to internalize a tragedy that has no comparison, a catastrophe that, I pray to God, can never be repeated?

Is it a strange sort of fortune, a destiny that I should be here to bear witness to another global tragedy, to so many terrible, heart-scorching atrocities, just so that you might comprehend the slightest fraction of the magnitude of a loss that even I – even I – have difficulty comprehending or "sensuating".

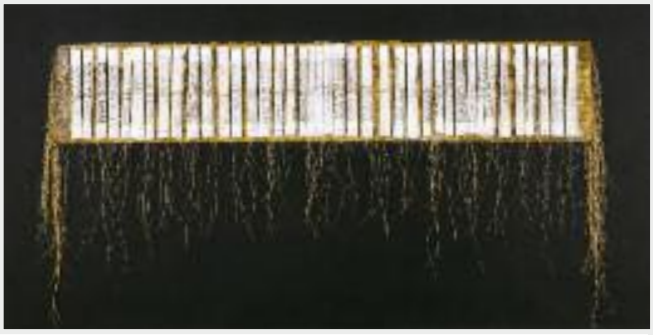
loss: defeat, beating, thrashing, slaughter…damage, harm, injury… bereavement, demise, death.

"sensuating": being aware through the senses: a physical, bodily experience of a moment in space or time.

What we know of the Three Weeks is what we read about in texts or hear about in lectures. Perhaps the Three Weeks in Jerusalem in 70 CE were horrifyingly like some of the last weeks of my life in Skala, on the Polish-Ukrainian border in the 1940's before my family and I went into hiding beneath a chicken coop for two and a half years.

There was the night of my eighteenth birthday, the first Aktzia which lasted from September 26th to September 29th 1942. The Nazis spent three full days just so they could fulfill their quota of killing 750 Jews from our small village of 1500. Three days…how many threads can be unstitched in a Jews' life? How many stitches in the shattered bones, our only graves?

Luckily – oh how we thanked God we were lucky! – we came back alive…but then we saw only the dead, only the killed! There were only twenty-four hours given to us to run to the next village, to the ghetto. And who wouldn't run from a city of the defiled dead?



(Left and Right)
Andi Arnovitz, Jerusalem, 2004.
***Tehillim* Belts**

I had lost everything and everyone I had ever known. I saw most of them gone…forever. I questioned my own will to go on. I remember my last night at home, the last night before the Aktzia. I remember the last time I spoke to my father, just after Liberation, after spending two and a half years beneath a chicken coop, four of us stuffed in a space barely large enough for two.

What I suffered, what my family suffered is unspeakable. Nor can I speak of other torments: of those who had less than one could imagine and still breathed another breath every day at the time of the Destruction of the Temple; of Rav Yochanon who had his *talmidim* sneak him out as if dead so he could set up a place of study in Yavneh; of Rav Tzadok who learned all day and night and fasted for forty years, sucking on fig juice to sustain him as he beseeched God to save the Jewish people.

I am 83 years old and I still remember the last night in my childhood home, the last night I spoke with my father. Both were destroyed. I wish I could give you a reason why. I mourn everybody, I mourn everything that was lost to me.

But after Liberation, we didn't allow ourselves to mourn. It took until my mother's death in 1982 – she was 82 and died a natural death – she died of old age in her sleep and she looked so peaceful. My mother was the first person I had ever known to die a natural death, to not be mutilated, to not be mutilated in death. I thank God for that. And I have no shame in telling you that that is what it took for me to finally cry.

I feel like everyone I've known or met has always had to leave, that I've always had to say goodbye.

My feeling of victory is that I survived, that I raised a beautiful family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And still…even my husband Joseph left me so early…when he died in 1986….left me here alone.

Is there a resolution for loss? I don't know. I experienced the communal loss of Skala – we were a vibrant community no matter how poor we were. But individual losses are irreplaceable.

Perhaps, even to this day, we feel that those out there who did not go through what we did could not possibly understand…The hypothetical question of choosing to burn in the flames of a bonfire in order to save a *Sefer Torah*…do you know what you would choose unless you were truly faced with that decision?

As impossible as it is to explain, I believe either way, one chooses life.

***Fanya Gottesfeld Heller** is a Holocaust survivor, author and philanthropist. Her memoir, entitled* Love in a World of Sorrow *(Devora Publishing, 2005), originally titled* Strange and Unexpected Love: A Teenage Girl's Holocaust Memoirs *(KTAV 1993), is a candid portrait of her family's struggle for survival and her relationship with her Christian rescuers.*

"The belts were created in the midst of the second Intifada. I made them as both an artist's and a mother's response to what I saw happening around me. The collective Jewish response in a situation of crisis is to recite *tehillim*. I took a suicide belt, the understood symbol of terror, and turned it on its head. I created a *tehillim* belt: an expression of hopefulness and peace. The belt is made from typical "Jewish" tools: words, paper and string. Although from a distance the scrolls can be read as perhaps sticks of dynamite, up close one realizes that they are nothing but scrolls of paper, like *mezzuzot*, and the power is in the contents and the repetition."

Andi Arnovitz

The Prohibition of Eating Meat and Drinking Wine During the Three Weeks

By Rabbi Daniel Sperber

It is customary not to eat meat or drink wine during this week [that is, the week during which Tisha B'Av falls]… Some add [the days] from Rosh Hodesh [Av], and some add [still more], from 17 Tammuz.

(Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 551.9)

Introduction

There is no doubt that these prohibitions were not observed in the time of the *Tanna'im* or the *Amora'im*: In the long passage at the end of tractate *Ta'anit* in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, the prohibition of eating meat or drinking wine is limited to the last meal before the fast of Tisha B'Av, according to R. Meir, whereas the sages merely require that consumption of these foods be limited, not prohibited—and only during that last meal. Hence, according to the majority opinion in the Talmud, one is permitted to eat meat and drink wine even immediately before Tisha B'Av.

Today it is generally customary for Ashkenazim not to eat meat or drink wine from Rosh Hodesh Av until Tisha B'Av, although there are some Ashkenazi individuals and groups, particularly among the Hasidim, who abstain from meat and wine from 17 Tammuz on. Sephardim start the restrictions from the Saturday night before Tisha B'Av.

The question arises: Where do these customs mentioned in the *Shulhan Arukh*—and still observed today—come from? Interestingly, their origin is connected to errors in the transmission of texts, and one of these errors involves the recorded practices of women. Tracing this origin gives us an understanding of the process by which customs sometimes develop.

The Prohibition During the Nine Days

The first source of the customs seems to be a quotation from the Jerusalem Talmud that is cited by several medieval authorities. In the twelfth-century *Sefer ha-Manhig* (ed. Rafael, Jerusalem, 1978, p. 297), we read the following:

R. Hai Gaon (tenth century) wrote: "Even though it is said in Yerushalmi Ta'anit *[1.6], and* Pesahim *[4.1], R. Zeira said: Women who are accustomed not to drink wine and not to eat meat* (דלא למשתא חמרא דלא למיכל בשרא) *from [the time] that Av arrives until the end of the fast, [it is] a [valid] custom, for then the* even shetiya *[that is, the Foundation Stone, upon which the world was created, and which was located in the Temple] ceased.*

The same source with some slight variations is cited by the *Mahzor Vitry,* written by a contemporary of Rashi in the eleventh century (sect. 263, p. 225):

Our women who do not drink wine from 17 Tammuz until 9 Av—it is a valid custom. And most Ge'onim *were accustomed not to eat meat or drink wine from the beginning of Av till [after] 9 Av..., and some begin earlier—from 17 Tammuz to 9 Av.*

Now these testimonies are most odd for two reasons. First, they contradict the talmudic sources referred to earlier. Second, why should this custom have been limited at first to women? Were they such tipplers in antiquity?

In fact, the answer to these questions stems from a recognition of an error in transmission of the Jerusalem Talmud. We know that, in his version of the Talmud, Rav Nissim Gaon in the eleventh century did not have the reading חמר–wine, but rather עמרא–wool and למשתי does not mean to *drink*, but rather to *spin*. Further, the Venice edition of the Jerusalem Talmud contains the following text in both *Pesahim* and *Ta'anit*: "Women who are accustomed not to spin, למשתייא (*le-mishtaya*), from when Av arrives—it is a custom, for then the *shetiya* stone ceased. What is the reason? 'For the foundations are destroyed' (Psalms 11:3), meaning when the Temple, that was built on the *even ha-Shetiya* (the Foundation Stone), was destroyed."

Professor Saul Lieberman wrote that the printed version above "is, without doubt, the correct one and its interpretation is indeed as Rav Nissim Gaon suggested: למשתי meaning to spin or to weave. All the other versions of the *Yerushalmi* are additions and interpretations" (S. Lieberman, *Ha-Yerushalmi ki-fishuto*, 430–31). Indeed, we know that it was customary for women to spin wool, and the Foundation Stone is that from which, according to tradition, the world was founded and from which it was metaphorically spun. The linguistic connection between the *even ha-Shetiya*—standing for the Temple—and the women's spinning explains why there was initially a custom for women to refrain from spinning to mark the period before the destruction of the Temple as a sign of mourning. Additionally, it seems that in many cultures women refrain from weaving and spinning in times of trouble.

Although "spinning" was the original reading, corruptions developed in this text that led to the introduction of restrictions connected to eating meat and drinking wine. The original text in the Jerusalem Talmud was "Women who are accustomed to spin," and the word "wool" was added to explain the reference more clearly. However, at some point, the Western Aramaic word for "wool"-עמר, was changed to חמר (Palestinian Aramaic) or חמרא (Babylonian Aramaic), and these words were subsequently misinterpreted as "wine" instead of "wool."

The discussion of these textual changes from עמר to חמר and חמרא is clarified by the words of the Babylonian Talmud in *Eruvin* 53b: "The inhabitants of Judah were precise in their language.., [but] the inhabitants of the Galilee were not precise." This verse is followed by a story about a Galilean who went around asking, "אמר למאן אמר למאן–who has *amar*?" They did not understand what he was asking for and said to him: "Foolish Galilean! חמר [a donkey] on which to ride or חמר [wine] to drink? עמר [wool to wear] or אימר [a sheep = a fleece] with which to cover oneself?" From this story we learn that the Galileans did not distinguish between the words for "wine" and "donkey," or

between "wool" and "sheep," precisely because they could not differentiate between the pronunciation of the *het* and the *ayin*.

Thus, it is not surprising that חמר and עמר should be interchanged, and over the course of time, the Eretz Israel forms חמר and חמרא were understood as "wine" under the influence of those familiar with the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud. Once "wool" was converted to "wine," the addition of "meat" by scribes was almost inevitable. Therefore, because of the erroneous transmission of the Jerusalem Talmud's text and the traditional association of wine and meat with celebration, extending the prohibition that was initially limited in the Talmud to immediately before Tisha B'Av became the accepted way to observe the ruling in *Mishna Ta'anit*—"From the beginning of Av, happiness is decreased."

I therefore conclude that the pronunciation of the early Eretz Israel spelling of עמר-חמר and the lack of understanding of this word by later scribes in Babylonia in the time of the *Ge'onim* created our custom of refraining from eating meat and drinking wine from the beginning of Av onward. Although later authorities attributed this custom to the fact that the sacrifices and libations of the Temple ceased in this period, the source of the custom is the corruption of the text that stated that women refrained from spinning at the beginning of Av.

The Prohibition During the Three Weeks

However, this textual corruption does not explain the other tradition noted in the *Shulhan Arukh*, namely, to refrain from eating meat and drinking wine from 17 Tammuz. For this tradition, there is yet another source: Daniel 10: 2–3. Daniel reports that "in those days, I, Daniel, mourned three full weeks. I ate no tasty bread, and neither meat nor wine came to my mouth; I did not anoint myself at all until three weeks were complete." These verses in Daniel served as a sort of source for this custom, as the *Tur* explains in *Orah Hayyim* 551:

> *There are pious people who fast from 17 Tammuz onward. Others refrain from meat and wine. And we learn in the Yerushalmi: How long is it between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av? Twenty-one days, from the time that the city was broken into until the Temple was destroyed.* Others say: [This] corresponds to the three weeks which Daniel fasted. *[But] the custom of Ashkenaz is for individuals to refrain from meat and wine from 17 Tammuz onward.*

In the *Beit Yosef,* his commentary to the *Tur,* R. Joseph Caro, the author of the *Shulhan Arukh,* says on this section: "Others say: '[This] corresponds to the three weeks which Daniel fasted'—this is in the name of Rabbenu Saadiah." In pursuing Caro's source for this statement, I found this attribution in a medieval work called *Tanya Rabbati* (p. 126):

> *I found in the name of R. Saadiah Gaon* ז"ל *that from 17 Tammuz till 9 Av are the days mentioned in Daniel during which Daniel fasted three weeks. Some are careful not to eat meat and drink wine, as is written, "and neither meat nor wine came to my mouth." Others say that this refers to the month of Nisan.*

However, the Rav Saadiah Gaon mentioned here is not the tenth-century philosopher and commentator who moved from Egypt to Babylonia, but rather a French rabbi called Saadiah who lived at the time of Rashi, more than a century and a half later. When the words of this other Saadiah were incorporated into a famous text of the *Roke'ach*, the word "Gaon" was mistakenly added, based on the assumption that the attribution was to Saadiah Gaon, which had the effect of giving it much more authority. This mis-attribution continued in later texts.

Ironically, we now have access to the words of Rav Saadiah Gaon himself referring to the three weeks mentioned in the book of Daniel and their connection with the custom of observing the Three Weeks before Tisha B'Av. In his commentary to the book of Daniel, Saadiah Gaon says categorically that Daniel could not have been referring to the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha B'Av:

> *Some have thought that these three weeks are from 17 Tammuz till 9 Av, and this is* a blatant error *for several reasons: First, the dates of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av are dates relating to the destruction of the Second Temple only, [and Daniel was mourning the destruction of the* First *Temple]. The corresponding dates for the First Temple's destruction are 9 Tammuz and 10 Av, for the city was broken into on the ninth of Tammuz. "In the fifth month, on the tenth of the month…. The Temple of God was burnt" (Jeremiah 52:4–12).*

Here, then, is a case where we find an attribution to Rav Saadiah Gaon of something that he expressly contradicted. Yet, his rejection of the interpretation of Daniel's words actually provides evidence of the existence of the custom of not eating meat or drinking wine from 17 Tammuz to 9 Av—the period we call *Bein Ha-Metzarim* (between the straits)—as far back as the tenth century.

Hence, both traditions in the *Shulhan Arukh*—the one of not eating meat and drinking wine in the Nine Days and its extension of abstaining from meat and wine for the Three Weeks—appear to be based on a conflation of errors. Oddly enough, the correct understanding of the text in the Jerusalem Talmud is found in the adjacent clause in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim* 551:8), which reads, "Women whose custom it is not to spin wool (למשתי עמרא) from the beginning of Av, this is a [legitimate] custom." Incidentally, this statement is actually the source of the restrictions on sewing, buying, and wearing new clothes during the Nine Days that are still practiced today.

Implications for Practice

Does the fact that these customs of not eating meat or drinking wine originated in errors mean that they should be rejected? Here we enter into the whole issue of the validity of customs and our obligations to maintain them. From our sources, we know of other customs that developed from erroneous suppositions: some were subsequently rejected by the rabbis as a "*minhag ra*–a bad custom," obviously based on an erroneous premise. However, generally speaking, the rabbis urged us to preserve customs, provided they did not conflict with other laws or impose excessive hardships. And certainly, if customs have some positive religious and educational value, even when based on error, they should be adhered to. This indeed is the view of the

...continued on page 34

The Meaning of Tisha B'Av Today

Every generation in whose times the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt is considered as though it was the one in which it was destroyed.
(Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 1.1)

Tisha B'Av and the Three Weeks are difficult for many Jews today. We know it is a time of mourning, but sometimes it is difficult to remember what we are mourning for. Every day, we include prayers in our regular *davening* for the rebuilding of the Temple; however, it is not so easy for us to anticipate a time when the *Beit Hamikdash* will be rebuilt and all the sacrifices will be restored. Particularly for our generation, who live with an independent and sovereign Israel, what does Tisha B'Av mean? It is hard to mourn the desolation of Jerusalem when thankfully the city does not seem quite so desolate. A number of rabbis, including the late Chief Rabbi Goren of Israel, have ruled that the *Nachem* prayer in the *Minha Shemoneh Esreh,* which talks about the desolation of Jerusalem in the present tense, should be recited in the past tense. But this view is not accepted by many who say that even though there now is a national homeland with Jerusalem as its capital, the prayer should not be changed until the Temple is rebuilt.

Tradition tells us that Tisha B'Av is to be observed until the days of the Messiah, at which point it will become a day of celebration. We know that even during the period of the Second Temple, Tisha B'Av was still observed to commemorate the destruction of the first Temple. Rabbis, such as Rabbi Irving Greenberg, have proposed that the intensity of the remembrance observances be stepped down to make clear that, in mourning on Tisha B'Av, we are remembering a catastrophic, historical tragedy but are not denying the reality of Israel reborn and rebuilt (albeit the Temple is not restored and the full spiritual wounds are not yet healed.)

When we focus on this period in the calendar, we should remember that many tragedies occurred to the Jewish people throughout history on Tisha B'av. In a way, the day has absorbed the memories of national disasters and catastrophes to become a collective day of mourning. It can therefore provide us with a framework to connect with other sad times in Jewish history and with other Jewish communities, past and present. Some consider it the appropriate time to add to our focus the consequences of all human suffering.

More than this, the destruction of the Temple can be seen as the cause of spiritual as well as physical exile for the Jewish People, marking not only our loss of autonomy, but a loss of our connection with God as well. The Temple was considered by many as the place where Heaven and Earth met. Thus the time of mourning connected with the destruction of the Temple gives us an opportunity to mourn the loss of God in our lives. It can be a time to try to make up for the failings of the past and to strive to enhance the spiritual dimension of our existence. In particular, our tradition associates the destruction of the second *Beit Hamikdash* with the sin of *sinat hinam* – senseless hatred. The Three Weeks can give us all a chance to reduce intolerance and polarization among Jews and work towards feelings of unity.

We hope that the material in the journal will be a springboard to further reflection as we struggle to observe and mourn in this period. May we all look forward to a period of redemption when Tisha B'Av will indeed become a day of celebration!

Burial Practices

Cemeteries and communities have different practices regarding the placement of graves. R. Moshe Feinstein states in a responsum that there were two standard customs for burial–one in rows of men alternating with rows of women; the other with husband next to wife, wife next to husband so that no man is next to a woman other than his wife. Nevertheless, there is no halakhic prohibition to bury an unrelated woman next to a man. There is a famous illustration of a 17th century cemetery in Switzerland which shows separate rows for men, women, and *yoldot*–women who died in childbirth. Others have separate sections for children.

Who Wrote the Book of *Eikha*?

By Meir Bar-Ilan

The awareness of authorship is quite a modern concept. Only once did the rabbis of the Talmud disclose their opinion concerning the authorship of biblical books (Babylonian Talmud *Bava Batra* 14b–15a), and there was no debate among them on matters of authorship. This lack of debate is in contrast to their discussions on the development of halakha that are characterized by many different opinions. With very few exceptions, only from the end of the eighteenth century and only in modern scholarship, did interest develop in such "unimportant" issues as authorship, and indeed rabbis today are reluctant to say anything beyond the talmudic statement.

In *Bava Batra*, the Talmud says that the Book of *Eikha* was composed by the prophet Jeremiah (in the sixth century BCE). The modern Orthodox commentary on the book by Mosad Harav Kook gives support to this statement by delineating certain parallels between this book and the life experience of Jeremiah, who saw with his own eyes, the fulfillment of his prophecies concerning the fall of Jerusalem. A number of dirges appear in the Book of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer. 20:7–18), so the connection between the Book of Lamentations and Jeremiah seems to be confirmed. In the Septuagint and the Vulgate, *Eikha* is placed after the Book of Jeremiah to denote the same concept: one author wrote both books.

However, tradition plays a role not only in religion but also in academic circles, and it is not surprising that until now very few people have considered that part of the Book of *Eikha* might have been composed by a woman. This is particularly so because the third chapter of the book actually begins with a statement: "I am the man that hath seen affliction" (and 'man' is mentioned in that chapter three more times).This again would seem to confirm the view that the book was composed by a man, the prophet Jeremiah.

However, a close reading of the Hebrew text leads to a different conclusion.[1] The first fact that becomes clear is that the Book of *Eikha* is an anthology, a collection of dirges. The first four of the Book's five chapters are all written in

acrostic form, following the order of the Hebrew alphabet, but the acrostic form used is not the same in all the chapters. In the third chapter, the acrostic has three verses beginning with each letter, not just one, as in the other chapters in acrostic form—and its style and rhythm are different. In contrast to the first four chapters, which are almost completely in the first-person singular, the fifth chapter is in the first-person plural. As well, several ideas appear twice in different chapters. All these factors lead one to conclude that the book was composed by more than one person.

Further analysis of the Hebrew text makes clear that, in the first two chapters, the speaker is a female; this is not evident in English translation, as English is a language that is "blind" from the gender suffix point of view. The speaker presents herself as a female several times, and there is no need to "explain" this by claiming that the speaker is the city of Jerusalem, and "cities" are female in Hebrew, a language in which all nouns are gendered. In addition, several of the words and phrases in both these chapters, such as the reference to male lovers, reveal the femininity of the text. The simple and straightforward explanation is that the speaker in the first two chapters is a woman who is lamenting and weeping for her city and for the Temple. We know that women were very involved in funeral practices in biblical times and were the ones who usually composed and recited laments. The unusual order of the alphabet in the second chapter—*Samekh–Peh–Ayin*, instead of the usual sequence *Samekh–Ayin–Peh*—leads me to the conclusion that this chapter was composed by a different woman from the one who composed the first chapter. There is also a difference in tone between the two chapters—the first is one of despair, the second of anger—and this supports the view that the two chapters were composed by different women.[2]

However, it seems clear that the third chapter was composed by a male who states his maleness in the introduction of his dirge, underlining his gender with the words, "I am the man," specifically to contrast with the preceding chapters. Indeed, all the parallels found between the Book of *Eikha* and Jeremiah are limited to the third chapter. Moreover, comparing carefully the language of the dirges in the Book of Jeremiah to the third chapter of *Eikha* leads to an interesting conclusion. We can look at the way the composer of the dirge in Jeremiah 20: 7–18 and the composer of the third chapter of *Eikha* describe themselves by analyzing the statistical frequency of the self-referential suffix or prefix in the Hebrew. This analysis shows that both texts have the same character: The composer of both texts is highly aware of himself, and both texts have almost the same percentage of words denoting himself as the mourner (18% and 16.4% of the words). This analysis makes what literary scholars call a kind of fingerprint of the text, and this fingerprint is very different from the first two chapters of the book. The male in the third chapter sees himself in the middle of the scene and describes the destruction as part of his own experience; in the first two chapters the speakers do not do this. Only 11 percent and 3 percent of the words of these chapters are self-reflective.[3]

"…it was usually the women of the Bible… who led laments…"

The gender of the author of the fourth chapter is not easily discernible, but an analysis of the text of this chapter, as well as its affinities with the first two chapters, and not with the third chapter, leads me to conclude that it was mainly composed by yet another woman. Examining the style and content of these chapters, it would seem that the women in each of the three chapters (1, 2, and 4) present their "femaleness" in a different way, with a different degree of emphasis, parallel to the way they each describe the disasters that befell them.

The fifth chapter in *Eikha* is different yet again from the other chapters: first, it is not in acrostic form, although it does have twenty-two verses—the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Second, it is presented in the first-person plural and not in a singular voice. Given the view that the book is a collection of individual dirges that might have been performed in some sort of ceremony—and the alphabetical order of the verses in the first four chapters is indeed an indication for a modern reader that the text was composed orally and performed—it makes sense that, at the end, all the performers come together in a chorus to make a dirge in a collective mode to denote the national loss beyond the individual losses. This would explain the distinct nature of the fifth chapter.

It is important to be aware of the difference between an author and a composer of texts. The conclusion that chapters 1, 2, and 4 in *Eikha* were probably composed by three different women does not confirm female authorship of the book. The individual chapters may have been composed and performed by women, but the actual writing down would have been separate. This process of writing is evident from Jeremiah 36, where it stated that the prophet spoke while his scribe, Baruch, son of Neriah, committed his prophecy to writing.

Of course, there were women who could write in antiquity (e.g., Jezebel [1 Kings 21:8] or Esther [9:29]), and more than thirty seals of Jewish women from the eighth to the fourth centuries BCE have been discovered, which indicates that maybe some of the dirges in the Book of *Eikha* were actually written down by a woman. However, although both women and men in this period wrote and performed laments, it is still more probable that a man wrote the text down because the dirges focus primarily on national symbols: the kingdom and the Temple. These symbols are generally associated with the domain of men and, in particular, priests (and one should remember that Jeremiah was a priest.)

In all probability, the anthologist, the one who collected the dirges together, knew that some were composed by women; nevertheless he did not hesitate to connect them in the same text. No doubt, he held these women in high esteem because they were probably already known as the best performers and public mourners in town, as is borne out by Jeremiah's own words (9:16–18):

> *Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the wise women, that they may come…. Hear the word of the Lord, O ye women and let your ear receive the word of His mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and everyone her neighbor lamentation.*

As already mentioned, it was usually the women of the Bible who were the

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Who Wrote Eikha?

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mekonnenot, who led laments while mourning for the dead. Perhaps it was Jeremiah himself who appreciated what these women did and, on one occasion or another, wrote down (with the help of his scribe) the best dirges of his time, collecting them into an anthology and inserting himself in the middle, as seen in the third chapter. Thus, the talmudic statement attributing the Book of *Eikha* to Jeremiah might still be accurate, even though women probably composed three of its chapters.

Usually people take the Bible as a male text. However, this analysis demonstrates that one should be aware of other ways of looking at an ancient text, and the Bible should be re-examined from the perspective of gender.[4] We can analyze many sections of the Bible for evidence of female composition. Not only can these three chapters of *Eikha* (chapters 1, 2 and 4) be identified as likely composed by women, but other texts (such as Devora's song in the Book of Judges, *Megillat* Ruth,[5] and more) fall into this category as well. One hopes that the riddle of the "female texts" in the Bible will be solved in the coming years.

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[1] Much of the discussion in this article draws on my book, *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity,* Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press 1998. See in particular, Chapter 3 'The Keening Woman'.

[2] The acrostic used in chapters 2, 3, and 4 all follow the unusual form *Samekh–Peh–Ayin* as opposed to *Samekh–Ayin–Peh*.

[3] This might be explained by the view that women are more "other-directed" than men because of their family role as nurturers.

[4] For a discussion of female literary creativity in the Bible including the Book of *Eikha*, see S. D. Goitein, *Iyyunim Bamikra*, (Tel Aviv, 1957) which has been translated into English as 'Women as Creators of Biblical Genres" in Prooftexts 8 (1988): 1-33.

[5] For a discussion of female authorship of *Megillat* Ruth see Meir Bar-Ilan, 'The Voice of Women: From Near and Far', (forthcoming, Hebrew).

Eikha Rabbah and Righteous Anger

By Marcie Lenk

As a student in an Orthodox day school, I often heard the story of Nahum Ish Gamzu, who responded to the tragedies he suffered with the phrase, "*Gam zo l'tovah*–this, too, is actually a good thing."[1] We were told, through this story and others, that true faith in God should lead us each to look for the good in all things, even pain. The education and socialization that I received—intended to teach me how to be a religious Jew, not to mention how to be an attractive and appropriate woman—pointed to such responses to misfortune. An angry woman is an unattractive woman, and anger shows impiety: true faith in God should lead me to appreciate my lot.

Although these ideas remain in force in the religious world, and in society in general, I later found that some of our most ancient and sanctified texts in the *Tanakh* and *Midrash* teach different lessons. In the *Tanakh*, the authors of Job, Lamentations (*Eikha*), and many of the Psalms, like Abraham before the destruction of Sodom, were not afraid to challenge God, to demand justice from God, and even to complain about pain. The rabbis followed suit—taking responsibility for their own failings but expecting God to do the same.

The biblical Book of *Eikha* responds to the agony of the loss of land and people following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE. The *Midrash* on this book, *Eikha Rabbah*, uses the biblical text to address the losses in rabbinic times, including the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the loss of access to Jerusalem under Hadrian in 135 CE, and the pain and humiliation felt by Jews under the power and oppression of the Roman Empire. Some *midrashim* in the collection are pious in the traditional sense of the word, presuming that Jewish suffering has come as punishment for a wide variety of sins. In these *midrashim*, the rabbis use misfortune as an opportunity to encourage the people to repent and to live according to God's instructions.

In many instances, however, the rabbis surprise us by making demands on God and acknowledging that people who suffer have reason for and are justified in feeling angry toward God. In one *midrash* in *Eikha Rabba*, Rabbi Abba bar Kahana accuses God of sinning, of not observing what God had commanded in the Torah:

> The Holy Spirit cried, "Behold, O Lord, my suffering, for the enemy has magnified himself" (Lamentations. 1:9). "The proud dug pits for me, which is not according to Your Torah" (Psalms 119:85). R. Abba bar Kahana said, two [transgressions of the Torah] are written. "You shall not take the mother with her young" (Deut. 22:6), but here "The mother was dashed to pieces with her children" (Hosea 10:14), which was not according to Your Torah. R. Abba bar Kahana said another is written: "To cut the children from the street" (Jer. 9:20), but not from the synagogues, "and the young men from the wide places," but not from the study houses. But here, "The anger of God went up against them, and slew the lustiest among them, and smote down the young men of Israel" (Psalms 78:31), which was not according to Your Torah (*Eikha Rabbah* 1:37).

Although the interpreter of the *midrash* might suggest that the main culprit here is the Babylonian enemy—who killed mother and child with no regard for the ethics demanded by the Torah—it is clear at the end that the people suffered because of "the anger of God," which is the force that destroyed "the young men of Israel" wherever they were. The prophet Jeremiah had written of the suffering of the young men in the marketplace ("the wide places"), which led the rabbis of the *Midrash* to presume that those who remained praying and learning in the synagogues and study houses would be protected. However, according to Psalm 78, God's anger went out against all of the students, wherever they were. The rabbis imply that, even though at least some of the people of Israel were observing God's Torah, God allowed His anger to take over and disregarded His own Torah laws and promises.

In *Eikha Rabbah* there are also a series of *midrashim* containing parables, most commonly involving the relationship between a king and his *matrona* (usually translated as "matron" or "consort"). Here is one of those parables:

> "For it was Your doing" (Lam. 1:21)—A parable—to a king who married a *matrona*. He said to her, "Do not speak with your friends and do not borrow from them and do not lend to them." Some time later, the king was angry at her, and he drove her out of the palace. She turned to all her neighbors, but they did not accept her, so she returned to the palace. The king said to her, "You are impudent [in returning to me]!" The *matrona* answered to the king, "My lord, had I lent to them and borrowed from them a single garment, if some vessel of mine was in their possession, or of theirs was in mine, would they not have accepted me?" So said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Israel, "You have acted impudently [in returning to Me]!" They said before Him, "Master of the Universe, did You not write in Your Torah, 'You shall not marry with them; do not give your daughter to his son, nor take his daughter for your son' (Deut. 7:3). Had we lent to them or married from them and them from us, had their daughter been with us or ours with them, would they not have accepted me?" This is the meaning of "For it was Your doing" (Lam. 1:21) (*Eikha Rabbah* 1:37).

In the parable, no motivation is provided for the king's anger at the *matrona*. Indeed, the *matrona* is depicted as an obedient wife, isolated from her neighbors at the command of the king. The parable is explained as referring to the relationship between God and Israel. Israel observed God's rules and did not intermarry, but when God (inexplicably) grew angry at Israel and cast her out of her land, she was perceived by other people as a stranger, not to be trusted. Using the verse in *Eikha*, the *midrash* blames God for putting the innocent people of Israel into this untenable situation. It even gives Israel the final word—implying that God cannot possibly have a reasonable response. This *midrash* is radical in another way, as well. The parable is a story of an abusive husband, but in the end, the wife publicly reveals the abuse, and she wins both our sympathy and our respect. The rabbis challenge God by accusing him of mistreating the people of Israel, and they offer no excuses for God's behavior.

Jewish tradition, from the *Tanakh* to modern writings, has always had many different responses to personal and communal pain and suffering. The rabbis in *Eikha Rabbah* provide models for a relationship with God that includes anger. In these *midrashim,* anger at God is not a sign of impiety, but rather a sign of relationship. In any deep relationship, there is engagement, which necessarily encompasses situations of frustration and anger. In a healthy relationship, the parties express their anger and work through it, ultimately leading to greater understanding.

Our texts and prayers teach us to strive to love God and to know God. *Eikha* and *Eikha Rabbah* teach that there are bumps along the way. Our prophets and rabbis were not afraid to challenge God in those moments. This model of engagement should serve us today as well.

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[1] Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 21a; Jerusalem Talmud *Shekalim* 5:15. It should be noted that the historical explanation for Nahum's name is that he came from the town of Gimzo, based on a reference to him as 'Nehemiah the Imsoni,' which seems to be a mispronunciation of the name of his hometown, based on the confusion of the letters ע and א (BT *Pesahim* 22b).

SOLILOQUY

I never held her hand. I never
called the last week of her life.
I meant to make the trip and then
postponed it. I said some words
I never can take back.
If only I had known.
(Ah, but you didn't.)
If only I had thought.
(But you could not.)
Why didn't I once tell you?
(But I knew it.)
Why didn't I invite you?
(Never mind.)
I hated you for growing weak,
for dying.
(I absolve you.)
I lie awake remembering how
I failed you.
(How I love you.)
For the rest of my life, I never—
(Only love.)
How could I—?
(Don't you know you
are forgiven?)
If only—
(Would you want your child
to live with such reproaches?)
No, I say reluctantly, I would not.
(Then forgive yourself. If only
I could ask you, that is what
I'd ask.)

Nessa Rapoport

Editor's Note: Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash *by Yael Levine was published in Hebrew in 1996. Since its publication, it has been recited in Israel by various communities and many individuals on the eve of Tisha B'Av or during the day. We are pleased that Dr. Levine is sharing translations of four extracts from her book, together with some background on the text. For the complete work see Yael Levine,* Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash, *Tel Aviv: Eked, 1996.*[1]

Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash –
The Supplication of the Mothers for the Rebuilding of the Temple

By Dr. Yael Levine

Introduction

I composed *Tehinnat ha-Nashim le-Vinyan ha-Mikdash* as a literary work in the style of the aggadic *midrashim* in which biblical and post-biblical female figures, through the end of the Second Temple period, beseech God to rebuild the Temple. The work contains various thematic components that are based upon talmudic, midrashic, and aggadic literature as well as the Zohar. The *tehinnot*, or supplications, portray the connection between women and the Temple throughout the generations.

The Destruction of the Temple

The initial inspiration for the piece came from the text in *Eikha Rabbah,* which describes how, following the destruction of the Temple, various figures come before God begging for the return of the exiles; only when Rachel comes to present her arguments does God relent and say "On account of you, Rachel, I will return Israel to their place."

Eighteen women or groups of women who beseeched the Almighty—all of whom had an affinity either with the Temple Mount, the Tabernacle, or the First or Second Temples—are represented in the book. The biblical women include Sarah, Rebecca, Aaron's wife Elisheva, the righteous women of the wilderness, Devorah, Ruth, Hannah, Jonah's wife, Huldah, and Queen Esther. The women from the post-biblical era include Queen Helena and the maidens and women who wove the curtains for the Temple.

When the Second Temple was destroyed
the souls of our fathers and mothers
descended to the Temple Mount
and composed lamentations.
At that time, the Holy One, blessed be He,
turned to them from the heavens on high and said:
Why are My beloved people reciting dirges in My home?
Thereupon the fathers said:
We are ashamed,
that strangers could enter Your Sanctuary.
Our holy and glorious Temple has been consumed by fire,
all that was dear to us has been laid waste,
and Your people are dispersed amongst the nations.

כשחרב הבית בשנייה
נתכנסו אבות העולם עם האימהות
ובאו למקום המקדש וקשרו שם מספד גדול.
אותה שעה נזקק להם הקדוש-ברוך-הוא
משמי מרום ואמר להם:
מה לאוהביי בביתי עושים מספד?
פתחו האבות ואמרו:
כיסתה כלימה פנינו
כי באו זרים על מקדשי בית ה'.
בית קדשנו ותפארתנו היה לשרפת אש
וכל מחמדינו היה לחרבה
והעם היה לכלי נידח בין אומות העולם...

Hannah's Petition

Hannah's husband, Elkanah, used to come "from his town every year to worship and offer sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts at Shiloh" (Samuel I, 1:3). Hannah participated in the pilgrimage, and prayed to God regularly at Shiloh. The Talmud and Midrash attribute various specific prayers to Hannah. The *Tanakh* contains one version of her prayer, and the text suggests that God responded to that singular prayer. In *Tehinnat ha-Nashim*, Hannah beseeches God to remember the people of Israel based on all her prayers. Hannah's biblical prayers, both her petition to God for children, as well as the prayer she recited when she returned to the Tabernacle in Shiloh after Samuel was weaned, were considered by the Sages to be the ultimate paradigms of prayer. Because of this, they are the source of many fundamental laws of *tefilla*.

The concluding phrase is from Lamentations 3:56, and serves here as an expression of protest. Other sections of *Tehinnat ha-Nashim* also contain articulations of protest, including the protest to God by a group of women in the generation of Nehemiah. This theme of protest is also found in other *midrashim* concerning the destruction of the Temple.

Then the soul of Hannah spoke:
On the pilgrimage festivals
I would ascend to the Temple in Shiloh
and behold all of Israel spread out before me. I said to You:
Master of the Universe, Your multitudes serve You
and I have not even one of them?
And You have now scattered Your people
amongst the nations of the world,
and they cannot go up and appear in worship before You
to perform their obligations in the House of Your choice,
in the great and holy House
upon which Your Name was proclaimed,
because of the hand that struck Your Sanctuary.

באה נשמת חנה, סחה ושאלה:
בפעמי רגלים הייתי עולה לבית המקדש שבשילה,
וראיתי את כל ישראל שם. אמרתי לפניך:
ריבונו של עולם, כל הצבאות האלו יש לך
ולי אין אחד מהם?
ועתה, פיזרתם לבין אומות העולם
ואין הם יכולים לעלות ולראות ולהשתחוות לפניך
ולעשות חובותיהם בבית בחירתך, בבית הגדול והקדוש
שנקרא שמך עליו, מפני היד שנשתלחה במקדשך.
על שהייתי תדירה עולה ומתפללת בבית המקדש
ומתחננת לפניך, על כן שמעת תפילתי ותפקדני,
ולא תפקוד את עמך ישראל הנתונים בצרה ובצוקה?
קולי שמעת, אל תעלם אזנך לרווחתי לשוועתי!

And because I often went to pray in the Temple
and supplicate before You,
my lips moving silently,
You heard my prayer and remembered me.
Will You not remember the people of Israel
who endure trouble and distress,
whose hearts are as broken as Your glorious house?
As You have heard my voice,
"Close not Your ears to my groan, to my cry"!

Jonah's Wife

Jonah ben Amittai is mentioned in two places in the Bible; once in the prophetic book that bears his name, and once in II Kings 14:25 in connection with Jeroboam ben Jehoash, king of Israel. Jonah's wife is not mentioned in the Bible at all, but in the talmudic literature there is a tradition that the wife of Jonah went up to the Temple regularly on the festivals. According to the Jerusalem Talmud she was not permitted to go to the temple, but the sages of the Babylonian Talmud did not protest her going. "Yo'am" is the name of Jonah's mother in several post-talmudic lists of Biblical women.

The soul of Jonah's wife,
the daughter-in-law of Yo'am, came forth to plead:
Without being commanded,
I would ascend to the Temple for the festivals,
my heart bursting with joy,
my soul full of song,
and the Sages did not object.
And You, who have commanded all males of Your people Israel
to ascend for the pilgrimage festivals
three times a year—
how can Your word now be observed
when the Temple no longer stands?
Reduced to rubble and a pile of stones,
only the voice of the wind is heard there now,
when all joy has waned,
and festival and Sabbath are forgotten in Zion?

יצאה נשמת אשת יונה, כלת יועם, וביקשה:
אף על פי שלא הייתי מצווה,
עולה הייתי ברגלים למקדש
ולא מיחו בי חכמים.
ואתה, שציווית לעמך ישראל הזכרים
לעלות לרגל שלוש פעמים בשנה,
היאך יוכלו לקיים מאמרך
כשאין המקדש עומד על תלו,
כשערבה כל שמחה
וכשנשכח בציון מועד ושבת?

My Daughters Have Defeated Me

The concluding section of *Tehinnat ha-Nashim* is patterned after the well-known talmudic passage in *Bava Mezia* concerning the oven of Akhnai. Rabbi Eliezer declared this type of oven, clean, whereas the sages declared it unclean. Rabbi Eliezer presented every imaginable argument, but the sages did not accept any of them. He then declared that if the halakha agreed with him, the carob tree should prove it. The carob tree was uprooted from its place, but the sages said that no proof could be brought from a carob tree. After enlisting several additional proofs, Rabbi Eliezer finally declared that if the halakha agreed with him, let it be proven from heaven. Thereupon a heavenly voice cried out: "Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halakha agrees with him." Rabbi Joshua retorted: "It is not in the heavens," i.e., after the Torah had been given at Sinai, no attention is paid to a Heavenly Voice, but rather, we observe the biblical rule that one must follow the majority. It is related that Rabbi Nathan met Elijah and asked him how God responded to the episode. Elijah said that He laughed and said: "My sons have defeated Me! My sons have defeated Me!" At the end of *Tehinnat Nashim*, God says, "My daughters have defeated Me!", and the *tehinnah* concludes with the promise of comfort and future redemption. With the destruction, the seeds of consolation were sown.

A heavenly voice came forth and cried:
My daughters have defeated Me! My daughters have defeated Me!
Their tears have compelled me.
For your sake, for your sake I will act!
For a short while I have forsaken you,
but with great mercy I will gather you in.
For a moment, in great anger I hid my face from you.
But with everlasting kindness I will have compassion upon you.
From the day the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed,
there is no joy for me
until I rebuild Jerusalem and return Israel to its midst.
And I shall rejoice in the city and delight in My people.
And the voice of weeping and wailing shall be heard no more.
For I shall return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth,
and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the Holy Mountain.

יצאה בת-קול ואמרה:
נצחוני בנותיי! נצחוני בנותיי!
למענכן למענכן אני עושה!
ברגע קטן עזבתיכם וברחמים גדולים אקבצכם.
בשצף קצף הסתרתי פניי רגע מכם
ובחסד עולם ארחמכם.
מיום שחרב בית המקדש וחרבה ירושלים
אין שמחה לפניי
עד שאבנה את ירושלים ואחזיר את ישראל לתוכה.
וגלתי בירושלים ושמחתי בעמי
ולא יישמע בה עוד קול בכי וקול זעקה.
כי שב ה' אל ציון ושכן בתוך ירושלים
ונקראה ירושלים עיר האמת והר ה' צבאות הר הקודש.

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[1] See further: Yael Levine, "*Tehinnat Hanashim Levinyan Hamikdash*: The Supplication of the Mothers for the Rebuilding of the Temple: Excerpts and Commentary", *Nashim 9 (2005), 126-134.*

Eikha Through the Voices of Women

By Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker

Two years ago, our Cherry Hill, NJ Women's *Tefilla* Group held its first reading of *Eikha*, the book of Lamentations, which is read on Tisha B'Av, the day of mourning which commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This reading has since become an annual ritual. A number of factors motivated me to initiate this gathering, the primary one being the experience of a close friend who had attended a women's *Eikha* reading in Bet Shemesh, Israel, and raved about it. For her, hearing the mournful words of *Eikha* read through the unique medium of a woman's melodious voice, heightened the spirit and meaning of the words. I have personally always found it meaningful to hear and read *Eikha* myself, and enjoy humming along with the reader.

Reading of *Eikha*

There are many precedents for women's readings of *Eikha* and *kinot* (the mournful elegies that are recited) on Tisha B'Av. This is apparent from numerous sources including the medieval *Kol Bo*, which describes the laws and practices of Tisha B'Av.

> *And therefore they extinguish all the lamps and the cantor begins to recite the lamentations to sadden the souls and break the hearts. And they recite dirges there for about quarter of the night, the men in their synagogue and the women in their synagogue. And likewise during the day the men recite dirges by themselves and the women by themselves, until about a third of the day is past.*
>
> (Hilkhot Tisha B'Av, 62)

There is no stated halakhic obligation to read *Eikha* and therefore no issue of needing someone else to read on behalf of others. The source for our practice of reading *Eikha* on Tisha B'Av is Tractate *Sofrim* (14.3), but this is essentially a gaonic work and the status of reading *Eikha* is a custom and not absolute law.

Obviously the issues of *kol isha* and

...*continued on page 38*

Our Women's *Tefilla* Group put together a reading that incorporated different elements of *Eikha* readings that we had attended over the years. Many of us had gone to summer camps, where the reading was held outside, with candles and other props to make the evening visually meaningful. Many of us attended *Eikha* readings where a *d'var Torah* or discussion helped us put the evening in the proper historical and religious perspective. In addition, *Tefillat Ma'ariv*, the evening prayer, would often accompany the reading, along with *Kinot*, or poems of lament.

With these elements in mind, we set up candles and prepared to hold a beautiful reading in an outdoor setting. However, we never actually made it outside, because unlike the lovely Pocono Mountains, the heat and bugs of Cherry Hill, NJ forced us inside! Nevertheless, the *Eikha* service, which began with our davening *Ma'ariv* together, was inspiring and meaningful. We found that many more women were able to actively participate in the service than in the Torah reading on Shabbat or in the reading of *Megillat Esther* on Purim. Many women had learned to read *Eikha* as teenagers; additionally, there is no requirement to read from a *klaf* (parchment manuscript with no punctuation or cantillation marks). We divided up all the chapters of *Eikha*, and each was read by a different woman. We also recited several selected *Kinot*. Finally, our *d'var Torah* took on a historical and educational perspective; the speaker focused on the prophet Zechariah and discussed the burning issue of his time, namely, how Tisha B'Av should be commemorated at the time of the rebuilding of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*.

Attending our Women's *Tefilla* was a sizeable, but intimate group of approximately twenty-five. We have found that, while there is potential for more attendees to drive in from nearby suburbs in the Greater Philadelphia area, the late hour, coupled with fasting, makes it attractive only to our local community. In addition, many of our regular attendees are away for the summer, including girls who attend summer camps.

Our meeting on Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the year for the Jewish people, brings full-circle our collective Women's *Tefilla* gatherings. It is our goal to celebrate together, with multiple generations of women, both the sad and happy times that are encompassed by the Jewish calendar, as well as those that comprise our community life cycles.

Maurycy Minkowski, (1881-1930)
***Remembering the Destruction of The Temple-Women Praying on Tisha B'Av* (1920's).**

Courtesy of the Museum Minkowski, Fundacion IWO, Buenos Aires.

When thinking about our *Eikha* reading and other Women's *Tefilla* gatherings, I am reminded of the memorable words of a friend who recently passed away: "We are all uttering the same words; each in our own voice."[1] However, when we utter them together in a group of like-minded women, the words have a special meaning and the voices a special sound, of unity, beauty, and mourning.

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[1] Rifka Rosenwein, Life in the Present Tense; Reflections on Family and Faith, Ben Yehuda Press, 2007.

Quilt in Memory of Unborn Child, Andi Arnovitz, Jerusalem, 2005.

In the artist's words:
I did this piece after one of my daughter's tutors, Yael Sorek, was murdered by terrorists two weeks before she was due to give birth. The quilt is made up of a sonogram of an infant, printed onto silk organza, surrounded by pages out of a book of *tehillim*, printed onto little pages of silk. Everything is sewn with threads of baby colors. Women often make baby blankets in exciting expectation of coming life, to keep the future child warm and comfortable, but here I was sewing something for a child who would never be born, out of something that was more shroud-like, that would never keep someone warm. The quilt expressed my own personal sense of loss, but at the same time, the many pages of psalms, assembled and sewn in layers around the image of the child, expressed the communal sense of loss over this single unborn child.

Reading of Eikha

...continued from page 30

kavod hatzibur can be used to exclude a mixed reading of *Eikha*, but for congregations for which this is not seen as a barrier, a mixed reading of *Eikha* would be acceptable. Although the Vilna Gaon advocated reading from a parchment scroll with a *berakha*, (which is what Tractate *Sofrim* records), usually it is read from a printed text without a *berakha*.

Sir David Wilkie, *Hebrew Women Reading the Scripture at Jerusalem*, Lithograph, London, 1843.

Moldovan Family Collection, from the exhibition The Sephardic Journey 1492-1992, Yeshiva University Museum.

AN OLD TALE

The woman grieving by the road was given this consolation. Go to every house that has known no sorrow and plead for flour. If from that flour you bake a cake before night comes, the one you mourn will be returned.

She ran from house to house, but each refused her. One door, then another, closed to her. The sky whitened and grew dark, an empty bowl.

"Alas," the woman cried, "I am undone. Not one would help me bring my lost one home."

Then she felt a hand upon her head. "My child," a voice said.

She saw the compassionate face and understood: No house is immune from sorrow, and no woman from a time of solitude.

Nessa Rapoport

Mourning and Consolation

Although Tisha B'Av is a day of great mourning, tradition nevertheless associated with it an element of consolation. There is embedded in the destruction the hope of future redemption. A famous story in Tractate *Makkot* (24b) tells of Rabbi Akiva laughing as he walked through the ruins of Jerusalem while his friends were all weeping bitterly. He explained his laughter by saying that having seen how God had fulfilled His promise of destruction, he knew He would fulfill His promise of rebuilding. Thus Akiva had confidence that Jerusalem would be rebuilt.

The idea that Tisha B'Av itself contains elements of future redemption explains the tradition that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av. Similarly before Tisha B'Av, we read three *haftorot* dealing with destruction and immediately after Tisha B'Av, beginning with Shabbat Nahamu, the Shabbat of Consolation, we read seven special *haftorot* dealing with consolation.

The First Biblical Figure to be Mourned

And the life of Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years; these were the years of Sarah's life...And Abrahan proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.
Bereshit, 23:2

The death of Sarah is the occasion for the first instance in the *Tanakh* of a person being mourned. She is also the only one of the Matriarchs whose age at her death is recorded.

How Do We Remember?
A Personal Reflection on the Loss of the Temple

By Malka Adatto

As I sit down to write this article, we are in the midst of a unique time period in the Jewish calendar. A few short weeks ago, on Pesach, we celebrated the birth of our nation by recalling the period of enslavement and the ensuing salvation by God. We retold the story of a people so entrenched in Egyptian culture and society that only through a series of miraculous events could they be spared. We drank four cups of wine corresponding to the four stages of salvation, we ate the *maror* to recall the bitterness of our lives in Egypt, and we consumed matza to commemorate the food that our ancestors ate on the night they were saved 3,000 years ago. All of this was done with one goal in mind: remember the miracles and never forget.

Just a few days after we put away all of our Pesach dishes, we experienced Yom Hashoah. Each year we recall the stories of our parents, our grandparents, our extended families, and the families of friends who were annihilated simply because they were Jewish. I remember being in grade school when each year we listened to a different survivor tell us his or her story. Each story ended with one message: remember the persecution and tragedy and never forget.

Then comes Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzma'ut, two days that stand in contrast to one another. The former acknowledges all the men and women who sacrificed their lives for the State of Israel; the latter celebrates the place that each and every Jew calls home. These days embody one theme: remember the sacrifices made and the celebration of independence and never forget.

The experience of the *seder* makes it quite difficult to forget the miracles of the Exodus; the horrible memories of many of our grandparents in Germany and elsewhere in Europe serve as constant reminders of the Holocaust; and the stories of our friends who continue to serve in defense of Israel compel us to remember our homeland. To forget the recent events at Merkaz HaRav where eight students' lives were cut short as they sat and learned late one evening would be unthinkable. And to consider a Jewish people without Israel is inconceivable.

But as we begin the Three Weeks dedicated to remembering what life was like when we had a *Beit Hamikdash*, a temple in Jerusalem, I don't know how to remember and not to forget. I am faced with a difficult task of taking an abstract concept and making it practical, of bringing the intangible into the realm of reality. We are told to take these weeks and mourn, but how do we mourn something that we have no memory of, something that seems so distant and alien?

The problem is only strengthened as we acknowledge the state of Jews in the Diaspora. We are thriving. Day schools and supplementary schools have increasing enrollment, synagogues serve as icons of religious expression and community stability, and summer camps now comprise one of the fastest growing programs across all denominations of Judaism. But as we celebrate these successes, we face an even greater challenge in mourning the loss of the Temple. We have done such a great job growing that on Tisha B'Av we have trouble reliving the pain and anguish that accompanied the destruction of the Temple because we are so far removed from that painful reality.

The *Beit Hamikdash* was an architectural wonder with an elaborate design demanding recognition of its significance. When I try to understand the magnitude of its destruction, I seek the familiar and the common. I turn to September 11, the day when the international financial headquarters were attacked. But I realize that this is not the most appropriate analogy, for the *Beit Hamikdash* clearly was not merely a structure that represented financial stability and independence. So I begin to imagine what it would have been like if the World Trade Center, the White House, the Capitol, Congress, the Senate, the Pentagon, and every religious institution in America were all destroyed. It is only in that very moment, when I reflect on the significance of each of these buildings together, that I can begin to comprehend what the prophets were attempting to convey in their writings about the devastation that followed the loss of the Temple.

My understanding was deepened recently when I attended a rally outside the home of a recalcitrant husband who refused to give his wife a *get*. Most of the participants were college-aged men and women. I recognized many of the

David Roberts and Louis Hague.
***Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans* (detail), London, 1850.**

Collection of Yeshiva University Museum. Gift of Michael Jesselson.

women from the *Beit Midrash* at Stern College. One came over to me with a look of pain and disgust. Her eyes were filling with tears; her head was beginning to fall forward. As she approached me, she began to speak in a voice that was barely audible. So I leaned in closer to hear her say, "How can I be a part of a religion that allows men to treat their wives like this?"

In that moment I could only embrace her and hope that she makes it through this tough time in her relationship to Judaism. But as I got on the subway to go back to my apartment, I continued to be haunted by the woman's pain. Her

> "The *Beit Hamikdash*… embodied the progression and evolution of halakha."

struggle resonated with me. I too struggle with aspects of Judaism that seem so removed from our lives today. As a Modern Orthodox woman, I pride myself on balancing my Judaism with secular culture, reaping the benefits of both while remaining committed to halakha. So when I see individuals using the Jewish legal system in an abusive way, I question how a system that I have grown to love and respect could allow such atrocities to occur.

And it is only in that moment that I can truly grasp the loss of the *Beit Hamikdash*. The *Beit Hamikdash* was not only a building that represented the financial, socioeconomic, military, and religious capital of our nation; it also embodied the progression and evolution of halakha. It is by no means a coincidence that the Sanhedrin sat to adjudicate cases in the chambers of the *Beit Hamikdash*. It is not without design that the Temple, which contains the ability to achieve a relationship with God, is also the epicenter of the Jewish legal system. The destruction of the physical structure of the Temple brought about the end of an era that allowed for an organic and natural flow of Jewish life in general, and of halakha in particular.

So, this year as I enter the period of mourning the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, all that I will need to enable me to understand the magnitude of its loss is the name of one *agunah*, for that one name will remind me of the national tragedy that we suffer in our post-*Beit Hamikdash* era. And at that moment the message of Tisha B'Av is clear: remember and never forget. For if I forget, then I lose my ability to hope that, along with the rebuilding of the third Beit *Hamikdash*, will come change.

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Watch Over You *...continued from page 14*

morgue was located. It was not difficult to find a fellow student just after 9/11 willing to volunteer her time to perform this very special *mitzva*. In fact, the Red Cross had been turning people away because there were too many volunteers, and all the girls who had gone to hospitals to help on the day of the attacks found that there were few survivors who needed medical attention. People had either made it out safely, or they had not made it out at all.

What I did not know when I agreed to help my friend was anything about the nature of the *mitzva* of *shmira* or the reason for it. I quickly learned that our tradition teaches that a body is to be treated with the utmost respect and dignity in life and especially in death. The soul remains near the body and is aware of what transpires nearby. *Tehillim* comfort the soul, and a person's physical presence protects the body from posthumous harm. However, in this case, we would not be able to see the bodies at all, but rather only glimpse them coming out of an ambulance and being wheeled to the morgue or to large refrigeration trucks. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein says that once the body is seen to be out of physical harm, it is sufficient to sit *shmira* on the same premises. As to whether or not a woman can sit *shmira* for a man or a man for a woman, exceptions were made in this case—because the bodies were mostly unidentifiable by gender—and because, since it took months to finish the Ground Zero cleaning process, there were hundreds of shifts to fill.

For almost eight months, hundreds of young men and women sat in that temporary morgue saying *Tehillim*. I wonder if, like me, they felt nervous every single time they walked into the morgue. Or if they shared these feelings—of getting lost in their own *Tehillim*, of warmth and caring from the firefighters and police officers who came to "keep their lost friends company," or of connectedness with those sojourning souls. I remember that, each time my shift ended and I walked back onto the city streets, it took me a while to reconnect with the physicality of the world around me. Even now, New York is filled with the memory of souls. And as for me, I am eternally grateful to the Almighty that I had the opportunity to help fix some of the world's injustices—at least for these victims.

Jessica Russak-Hoffman *currently lives in Seattle and is writing her first novel about 9/11. In 2001 she was a senior at Stern College for Women, where she received her BA in English Literature.*

CRY

Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, sister. Blood of my blood, born of my earliest thought. Cry of my cry,
how do we find ourselves sitting on these low chairs?
Where is the one who greeted us with still-wet hands?
The dishes are put away, the day is done. And all the laughter in this house is gone.

Nessa Rapoport

Prohibition

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thirteenth-century authority from Provence, the Meiri, who stated in *Magen Avot*, Inyan 20 (ed. R.Y. Cohen, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 215):

> *A custom without origin or reason is no custom, halakhically speaking, unless there is [involved therein] some semblance of a* mitzva, *or moral teaching, or* gemilut hesed *or some concern for [the avoidance] of some prohibition or [the prevention of some] unethical act or moral or religious failing. [In these cases, the custom, even if it has no valid origin, should be maintained.] In any case, any ancient custom should be retained and maintained, even a leniency, so long as there is no* issur.

Because this custom of abstaining from meat and wine does make us more fully aware of the sad nature of the Nine Days and the Three Weeks, it surely plays a positive role in our remembering the tragedies with which the period is associated. Hence, it should be viewed in a positive light regardless of the fact that the customs originated in errors of transmission or misunderstandings.

* * * * * * * *

On a personal note, I have been a vegetarian for close to sixty years and am also a teetotaler. So, in effect, I abstain from meat and wine the entire year. For me, then, the element of mourning during the period expresses itself primarily in the fact that I do not listen to music—which I find very difficult—and do not make new purchases. In this way, I feel I am preserving the spirit of the custom aimed at giving this period a special somber atmosphere and a time for contemplation.

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Hevra Kadisha

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the *hevra* signaled to my cousin Linda not to accompany her three brothers to the gravesite. Linda had been the caregiver for her mother during the last few months of her life and had traveled 9,000 miles to bury her, only to be halted at a point without sight lines to the grave. A few female cousins disregarded the *hevra*'s instruction and walked on without being stopped, but Linda did not want "to make a fuss" and had waited there.

So, for an instant, it crossed my mind even in the midst of my sorrow that it was because I was a woman that the rabbi held up a cautionary hand and said, "We don't do that," as we stood together in that little room before the burial. When I first saw JJ, I touched the top of his shoulder, wanting to have some physical contact with this child whom I was not able to hold in the hospital before his life slipped away. The rabbi quickly jumped in and said, "We don't do that after *tahara*." I stepped back, but could not help but wonder at the moment whether he cautioned me because I was a woman. Then he left us alone in the room, which I appreciated as a measure of sensitivity. Was he actually saying, "Be guided by your own emotions?" Not knowing whether it was a general halakha applicable to everyone, a specific law or ultra-Orthodox custom applying only to females, or simply his personal view, I would not violate his admonition. Moreover, another part of me said that perhaps this restraint was fitting. Although I desperately wanted to give JJ one last hug and still long for that moment, I know that it would have been hard for every family member to witness each other do so. Still, it should never have entered my mind that possibly the rabbi was suggesting that a woman's touch would render this pure soul impure. Much later, I couldn't help but wonder: would the *hevra* rabbi have similarly checked my husband had he reached out to touch his son? (I've since learned that even after *tahara,* a body is still *tamei* [a status of ritual impurity], and touching it does nothing to affect this status).

These last comments should in no way obscure the central truths about the *hevra kadisha*'s role and my personal gratitude for this last act of love for my child. The work of the *hevra kadisha* is considered the ultimate exemplar of *hesed* or loving-kindness; it is *hesed shel emet*, an act that is utterly selfless because the recipient, the dead, can never repay it.

Yet, there may be a deeper meaning to the phrase "*hesed shel emet*," a loving-kindness that is strong enough to overcome *emet*, the stark truth. The Song of Songs teaches us, "עזה כמות אהבה" "Love is as strong as death" (8:6). Indeed it is stronger than death because it persists after death. The *hesed* of the *hevra* is so strong that it takes the truth—that death is so fierce, so cruel, so final that it rips away the life and the vitality of the living person—and overcomes this truth, covering the harsh reality of death with a mantle of purity, respect, and dignity. Neither the loving family nor the buried dead can ever repay this *hesed*.

Blu Greenberg *is Founding President of JOFA.*

Burial Shrouds or *Takhrihim*

Women have always been responsible for preparing the *takhrihim*, the simple white linen shrouds in which the dead are buried. The practice of *takhrihim* was instituted by Rabbi Gamliel (*Mo'ed Katan 27b*) in Talmudic times so that rich and poor would be buried the same way. According to the Zohar, they correspond to the *haluka d'rabana*, the robe of the sages, woven out of a person's good deeds fulfilled when alive. Now most are commercially produced, but traditionally they were sewn by hand without hems and with thread that has no knots to signify impermanence. The garments have no pockets to underline that a person takes no worldly goods to the grave. There is one custom, probably based on kabbalistic reasons, that the women who sew *takhrihim* should be post menopause, but we also know of many communities in Germany and elsewhere in which young women would sew their own shrouds, either when they got married as part of their trousseau, or else during pregnancy.

Emerging Voices

We welcome future submissions from all high school students. Please contact www.jofa.org.

התקווה בת שנות אלפיים—Our Hope of 2000 Years

By Ronni Kehat

In most Israeli schools, both religious and non-religious, it is a tradition to fly to Poland during senior year or in the summer before senior year to explore the remnants of the Holocaust. I went on such a trip last summer.

Our first day was a pretty horrific way to start the trip. We visited Majdanek, one of the infamous extermination camps. One of my most memorable moments that day was standing around a concrete table in a room adjoining the crematoria. Our guide explained that, on that table, Nazi "doctors" had performed vile experiments on pregnant women. He then asked us to sing *Eshet Hayyil*, to honor all those Jewish mothers who were tortured and then murdered heartlessly. We sang, a *tikkun* (rectification) for the degrading manner in which those women were treated, the words echoing off the damp walls.

After spending the afternoon in gas chambers and crematoria, we drove to the old yeshiva in Lublin.

There, we suddenly found ourselves dancing and singing Hebrew songs at the top of our lungs. I was shocked at the sheer joy of life that erupted in that room after such a despairing day. We had traveled from a place that lay heavy with the silence of death, to a center for *limmud Torah,* which was destroyed by the Nazis in 1940. And yet, standing in the *Beit Midrash*, we did not have to dig deeply to find a drop of happiness inside ourselves; rather, the joy burst from us with an intensity that threatened to knock the walls down.

A similar thing happened on Friday. Returning to the hotel from Auschwitz-Birkenau—too close to Shabbat to shower and still make it to shul on time—we opted to have our own *davening* in the hotel's courtyard. Our *tefilla* was one of the most moving I've ever heard. Our *kabbalat Shabbat* that evening must have set the angels crying, for after three beautiful summery days, that night the heavens tore open in a downpour.

The days took on a pattern: throughout the day we would drive from place to place, comforting each other and mourning the terrible loss we were witnessing for the first time in our lives. At night, we would sing songs, joke, and generally just experience joy in being alive.

I spent a lot of time thinking. While most girls fell apart at the death camps, I, along with a few others, remained dry-eyed. I hurt for the destruction we saw, but I did not cry.

One late night, on the way back to our hotel, we watched a short documentary on the bus. During Israel's military memorial ceremony for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, three Israeli F-15 planes made an aerial demonstration over the death camp, a salute to the six million who perished. Among the six pilots, some were children of Holocaust survivors.

Watching that film, I broke down. The tears that had not come at the death pits in a forest came at the sight of the little blue *magen davids* painted on the tails of those F-15's.

Following my trip to Poland, *Yom ha-Sho'ah* this year was a different experience. I had a new perspective on things said at my school's memorial ceremony. When our principal, Shira Breuer, got up to speak, she left us with food for thought: "Okay," she said, "so somebody decided that today is *Yom ha-Sho'ah*, a national day for mourning. But how do you personally mourn for those six million on the remaining days of the year?"

The little blue *magen davids* came into my mind again, and I had my answer right away – I mourn the six million only one day a year. And on the remaining 364 days? I say "*Barukh ata…She'asani Yisrael"* in the morning blessings—"Blessed are You…….who made me a descendant of Israel."

When losing a loved one, people left behind often tend to feel guilty and saddened by everything they didn't get a chance to do with the departed. My great-aunt told me recently how awful she had felt when her mother, my great-grandmother, passed away nine years ago. "I was so upset that I would never get to do the *mitzva* of *Kibbud Horim,* of honoring my parents, ever again," she remembered. "Then my cousin said to me, 'Everything you do honors your mother.' And she was right."

That, in my mind, makes all the difference. One day a year, Jews all over the world mourn as one, focusing on the past. The rest of the year, the focus is on the present. In Israel, we hang Israeli flags from our windows. We send representatives to the Olympics. We fly our very own Israeli planes over Auschwitz. By living proudly, by strengthening our Jewish identity, we are honoring those whose freedom to do so got taken away.

ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאם ה'
ושבו בנים לגבולם.

"And there is hope for thy future," says the Lord, "that thy children shall return to their own border."
(Jeremiah 31:17)

God promises the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah that one day there will be an end to their exile, that they will overcome their crisis, their struggles and sorrow, and Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

I once read an interpretation of this *pasuk* that explained, "And there is hope" – where there is yet hope, there is strength enough to move on and rebuild. A person who is in constant mourning has lost hope.

Ronni Kehat *is a senior at Pelech Religious Experimental School for Girls in Jerusalem. Next year she will attend* Mekhinat Tzahali, *a year-long program integrating Jewish studies and army preparation before starting her army service.*

Women, Funerals, and Cemeteries

...continued from page 3

> *with no decorum or restraint whatsoever, and they attend with their usual wild and shameful dress. They scream and shriek enough to deafen the ears, and they let no one hear the speech or the eulogy. They stage fainting in all sorts of poses, and "merciful" men run to "save"[8] them, give them a hug, and stand them on their feet, as if to keep them from toppling and—Heaven forbid! —falling to the ground... If one has the nerve to shush them, they fall upon him as if respect for the dead were unimportant to him.*

Rabbi Kapih here makes no mention of the Talmudic or Kabbalistic fears of death. He seems to be reinterpreting the older custom to suit his religious and social concerns, though there is no textual evidence that concerns about sexuality or decorum ever led to the exclusion of women from cemetery services in the past.

Men should be careful not to mix with the women or look at them (onus on the men).

An example is Rabbi Joseph Yuzpa Hahn Neurlingen (1570-1637), in his *Yosef Ometz* (p. 327),[9]

> *It is very important to separate from the women when they are going to and from the dead… and I heard that in Worms the men are accustomed to turn their faces to the wall when the women pass.*

Women can attend funerals but should be careful not to mix with the men (onus on the women).

An example is Rabbi Aaron Berechiah of Modena (d. 1639) in his *Ma'avar Yabok,* (*Siftei Ranenot* 10),[10]

> *It was announced with much force that women should not be seen with the men when they are going to the cemetery, and certainly not when they are returning.… It was told to me from a reliable person that the custom that has spread throughtout all of Israel and Babylon and the entire Eastern Empire, that first the men go, and attendents stand there who are in charge of separating out the women, so that they do not begin to go until all the men have passed. After the funeral the women remain about a quarter of an hour until the men have all left, and they wail over the deceased.*

Conclusion

Rabbi Salem Isaac ha-Levi (Israel, d. 1973) in his responsa *Divrei Hakhamim* (*Yore De'ah*. 37), sums up the situation well: "What we learn is that whether women participate in the procession is a matter of custom, when and where. It seems that there is no prohibition."

As we have seen, there is no early textual support for banning women from funerals either in the Talmud or the Zohar. The first authority to invoke this rule seems to have been Rabbi Joseph Karo. Some authorities, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic, followed him, and some did not, and the customs across the Jewish world varied. However, it is clear that the original custom in Talmudic and early medieval times was that women were an integral part of the burial process. Therefore, no woman should feel that the halakha forbids her from attending funerals, and women in our community should be clearly informed of this, especially when the funeral is in Israel and she might be subject to pressure from representatives of communities who practice differently.

Rabbi Zev Farber is the founder and director of Aitzim (Atlanta Institute of Torah and Zionism). He studied at Yeshiva Bnei Torah and then Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, where he received *semikha*. He has an MA in Jewish History from the Hebrew University. He is currently studying for *dayanut* with Rabbi Michael Broyde of the Beit Din of America, and is a doctoral candidate in Jewish Studies at Emory University.

1 For a slightly different analysis of the subject, see chapter 5 of Rabbi David Golinkin's, *The Status of Women in Jewish Law* (Schechter Institute, 2001).

2 Later R. Simeon adds: "[The Angel of Death] is not found when there are less than seven or less than ten women. In public, he is found among seven and seeks a judgment; among ten he seeks to kill."

3 On this key point, it seems that Rabbi Golinkin differs, as he says (*op cit.*, p.116) that according to the Zohar, the women should not look at the men.

4 Here follows an abridged version of the above quote from the Zohar.

5 Other examples are the Vilna Gaon in a letter to his family; Rabbi Samuel Vozner of Bnei B'rak (b. 1914) in his responsa *Shevet ha-Levi* (2:212); the custom of Yemen, mentioned by Rabbi Salem Isaac ha-Levi (Israel) in his responsa *Divrei Hakhamim* (Y.D. 37) and by Rabbi Joseph Kapih in his *Collected Writings* (p. 922), as well as the custom of Pressburg, mentioned by Rabbi Akiva Sofer in a letter to Rabbi Hanina Yom Tov Lippa Deutsch of Cleveland (*Taharat Yom Tov*, vol. 6, p. 125). See also the comment by Rabbi Samuel Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Safed (http://www.kipa.co.il/ask/show/26481), who brings multiple secondary reasons to support this, as well as the Artscroll book, *Mourning in Halacha*, by Rabbi Chaim Binyamin Goldberg (1991, 10:10, p. 130), which quotes no reasons at all in the main text.

6 The issue of immodesty at funerals is dealt with by Rabbi Deutsch in the context of mixed seating.

7 Another example, can be found in the *Otzar kol Minhagei Yeshurun*, by Rabbi Abraham Hirshovitz of Pittsburgh (1918, p. 73c).

8 Quotation marks in the original.

9 Other examples are Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) in his *Shulhan Arukh* (*Hoshen Mishpat,* Laws of Self-Protection, #10), and Rabbi Jacob ben Samuel of Zausmer, in his responsa *Beit Ya'akov* (72), R. Moses Hagiz in his work *Leket ha-Kemah* (*Yoreh De'ah*. p. 249), and R. Tzvi Hirsch ben Azriel of Lublin in his glosses on the *Shulhan Arukh*, *Beit Lehem Yehuda*. Rabbi Jacob comments, "It is possible that according to the aforementioned passage in the Zohar that there is only danger from someone who died naturally, because then it was caused by the Angel of Death… but people who are killed did not die by the hand of the Angel of Death."

10 Another example is Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried (Hungary 1804–1886), in his *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (198:10).

Dignity in the Face of the Holocaust

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engraved with her German name, Hebrew name, birth date, and date of death. When I got there and saw how all the other graves were marked only with a single name or "Unknown," I had the engraver put her given name "Dora Ebbe" on it, nothing else. I didn't want her to be different from all the others.

Following in her mother's footsteps, Mrs. Blumner became involved in the Queens *hevra kadisha* when she came to the United States. She said, "The first few *taharot* I did brought back painful memories of the deaths of my mother and my sister. Most of all when I started, I felt I had done such a poor and incomplete job with my sister. I felt so guilty."

When she spoke to the rabbi who was head of her *hevra*, he told her, "You have done all you knew and understood at the time and I'm sure *Hashem* has forgiven you. You need now to carry on your good deeds."

* * * * * * * *

When I think of all these women did, how they struggled to care for the dead amid terror and tragedy and how they kept their faith in the importance of this *mitzva*, I am awed and inspired.

I myself joined a *hevra kadisha* after my father died in 1985. Becoming a *hevra* member radically changed my life. It is now one of the pivotal identities that define who I am: it has been added to my list of significant life roles—wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, social worker, writer, and friend. Participating in the egalitarian customs and ceremonies of burying the dead reaffirms an important personal tenet I learned from my father, a lifelong champion for equality and justice. It has also helped bring my own mortality into sharper focus. On a communal and spiritual level, I have come to consider my work with the *hevra* as the most profound expression of my Judaism. These services are rooted in our history and therefore link *hevra* members to past generations of Jews over the world. One of the links is to the Jews who died in the Holocaust and the courageous people who sacrificed to care for them.

Rochel U. Berman is the author of *Dignity Beyond Death*, which won the Koret International Jewish Book Award. She is the former Executive Director of the American Society for Yad Vashem. This essay is adapted from the book.

[1] *Takhrihim macher* is the term in Yiddish for a person who makes burial shrouds.

[2] "The custom of placing small wooden sticks in the hands of the departed relates to facilitating their rising from the grave during the Resurrection." Rabbi Mosha Epstein, *Tahara Manual of Practices* (Bridgeport, CT, 1995), p. 24.

The Laments of Women

Detail of illustration of Plague of First Born, Hispano-Moresque Haggadah, Castile, late 13th or early 14th century, British Library Or 2737, fol.82v.
With permission of British Library Board, (All Rights Reserved)

The illustration shows two symmetrically placed groups, each including a man lying dead on a bed and two kerchiefed, keening women mourning them.

As is clear from Professor Bar-Ilan's article in this issue (p. 24), women served as the *mekonnenot*, the traditional public mourners and lamenters in biblical times, and this continued in the rabbinic period.

The Mishna in various places starts from the assumption that women are the *mekonnenot*. In *Ketubot* (4:4), Rabbi Judah is cited as stating that the funeral of even the poorest person should include at least two flutes and a wailing woman. In *Mo'ed Katan*, the Mishna discusses the limitations placed on the female mourners during *Hol Hamo'ed* and other days in the calendar.

The women may sing dirges during Hol Ham'oed but may not clap their hands. R. Ishmael says: They that are near to the bier may clap their hands. On Rosh Hodesh, Hanukah and Purim they may sing lamentations and clap their hands; but during none of these times may they wail. After the corpse has been buried they may not sing lamentations or clap their hands. What is a lamentation? When all sing together. And a wailing? When one begins by herself and all respond after her.

Mo'ed Katan 3.8-9.

The *gemara* of the same tractate includes a list of eight short enigmatic laments in Aramaic; one is anonymous but the other seven are attributed to the women of Shoken Zeb in Babylonia (*Mo'ed Katan 28b*).

Note: For further material on this topic, see Meir Bar-Ilan, Chapter 3, The Keening Woman in *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*, Atlanta, Georgia. Scholars Press, 1998.

Book Corner

Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation

By Tova Hartman
Brandeis Series on Jewish Women
Brandeis University Press 2007
$29.95 (hardcover) $19.95 (paperback)

In this book, which won the Jewish Book Council Award for Women's Studies in 2007, Tova Hartman, well known to JOFA conference attendees, brings tradition and feminism into dialogue with one another. With intellectual clarity, Hartman draws on her own life, her experience as an academic and psychologist, and Jewish scholarship, to discover "creative tensions" that she believes can lead to unexpected connections beyond ostensibly insurmountable contradictions. She does not avoid hard questions but looks for new models for a healthy relationship between feminism and traditional Judaism. Particularly fascinating is her detailed discussion of how, after being discouraged by not being able to make her own synagogue more inclusive of women, she and Elie Holzer founded Shira Hadasha in Jerusalem, a "partnership *minyan*" which aims at extending the range of religious, spiritual, and emotional possibilities to both men and women. This is an engaging book, both scholarly and deeply personal, by an individual with the ability both to make things happen, and to reflect on her practices and beliefs in an honest and constructive way.

Moses' Women

By Shera Aranoff Tuchman and Sandra E. Rapoport
KTAV 2008 $35

Following their book on *Sefer Bereshit*, "The Passion of the Matriarchs" (2004), the authors focus on the Women of the Exodus, including Yocheved, Miriam, Batya the daughter of Pharaoh, and Zipporah. The book uses talmudic and midrashic sources and a vast range of traditional commentators to bring these women to life. The authors make accessible to readers many valuable commentaries, not previously translated into English, including the Bekhor Shor, the Alsheikh and Hizkuni. The original Hebrew and Aramaic of many of the passages quoted is provided at the back of the volume. The book also draws on the writings of modern scholars such as Rav Soloveitchik, Nehama Leibowitz, Rav Adin Steinsaltz, Aviva Zornberg and Rabbi Benjamin Lau. Included is an intriguing section on the mysterious Kushite woman in the Book of Numbers. The excitement and fascination that the authors feel as they work together with commentators of past and present to unravel the puzzles in the biblical text are contagious and make this book an important addition to Orthodox women's biblical scholarship.

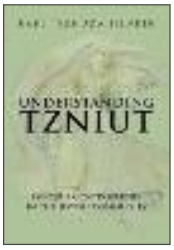
The Torah: A Women's Commentary

Published by Women of Reform Judaism,
URJ Press, 2008 $75.00

This Hebrew and English Bible features commentaries by Jewish women of all denominations. For the Orthodox reader there is a great deal of stimulating and accessible commentary with new insights. It will serve as an introduction to the work of Jewish women scholars outside the Orthodox world. Many years in preparation, this scholarly and extremely well researched volume focuses on how women's experiences can shed light on the text of the Torah, as well as providing excellent perspectives on all aspects of the text. Four separate commentaries on each *parasha* highlight different topics. For each *parasha,* the fourth commentary links the Torah portion with contemporary issues. Following each *parasha* are creative responses in the form of well-chosen poems, prose poems and modern *midrash*. The commentaries are wide-ranging, but all have a focus on texts that are relevant to women's lives and on the women of the Torah.

Undertanding *Tzniut*: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community

By Rabbi Yehuda Henkin
URIM Publications, 2008 $21.95



Tzniut, incorporating Jewish standards of modesty in behavior and in dress, is a much debated topic. The major focus of this book is a discussion of Jewish legal sources dealing with women's dress codes and the mingling of the sexes, and an examination of how these have been implemented by contemporary halakhic authorities. Rabbi Henkin, a leading halakhic scholar and *posek*, considers that many in the religious community are obsessively preoccupied with details of permitted lengths and materials of clothes. In his view, this leads to the danger of "losing sight of the real basics of modesty-not to mention being so concerned about not thinking about women that one can think of nothing else". With a firm conviction in the importance of women's Torah learning, he dismisses the view that just as a man has the study of Torah, a woman has the practice of *tzniut*. One of his central arguments for possible leniencies in the area of *tzniut* is what he terms 'habituation'. In cultures and communities where men and women mingle freely, for example, certain behavior no longer need be seen as provocative. He makes clear that this is not an argument for permitting activities with explicit or implicit sexual content. One need not agree with everything Rabbi Henkin says to appreciate his deep Torah scholarship, intellectual honesty and concern for *Klal Yisrael.*

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Mission Statement of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

The Alliance's mission is to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for women within the framework of halakha. We advocate meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning, and Jewish communal organizations to the full extent possible within halakha. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews.

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