

Preparation and Consolation



A Jewish Guide to the End of Life
Second Edition

Congregation 
Rodeph Sholom
Established 1842

The logo for Congregation Rodeph Sholom features a stylized blue and white building with a dome and a central arched entrance, set against a white background.

This book is dedicated in loving memory of
Peter James Kaplan
by the Kaplan Family

His life taught us about family, friends, and the ability to connect to others.
His illness inspired us to face the unimaginable with courage and spirit.
His death reminds us of the power of love that can never die.

שימני כחותם על לבך
כחותם על זרועך
כי עזה כמות אהבה



מים רבים לא יוכלו
לכבות את האהבה
וגהרות לא ישטפוה

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm
For love is stronger than death
Great floods cannot quench love, nor rivers drown it.
(Song of Songs 8:6-7)

Acknowledgments

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Beginning in mid-2005, a small group journeyed together on a sacred path preparing this booklet over an eighteen month period. Rabbi Matthew Gewirtz, Cantor Jennifer Frost, and Director of Community Engagement Rabbi Leora Kaye poured themselves into this effort, generously and passionately sharing spiritual insights gleaned from their experiences accompanying those confronting loss. Sally Kaplan, Stephanie Lasher, and Marilyn Druck devoted untold hours conceptualizing and writing this booklet, drawing on the wisdom of their life lessons, in the hope of making the path easier for others as they walk through the valley. Ruth Kobrin, Rabbi Lori Koffman, Randye Retkin, Peter Strauss, Pinchas Berger, and Rabbi Simkha Weintraub lent their invaluable expertise to help shape content in critical areas. Rabbi Andrea Myers edited this booklet with exquisite sensitivity and made exceptional original contributions.

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Preparation and Consolation: A Jewish Guide to the End of Life

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Introduction



The time of death and dying can be one of disorientation, pain, and sadness. Little wonder, then, that although death is a natural part of the life cycle, most of us have difficulty discussing it. Yet our sages teach us that dealing with death can lead to understanding the deepest essence of life; engaging with such sacred matters can give us a sense of purpose that enriches our days. This booklet has been prepared to help each of us become more comfortable thinking and talking about death, and more knowledgeable about the life-affirming wisdom of our Jewish tradition.

The clergy and the entire Rodeph Sholom family are here to provide you with support. As a caring community, we have a sacred responsibility to help you, from the moment illness strikes a loved one through the entire period of bereavement and healing, or as you consider your own mortality.

Whether your concerns are of an emotional, practical, spiritual or theological nature, resources are available to you: conversations with the clergy; adult education classes; programs run by the Caring Community; and the services of our social worker. We offer various types of support groups and have a resource center where you can find, both on the Rodeph Sholom website and within the synagogue building, tools that will help you on this journey.

Rabbi Amy Eilberg wrote: “Death can be a teacher about the fragility of life and its beauty, about the deep importance of loved ones and of treasured values, about the ways in which life gives us extraordinary gifts ... death is a teacher about God’s presence in the world, about human goodness and compassion and love. Death is a teacher about courage and hope and faith, about believing in that which we cannot see, about moving through the valley of the shadow, until light is visible again.”

Indeed, this booklet is not about bringing us down, but about lifting us up. We hope it will serve as a guide to making all of your living days precious and more meaningful.

Please read these pages and know that we are here to continue the conversation. May we as a community move through both the happy times and the sad, from strength to strength.

Rabbi Robert N. Levine, D.D., Senior Rabbi
Rabbi Sari R. Laufer, Associate Rabbi
Rabbi Benjamin Spratt, Associate Rabbi
Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer, Assistant Rabbi
Cantor Rebecca Garfein, Senior Cantor
Cantor Shayna De Lowe, Associate Cantor

Congregation Rodeph Sholom
New York City
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Resources of the Rodeph Sholom Community

כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה

All Israel are responsible for one another.

(Babylonian Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a)

Clergy

When the clergy at Congregation Rodeph Sholom learn that a congregant is grappling with loss, illness, or crisis, they respond as quickly as possible. The clergy can visit with the family or congregant in the hospital or care facility where the congregant is being treated, at the synagogue, or in the home. Additionally, the clergy can help put much-needed systems in place to assist the family members, as the changes which accompany illness can affect the entire family's way of life. When appropriate, the clergy works in partnership with congregants to give support, perhaps by providing an introduction to someone in the congregation who has confronted a similar situation. More than anything, the role of the clergy is to offer care in a Jewish context, and to help people respond spiritually to crises that at first may seem only physical in nature.

Congregational Family

As Jews, we believe that community can be a source of holiness and healing. In that spirit, the *Bikur Cholim* program is an important facet of our caring community. *Bikur Cholim* means 'visiting the sick'. According to rabbinic tradition, when one visits a sick person, a portion of that person's illness is removed (Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 39b). The Rodeph Sholom *Bikur Cholim* program aims to reach out to those in our community who are ill, homebound, or in need of a listening ear. Support can include a phone call or a visit from a congregant, or assistance with getting to a doctor, coming to synagogue, buying groceries, or accomplishing other basic tasks.

The community also can provide spiritual support. As we look to our medical professionals to cure our physical ailments, we look to our community for healing. At services each Friday night and on Saturday morning, we say the *Mi Shebeirach* blessing, mentioning the names of those in our congregational family who are suffering. The blessing, which can be found in the back of this guide, asks that God grant healing. It also offers us the opportunity to gain strength from those who are a part of our extended family.

If you want the name of an ill friend or family member to be placed on the *Mi Shebeirach* list, please contact the clergy office at 646-454-3021. There is also an opportunity to offer names from the congregation just prior to the recitation of the prayer.

It is not always easy to reach out for help in times of need. We want very much to be present for you at such times and will do everything we can to respond.

Caring Community Committee

The Caring Community Committee seeks to enhance the sense of connection within our Rodeph Sholom family by providing opportunities to reach out to one another, especially in difficult situations. When we bring people closer together, we fulfill our sacred mission, all of us understanding that we are made in the image of God. Our aim is to find wholeness and meaning in our lives, both as individuals and as a community. If you would like to know more about the committee's programs, please contact them at:

caringcommunity@crsnyc.org

Social Worker

In addition to our clergy and Caring Community, Rodeph Sholom provides another avenue of support to congregants through the services of our social worker, who is affiliated with the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. The social worker is available to all our congregants, whatever their age or family situation. Here, congregants will find a safe place to express their feelings, discuss problems, seek solace, and learn of many relevant resources. The social worker can provide personal and strictly confidential consultations, and can also offer information and referral to the human services organizations that comprise both the public and private safety nets. To contact our social worker, please call 646-454-3180.

Through the Valley of the Shadow: Transition to Death and its Aftermath

Eternal God full of Mercy
grant perfect rest in Your sheltering presence to those who have entered eternity.
O God of Compassion, let them find refuge in the shadow of Your wings,
and let their souls be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.
God is their inheritance.
May they rest in peace, and let us say: Amen.

The following section is intended as a guide for mourners,
as they transition from the moments before death,
through the mourning process, and beyond.

The *Viddui*: Prayer and Forgiveness

Many are surprised to learn that Jewish tradition offers the opportunity for a Confessional Prayer, the *Viddui*, to provide a sense of comfort and peace as one approaches death. Many of us reach the moment of our death with some things left unfinished, and perhaps with guilt and regret. We may not have forgiven those who have hurt us. We may not have been forgiven by those we have hurt. The *Viddui* is an acknowledgment that death is near and that we may have left things unfinished.

The *Viddui* consists of the dying person asking for forgiveness for all the sins they have committed in their life. The person prays for health, but asks that if they do die, their death serve as atonement for their sins. See page 31 for the text of this prayer.

Alternative *Vidduis* have been written to reflect other emotions one might experience towards the end of life. One such *Viddui* may be found on page 32.

The prayer ends with a final recitation of the *Shema*. Some may choose only to say the *Shema* before death comes as an affirmation of their faith. The *Viddui* and the *Shema* may also be said by someone else, on behalf of the person who is dying.

Attending the Death

It is a sacred privilege to be present when someone passes from life into death. Beyond the *Viddui* and *Shema*, there is no prescribed practice for this moment. What is most important is to be respectful of the needs and desires of the dying person, as much as they can be ascertained, and not to force conversation, try to control the situation, or create distractions. The simple presence of another human being can be a great source of comfort. At the same time, it is thought that people who are dying sometimes wait for their loved one or caretaker to leave the room in order to die; they may even see it as an act of kindness. Although being present at the moment of death can be deeply significant, not being there does not diminish the relationship that you may have shared, nor does it mean that the deceased felt alone at the moment of their death.

There is a blessing that can be said when witnessing a death or hearing the news that someone has died. This blessing, which acknowledges God as the truthful Judge, can be found with the *Viddui* on page 31.

Organ Donation: The Gift of Life

Immediately before and after a person dies, certain decisions may be required. For instance, there may be questions concerning organ and tissue donation. Jewish tradition teaches that we are partners with God in continuing and sustaining the daily miracles of creation. Organ and tissue donation are an

extension of this partnership. The value of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) underlies this belief within our entire community, and generally transcends denominational affiliation.

Whom to Contact When a Loved One Dies

The first thing to do when a loved one dies is make sure you have emotional support. Call a family member, friend or someone else who can help you, particularly in the hours immediately following the death.

You can also call a funeral home and Congregation Rodeph Sholom. Funeral homes are open 24 hours a day. If you require the immediate assistance of our clergy after business hours, you can call our synagogue's 24-hour emergency phone number: 917-902-6103.

We encourage you to call the clergy soon after the death and let us know of your loss, so that the congregation can support you in your grief. The clergy will assist you in making the difficult decisions that need to be made, particularly with regard to the funeral home, the funeral service, and the transitional Jewish rituals and customs that can provide meaning and comfort following the death. If you desire Rodeph Sholom clergy to officiate at the service, please contact the synagogue before setting a time for the funeral.

For Those with Non-Jewish Family Members

In discussing mourning practices, issues may sometimes arise for Jews with non-Jewish family members. The general principle is that the choices of the deceased should be respected concerning burial, and that the needs of the mourner are primary from that point onward. For example, a mourner might attend a non-Jewish funeral service for a relative, then sit *shiva*. If you have any questions on these matters, please do not hesitate to contact our clergy.

Decisions Involving the Funeral Home

שמירה *Shemira*: the ritual watching of the body

Out of respect for the deceased, it is Jewish tradition that the body not be left alone between death and burial. If mourners choose this option, and if the funeral home permits, friends and community members can volunteer to sit with the coffin during *shemira* while reading appropriate psalms and prayers; the clergy can suggest reading materials. Alternatively, the funeral home can make arrangements for a *shomer* (guardian) to accompany the body during this time.

טהרה *Tahara*: the ritual preparation of the body for burial

The term *Chevra Kadisha*, which means ‘holy society’, refers to a group of Jews who take responsibility for performing the rituals associated with preparing the bodies of the deceased for burial. The main role of a *Chevra Kadisha* is to perform a *tahara*, the sacred ritual of washing the body of the person who has died. This includes clothing her or him in a white linen shroud, and placing the deceased in a simple wooden *aron* (casket), all the while reciting prayers from the Prophets, Psalms, and the Song of Songs. *Tahara* is meant to honor and respect the body of the deceased. The funeral home can arrange for a *tahara*. If you choose this option, be sure to discuss with the funeral home what it entails.

ארון *Aron* and **תכריכין** *Tachrichin*:

Traditionally, Jews are buried in a plain wooden casket (*aron*) and are dressed in linen shrouds (*tachrichin*). A polished wooden casket may also be chosen. The simplicity of these items reflects the belief that the deceased have no material needs, and that all are equal in death. Sometimes people choose to dress the deceased in an article of clothing which has special resonance.

Jewish Rituals After Death: Periods of Mourning, Prayers, and Spiritual Practices

Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hanina said: What does this text mean: 'You shall walk after Adonai your God' (Deut. 13:5)? Is it possible for a human being to walk after the Divine Presence?...[The meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Blessed Holy One...The Blessed Holy One comforted mourners, as it is written: 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son' (Gen. 25:11), so do you also comfort mourners. The Blessed Holy One buried the dead, as it is written: 'And God buried him [Moses] in the valley' (Deut. 34:6), so do you also bury the dead.

(Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 14a)

The Funeral

Attendance at a funeral is among the most compelling of the *mitzvot*. *Leviyat ha-met* (accompanying the dead) is considered a wholly unselfish act, and thus a great act of kindness.

Not only does attending the funeral enable us to honor the memory of the deceased, but it also acknowledges the loss as an event affecting the entire community, not just the bereaved. The funeral reminds us that the community, too, has been diminished by the death.

In Jewish tradition, the funeral occurs as close to the time of death as possible. However, there are various reasons for delaying the funeral and burial, including the allowance of travel by close relatives and others whose presence will honor the deceased.

Although there is a legal requirement for a mourner to identify the deceased in private, public viewings are not encouraged in Judaism out of respect for the dignity of the deceased.

Before the funeral begins, mourners in the immediate family (and sometimes other close mourners) perform a ritual known as *keria*, tearing their clothing or attaching a small black ribbon to their garments, which is then cut or torn. This ancient tradition is an expression of grief as first expressed by Jacob upon hearing of the death of his son. The tearing of cloth represents the tearing of one's heart; it provides the mourners with a physical manifestation of their grief. Traditionally, when one is mourning a parent, the tear is made on the left side, over the mourner's heart.

The funeral service itself is simple and brief, designed first to honor the deceased, and second, to comfort the bereaved. The focus of the service is the eulogy, which recalls the deceased's character and moral values. The eulogy provides both *hesped* (praising the deceased for her/his worthy qualities) and *bekhi* (expressing the grief experienced by the mourners and the entire community). The clergy member who officiates at the funeral will meet and speak with the family beforehand, to learn about the deceased and what the family wishes to be publicly remembered. One or more people close to the deceased may also choose to speak. The traditional funeral service includes selections from the Book of Psalms; *El Malei Rachamim*, a memorial prayer; and, if desired, personal selections by close mourners.

Burial

To many, burial is the most difficult act, and yet it is potentially cathartic as well. Throughout the traditional service, we convey honor to the deceased (*kavod ha-met*), mixed with our grief at letting go. When the mourners arrive at the cemetery, they may choose to walk behind the casket as psalms are recited and it is brought to the grave. Additional prayers, including the Mourner's *Kaddish*, also are offered by the mourners at the graveside.

Traditionally, the casket is lowered completely into the grave and covered with earth before mourners leave the deceased. It is considered a holy act for mourners to help shovel the earth and cover the casket. Even so, it is an act we perform with a heavy heart. One custom reflecting this is to use the back of the shovel to fill the grave more slowly. Another is for each person to put the shovel into the dirt when they are done, instead of passing it directly from one person to the next. Some follow the custom of shoveling to fill the entire grave, while others stop after the casket is covered.

The final part of the burial is the recessional, which marks a shift from honoring the dead to comforting the mourners. The mourners pass through two lines of people as traditional words of comfort are recited, reflecting the community's support as the bereaved enter their new state of mourning.

When an interment is in a vault or a mausoleum, these practices are modified accordingly.

Kaddish: Looking Forward

We recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* to honor the memory of our loved ones, as well as to remember others in our community who have no one to mourn for them. Yet the *Kaddish* contains no mention of the dead or of death. Rather, it extols the transcendence of God and the sanctity of life. Some mourners find that the simple act of saying the *Kaddish* lets them express emotions they otherwise feel obliged to constrain. The repetition itself can sometimes help mourners acclimate to their loss. The liturgical hope is that we will derive strength in our bereavement by embracing God. We are comforted further by reciting the *Kaddish* surrounded by community, whether at synagogue services, at a *shiva minyan*, or at the gravesite. The congregation actively participates in the recitation along with the mourners.

The Mourner's *Kaddish* is recited at the burial; during *shiva*, *sheloshim*, and the first year of mourning; annually at the *Yahrzeit*; and at designated holidays through the year. In addition to Shabbat and holidays, *Kaddish* also can be recited at our weekly lay-led *ma'ariv* (evening) service. If you would like to attend and want to be sure of a *minyan* (a quorum of ten people), please contact the clergy office at 646-454-3021.

Saying *Kaddish* can provide the comfort of traditional ritual and connect us with communal support while turning our attention to God, life, and peace. We are reminded that Judaism embraces life and views death as a part of life. This perspective can be a source of consolation, helping us to move towards healing.

The Mourner's *Kaddish* can be found on page 34.

Periods of Mourning

Mourning is a process. Mourners experience a wide range of emotional and even physical responses to their loss. During this difficult transition, Jewish tradition offers us a framework with rituals that can support us as we make our way through the valley of the shadow of death. Below is an introduction to this framework and some of the rituals associated with it to be observed by primary mourners. Jewish law identifies primary mourners as: a parent, child, spouse, or sibling.

אנינות *Aninut*: the period between death and the funeral

This is a time when the bereaved should be relieved of the responsibilities of daily living as much as possible. It is a *mitzvah* to assist mourners at this time with practical tasks like running errands, seeing to out-of-town mourners, and providing food or childcare. At Rodeph Sholom, the Caring Community

Committee members can reach out to the bereaved and provide assistance during *aninut*. The clergy or office staff can be in touch with a member of the committee on your behalf.

שבעה *Shiva*: the days of mourning following the funeral

This time period, traditionally seven days, begins the day of the funeral. *Shiva* marks the beginning of a long process of working through grief with family, with friends, and in community. Friends and community can be supportive by visiting mourners at the designated *shiva* house to comfort them, pray with them, and provide food.

Shiva offers an opportunity to engage in prayer. A short service, referred to as a *shiva minyan*, is held in the mourner's home during this week, and the *kaddish* is recited. The clergy can help arrange for a *shiva minyan* to be held at your home.

Shiva is abbreviated by Jewish holy days and suspended during Shabbat. Moreover, individual preference and need are taken into consideration when determining the length of time that your family might observe *shiva*. '*Shiva*' literally means 'seven', and seven days is the full amount of time for this observance. However, Jewish law also indicates a shorter, three-day period as being permissible if other factors require an abbreviated observance. Many mourners choose to honor the tradition of not working during this time.

Some customs connected to *shiva* relate directly to the physical space in a house of mourning. Traditionally, a pitcher of water and a bowl are set outside the entrance of the mourners' home, allowing for an opportunity to perform a ritual hand-washing upon returning from the cemetery. A seven-day memorial candle, provided by the funeral home, is lit.

Part of *shiva* observance is also linked to the mourners' physical being. One custom is to cover the mirrors in a *shiva* house, as one's physical appearance is unimportant during this period. Mourners traditionally sit in low chairs, which further remind them of the departure from routine. This physical lowering also symbolizes the emotional state of the person in mourning.

Shiva concludes on the morning of the last day. At this time, mourners walk together around the block, symbolizing their return to daily life.

שלושים *Sheloshim*: the thirty days of mourning following the funeral

The period known as *sheloshim* begins on the day of the funeral, lasts through the *shiva*, then marks a transition to the next stage of mourning. *Sheloshim* supports mourners in making their way gradually back to a sense of normalcy in work, school, and routine activities over the remainder of the month. While mourners are encouraged to return to the cycle of their lives, they may also need a period of disengagement from certain activities in order to respond to the significance of their loss.

During *sheloshim*, some mourners choose, in accordance with our tradition, not to engage in overtly celebratory activity. The clergy can be consulted in reference to specific circumstances, such as when a family *simcha* has already been planned.

אבילות *Avelut*: the eleven months of mourning following *sheloshim*

This period is traditionally observed by someone mourning the loss of a parent. It extends from the end of *sheloshim* through the first *yahrzeit* or anniversary of the death. Mourner's *Kaddish* is said during this time at a daily *minyan*, or alternatively with their synagogue community on Shabbat, to honor and remember the parent who has died.

מצבה *Matzeva*: placing of the grave marker/unveiling

This service is conducted at graveside approximately a year after the death. Of necessity, decisions regarding the memorial stone take place beforehand, and the clergy are available for consultation. *El Malei Rachamim* and the Mourner's *Kaddish* are recited. The unveiling provides an opportunity to once again gather with close family and friends to honor the memory of the deceased. At the unveiling and at any subsequent visits, many follow the custom of placing a stone on the grave. This custom symbolizes that we have come to honor and care for those who have died, and to remember them. The permanence of stones also suggests the permanence of memory.

יארצייט *Yahrzeit*: the anniversary of death

The anniversary of death is marked each year by lighting a 24-hour memorial candle to honor those we have loved, and by reciting the Mourner's *Kaddish* in their memory. It also is customary to give *tzedakah* in memory of the deceased. Traditionally the *yahrzeit* is observed based on the Jewish calendar, although at Rodeph Sholom we give the option of following the secular calendar, depending upon the family's wishes. The family is invited to say the Mourner's *Kaddish* at a Shabbat service closest to the date of the *yahrzeit*, when the names of the deceased are read.

יזקור *Yizkor*: prayer of remembrance

The *Yizkor* prayer is said at a special memorial service held four times a year. The *Yizkor* service takes place on *Yom Kippur*, *Shemini Atzeret* (which in our tradition is observed on the same day as *Simchat Torah*), the last day of *Pesach*, and on the morning of *Shavuot*.

Cemetery Visits

Some people observe the tradition of visiting the grave in the days preceding the High Holy Days. During the visit, it is traditional to recite the *El Malei Rachamim* and *Kaddish*. There may be other times during the year when you want to visit the grave. If you would like to be accompanied or need transportation, the Caring Community Committee will assist. They can be reached at caringcommunity@crsnyc.org.

Autopsy, Cremation, and other Non-Traditional Practices

Over the millennia, Jews have buried their dead in different ways, and many practices – such as burial in vaults – have historical precedent. Other practices, such as autopsies, cremation, embalming, and viewing of the body are prohibited in traditional Judaism on the basis of *kavod ha-met* (honoring the dead).

However, these practices are, at times, observed by members of our community. Sometimes they are part of the spiritual practice or tradition of either the deceased or a family member, and the mourners feel they are honoring the dead by observing their wishes. In addition, practices such as embalming and autopsy sometimes are required for legal or other reasons. We suggest asking a member of the clergy for guidance if you are unsure what to do in such situations. Above all, we encourage you to speak and plan ahead with family members about their wishes regarding such practices, and to record them in writing.

Emotional Support: Grieving the Loss of a Loved One

For Mourners

Grieving is a natural and healing process which each mourner may experience differently. It can also be overwhelming, confusing, frightening, exhausting and at times seem endless. Psychological and physical reactions are a normal part of the grieving process, and it is important to have support throughout.

In the search for comfort and solace, mourners often seek out people with whom they can express feelings, share memories, and find some peace. Even beyond friends and family, the Rodeph Sholom clergy and social worker can help. Participation in counseling and support groups may help to lessen your pain and sorrow. Other resources are available as well, if you feel like your grief is incapacitating.

Bereavement Support Groups

Rodeph Sholom holds ongoing Bereavement Support Groups for congregants who have suffered a loss. These professionally facilitated groups provide a nurturing environment in which participants can share experiences, receive interpersonal support, draw insights and guidance from the Jewish tradition, and gain practical information. For further information, please contact our social worker at 646-454-3180.

Jewish Views of the Afterlife

Although Judaism is focused on how we live our lives in this world, our religion contains a wide range of views on the afterlife. Jewish teachings and stories speak profoundly to the continued existence of the soul after death. Judaism

also embraces the idea that those who have died live on through their legacies and the lives they touched. Our clergy are available to explore all these ideas with you.

For Children Suffering a Loss

Ultimately, each family must decide how to approach loss with their children, but it is important for children to participate in the grieving process in some manner. The challenge is to talk with them about death in ways they can understand, listen carefully, and help them to express their feelings. You may consider bringing them to the funeral and memorial service, and having them participate in Jewish mourning rituals. Although their behavior may not appear grief-like, children may be feeling all the same things as the adults around them.

When children suffer a loss, it is important that their school community is aware of the situation and the ways in which your family is responding. The clergy and social worker are here to help you with some of these conversations.

For Those Supporting Mourners During *Shiva* and Afterwards

A meaningful way to support mourners is to visit them during the *shiva* period. Jewish custom teaches that the mourners are not meant to act as hosts; rather, they are to be cared for by their community. At the same time, the mourners are the ones who set the tone for the *shiva*, and it is important for those who come to be attuned to their direction. Jewish tradition teaches that when you enter a *shiva* house and interact with a mourner, let them begin the conversation. This tradition emphasizes the importance of being sensitive to the needs of the mourners. *Shiva* offers the mourners an opportunity to share memories, both happy and sad, of the deceased and give voice to their emotions. Be aware there may be times when mourners need to be left alone between or even during visits.

It is in keeping with Jewish practice for friends of the mourners to give *tzedakah* in memory of the deceased, and the mourners may decide where to direct these donations. In addition, some people send or bring food to the bereaved during the *shiva* to see that the mourners are cared for, and to relieve the demands of receiving visitors in their home. Finally, although there is no religious prohibition, it is not customary to send flowers to a Jewish funeral or to the bereaved during mourning.

A mourner's grief does not end at the completion of *shiva*, nor should your support. After the *shiva*, when the house is emptied of visitors, it is particularly important for family, friends, and members of the community to call and visit during the ensuing months.

PLANNING AHEAD

Rav Nachman showed himself [in a dream after his death]. Rava asked him “Was death painful?” Rav Nachman replied. “It was a painless separation...But were the Blessed Holy One to say to me, ‘You may return to that world where you were before,’ I would not wish to do it, for the fear of death is too great.”

(Babylonian Talmud, *Mo’ed Katan* 28a)

Overview

Struggling with the illness of loved ones, or losing them, confronts us with the reality of mortality. The fear of death often prevents us from discussing and planning ahead for this reality for ourselves. We should, however, take advantage of the opportunity, while we are physically and mentally able, to give future direction to our loved ones about material, medical, and spiritual matters. Engaging in this sacred process is consistent with Jewish traditions and values, and can lend more meaning to our relationships with those closest to us.

Estate planning directs the future ownership and management of your assets, and develops strategies to reduce taxes, resolve liquidity problems, and protect loved ones upon your death. It is also important to think about how your financial affairs will be handled if you become incapacitated. It is suggested that you engage in ‘life planning’ and set up a system for management of your finances, should you be unable to carry out the responsibilities yourself.

Appropriate life planning also includes executing advance directives for health care, consisting of a Health Care Proxy and Living Will, so that decisions can be made for you should you be unable to make health care decisions for yourself. According to the Family Healthcare Decision Act passed

in New York State in 2010, family members and close friends are allowed to make healthcare decisions in hospitals, hospice, and nursing homes if you lose the ability to make your own. The order of priority to make these decisions according to the FHCDA is: legal guardian, spouse or domestic partner, adult child, parent, sibling, and close friend.

The process of advance planning is not only legal in nature. Many people choose to write an ethical will in which they share their values, life lessons, hopes and dreams for the future, love, and forgiveness with their family, friends, and community.

Finally, from a purely practical viewpoint, wills and other important documents, including the deed to a cemetery plot, should be kept in a secure but easily accessible place (for example, not your safe deposit box). Tell your executor or family members the location of those documents, and give them copies. It is also helpful to keep a list of assets that comprise your estate.

By taking care of these matters during your lifetime, you are much more likely to bequeath a legacy of love to those you leave behind and ensure that your wishes will be carried out. Making your wishes known can reduce the guesswork, and thus the potential anguish of those who might one day have to make decisions on your behalf.

Estate Planning

Thinking about estate planning can be daunting. A basic understanding of the choices can help you and your loved ones. This section only highlights certain key components of estate planning. For more details, please discuss these issues with an attorney. You may also want to consult other written and organizational resources, some of which are listed in the back of this booklet

or on the Rodeph Sholom website. Talking to a trusted friend, confidant, rabbi, or spiritual counselor can be very helpful as well when making decisions about how you want your affairs handled when you die.

Wills

The purpose of a Last Will and Testament is to direct how your assets and personal effects are to be distributed after your death. If a person dies without a will in New York State, the law specifies which relatives are to receive the estate and there is no flexibility. It is to your benefit to direct in a will how and to whom your estate should be distributed. This is particularly important for persons who are not legally married to their partners.

Keep in mind that a will only disposes of assets in your individual name. For example, it does not affect assets that are jointly owned or have a named beneficiary. Those with young children may consider speaking with a lawyer about selecting a guardian and establishing trusts.

The Estate Plan

Legal and financial advisors can help you develop an overall estate plan that is consistent with your wishes and the current and future needs of your family, and that also takes account of current estate, gift, and income tax laws. A few examples of other estate planning tools are trusts, which can be used to direct the distribution of your assets and income during your lifetime, as well as upon your death; life insurance policies and designation of beneficiaries of the proceeds; ownership of bank accounts and other assets, such as real estate, as joint tenants with right of survivorship and ‘transfer on death’ designations; and outright gifts. All of these have tax implications and should be discussed with an attorney or tax advisor.

Powers of Attorney

A Power of Attorney appoints someone you trust to act as your agent and act on your behalf for a wide variety of matters, including banking, during your lifetime. The Power of Attorney should be ‘durable,’ which means that it will remain valid if you become incapacitated. It can serve as an inexpensive and effective means for the management of your assets and income if you become unable to manage your own affairs. A lawyer can explain the implications of the different types of Powers of Attorney and help you determine which, if any, is right for you.

Advance Directives for Health Care

Our Jewish tradition values the sanctity of human life, and it is this value that also guides us in making choices when death is near.

‘Advance Directive’ is the term used to describe the two kinds of legal documents - the Health Care Proxy and the Living Will - that enable health care decisions to be made in the event you are physically or mentally unable to guide your own care. Since we never know when Advance Directives will be needed, it is important to execute them before a crisis occurs.

Making decisions about such issues can be difficult for our loved ones, and medical personnel are generally not aware of our wishes. As with other advance planning, having an Advance Directive can help relieve our loved ones from guilt and make it much more likely that our wishes will be honored.

In preparing Advance Directives you will need to consider how you feel about end-of-life decisions and the use of life-sustaining measures such as artificial nutrition and hydration. In Jewish teaching, each person has intrinsic dignity and value, whatever the level of one’s physical or mental abilities.

At the same time, rabbis and other spiritual leaders have widely interpreted Jewish teachings both to allow for and reject life-sustaining measures when there is little hope for recovery. Consider what various life-sustaining measures mean to you and your loved ones, and make your own decisions about what you want your Advance Directives to specify. Our clergy are always available to assist you in having these conversations.

The Health Care Proxy

A Health Care Proxy is the most important document you can have in connection with your care to ensure your wishes. In this document, you designate an agent to make medical decisions on your behalf if you should become unable to do so. This person would make decisions if, for example, you were in a coma, unconscious, or suffered from advanced dementia. You should also designate an alternate to act as your agent if the primary person you choose is not available.

It is very important to discuss your desires regarding end-of-life decisions and the use of life-sustaining measures with the people you plan to designate to act as your health care agent and alternate. This way you can be certain that your agents know your wishes and understand their obligation to carry them out.

It is not unusual for people to have difficulty choosing an agent. Some people are very clear that they want a spouse or partner or a particular family member or friend to be their agent. Others are not sure they want to put those closest to them in the position of making these difficult decisions. Be sure that both you and your agent are comfortable with your choices and that your agent understands and is willing to carry out your wishes.

Finally, a Health Care Proxy also may include a section in which you can designate organ donation if you wish (this can also be indicated on your driver's license). You may want to discuss this issue with your physician, other health care providers, clergy, or loved ones. A brief discussion of organ and tissue donation can be found on page 7.

The Health Care Proxy recommended by the New York State Department of Health is available on the Rodeph Sholom website, or you can contact the clergy office 646-454-3021 to have it sent to your home. Completing this document is a simple but essential way to ensure that the person you want to make decisions for you has the necessary authority to do so.

The synagogue will provide you with a wallet sized Health Care Proxy card.

The Living Will

Many experts recommend that you also prepare an additional Advance Directive, the Living Will, which contains an expression of your health care choices. It identifies treatments you do or do not want to receive in specific situations, and also describes circumstances under which you would not wish to have your life prolonged by artificial means. As a Living Will cannot anticipate every possible scenario, it is critical to also have a Health Care Proxy naming an agent with knowledge of your wishes and the authority to speak for you, to clarify your statements and guide physicians.

Ethical Wills

An ethical will ensures that our personal values, our stories, and our essence can live on in generations to come. We give a great gift to our loved ones – family, friends, and community – when we make our legacy known. They, in

turn, can take comfort from their efforts to follow in the spirit of that legacy.

Ethical wills go back thousands of years in our history, to our teacher Moses. In his final speech to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 32:1-47), he expresses his wishes for the people. He warns them, instructs them, and encourages them to carry on, even as he anticipates his own death.

The tradition of ethical wills continues throughout the millennia, from Moses until this day, in Midrash, Talmud, and ethical Jewish literature. An ethical will differs from a Last Will and Testament in that it bequeaths spiritual values instead of material goods. It may also include the reason(s) for a bequest of an item of sentimental value, or even instructions regarding funeral arrangements.

You do not need to be a professional writer to prepare an ethical will. The style is open: it can be in the form of a letter, a poem, or anything else you might imagine. Judaism teaches, “Words that come from the heart enter the heart” (Rabbeinu Tam, *Sefer HaYashar*). If you believe a particular piece of your history or a particular set of core values uniquely enhanced your life, you have the ability to enhance the lives of your loved ones by sharing this wisdom. If you are giving someone a belonging that has sentimental value for you, simply put in writing the reason this item has meaning, so that the story can be told and preserved for years to come.

As always, you are not alone in this effort. The Rodeph Sholom resource center has a broad array of materials to help you write an ethical will, and our clergy would be pleased to offer guidance.

Memorial Gifts

Planned giving is a way for you to continue to support an organization that has

figured significantly in your life, perpetuating your values and feelings when you are gone. At Rodeph Sholom, opportunities include donations to the Temple Fund, individual bequests, and specific causes such as the Food Drive and the Prayer Book Fund. Those remembering a loved one might choose to arrange for their name to appear in the Roll of Remembrance, or a Memorial Plaque.

However big or small the amount, a donation has great meaning. There are many ways to make a planned gift, including a bequest in your will of cash, securities, real estate, or tangible personal property. You may also wish to set up an annuity or a charitable trust. With your bequest, you can also address your own important financial, tax, and estate concerns. For details about options that suit your situation, you should consult your legal and tax advisors. If you have any questions about a planned gift, you may also contact the Development Director of Congregation Rodeph Sholom at 646-454-3050.

Funeral and Burial Plans

Planning ahead also can include thinking about funeral and burial arrangements. Some people, out of respect for tradition and in an effort to relieve loved ones of uncertainty, leave precise instructions regarding the details of their funeral.

Some of the questions to consider include where to be buried, and whether you wish to be in a family plot. Many people buy plots in advance so that loved ones do not need to be concerned with this in their time of grief. Once you have decided what your wishes are, we urge you to share them with the people closest to you. Under New York law, you may designate in writing a person who will have the authority to make decisions about the disposition of

your body after your death. If you do not sign the written instruction, the law provides a hierarchy of persons entitled to control the remains.

Union Field Cemetery

Congregation Rodeph Sholom owns Union Field Cemetery, consisting of 63 beautiful acres and a chapel located on Cypress Avenue in Queens. Opened in 1878 by this congregation and overseen by our cemetery committee, Union Field reflects the wisdom of our founders, who had the foresight to provide interment facilities for the Jewish community. The cemetery is a place for remembrance and reflection. To learn more or to visit the cemetery, call 718-366-3748, or see the Union Field web page at www.unionfieldcemetery.org. This information can also be found in the 'Facilities' section of our website.

Important Documents

The planning process can result in a large number of documents, such as wills, trusts, health care proxies, and deeds to cemetery plots. These documents are in addition to your financial statements, insurance policies, leases to co-op apartments, and other documents relating to your financial assets. It is very helpful to have a list of these documents and their location, as well as the name and contact information for your attorney, your insurance agent, your financial advisor, your Human Resources contact at work, and your clergy. It is also advisable to keep certain key documents, such as your will and the deed to your cemetery plot, in a safe but accessible place. Please note that your safe deposit box is not easily accessible. You should also consider informing the people closest to you about the location of this list.

Further Resources

Overview

A number of prayers and resources in the pages ahead have been selected to provide information as well as consolation. Prayers and their translations, except where noted, have been gleaned from the liturgy of the Reform movement.

In addition, a resource center is located on the 4th floor of the Synagogue building, containing a wide variety of books, articles, and other materials. Please also visit www.rodephsholom.org under the 'End of Life' section for additional web references. Although the inclusion of these resources does not imply an endorsement of their contents, we believe that, within this selection, you may find many that will be helpful.

Finally, please know that Rodeph Sholom's clergy are always available to offer you practical and spiritual support.

Viddui

Viddui is a confessional prayer said by the dying person, asking for forgiveness for all the sins they have committed in their life. The person prays for health, but asks that if they do die, their death serve as atonement for their sins.

My God and God of all who have gone before me, Author of life and death, I turn to You in trust. Although I pray for life and health, I know that I am mortal. If my life must come to an end, let me die, I pray, at peace.

If only my hands were clean and my heart pure! I confess that I have committed sins and left much undone, yet I also know the good that I did or tried to do. May my acts of goodness give meaning to my life, and may my errors be forgiven.

Protector of the bereaved and the helpless, watch over my loved ones. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; redeem it, O God of mercy and truth.

(As the end approaches, the following is said with or for the dying person)

יְיָ מֶלֶךְ, יְיָ מֶלֶךְ, יְיָ יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד.

Adonai melech, Adonai malach, Adonai yimloch l'olam va'ed.

God reigns; God has reigned; God will reign for ever and ever.

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד.

Baruch shem k'vod malchut'o l'olam va'ed.

Blessed be God's name whose glorious dominion is for ever and ever.

יְיָ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים.

Adonai hu ha'elohim.

Adonai is God.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai ehad.

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One. (repeated by those present)

(After the moment of death)

יְיָ נָתַן וַיִּי לְקַח. יְהִי שֵׁם יְיָ מְבֹרָךְ.

Adonai natan v'Adonai la'kach. Y'hi shem Adonai mevorach.

God gave and God has taken away; Blessed be the name of God.

בָּרוּךְ דַּיָּן הַאֱמֶת.

Baruch dayan ha'emet.

Blessed be the Judge of truth.

Alternative Viddui

Kayla's Prayer

Listen to my voice,
O Lord our God
And God of my ancestors.

I lie here on the brink of life,
Seeking peace, seeking comfort, seeking You.
To You, O Lord, I call and to You, O Lord, I make my supplication.
Do not ignore my plea.
Let Your mercy flow over me like the waters,
Let the record of my life be a bond between us,
Listen to my voice when I call,
Be gracious to me and answer me.

I have tried, O Lord, to help You complete creation,
I have carried Your yoke my whole life.
I have tried to do my best.
Count my effort for the good of my soul,
Forgive me for when I have stumbled on Your path.
I can do no more, let my family carry after me,
Let others carry after me.

Protector of the helpless, healer of the brokenhearted,
Protect my beloved family with whose soul my own soul is bound.
Their hearts depend upon mine,
Heal their hearts when they come to depend upon You.

Let my soul rest forever under the wings of Your presence,
Grant me a share in the world-to-come.
I have tried to love You with all my heart and with all my soul,
And even though You come to take my soul,
Even though I don't know why You come,
Even though I'm angry at the way You take me,
For Your sake I will still proclaim:
Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
The Lord is with me, I shall not fear.

Rabbi Lawrence Troster: Reprinted with permission from *Conservative Judaism* Summer 1984,
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El Malei Rachamim

El Malei Rachamim is a prayer recited which asks for peace for the soul of the person who has died. It is traditionally said to conclude the funeral service.

(For a Male)

אל מלא רחמים, שוכן במרומים,
המצא מנוחה נכונה תחת כנפי השכינה,
עם קדושים וטהורים כזהר הרקיע מזהירים,
את נשמת _____ בן _____ שהלך לעולמו,
בעל הרחמים יסתירהו בסתר כנפיו לעולמים,
ויצור בצרור החיים את נשמתו, יי הוא נחלתו,
וינח בשלום על משכבו. ונאמר אמן.

(For a Female)

אל מלא רחמים, שוכן במרומים,
המצא מנוחה נכונה תחת כנפי השכינה,
עם קדושים וטהורים כזהר הרקיע מזהירים,
את נשמת _____ בת _____ שהלכה לעולמה,
בעל הרחמים יסתירה בסתר כנפיו לעולמים,
ויצור בצרור החיים את נשמתה, יי הוא נחלתה,
ותנח בשלום על משכבה. ונאמר אמן.

(Note: Transliteration in parentheses is used for a female)

El malei rachamim shochan bamromim, hamtz'ei menucha nechona / tachat kanfey ha-shechina, im kedoshim u'tehorim k'zohar / harakia mazhirim, et nishmat (Hebrew name) hebalach l'olamo / (shebalcha l'olama), Ba'al harachamim yastireyhu (yastireha) bi'eter / k'nafav l'olamim, v'yitzror b'tzror hachayim et nishmato (nishmata), / Adonai hu nachalato (nachalata), v'yanuach (v'tanuach) b'shalom al / mishkavo (mishkava), v'nomar: Amen.

Eternal God full of Mercy,
grant perfect rest in Your sheltering presence to _____, who has entered eternity.
O God of Compassion, let him/her find refuge in the shadow of Your wings,
and let his/her soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.
God is his/her inheritance.
May he/she rest in peace, and let us say: Amen.

The Mourner's Kaddish

Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmey raba.

B'alma di-vra chirutey

v'yamlich malchutey

b'chayechon uv'yomeychon

uv'chayey d'chol beyt Yisrael,

ba-agala uvizman kariv,

v'imru Amen.

Y'hey shmey raba m'vorach

l'olam ul'almey almaya.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach,

v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasey,

v'yit-hadar v'yitaleh v'yit-halal

shmey d'kudsha, b'rich hu.

L'eyla min kol bir-chata v'shirata,

tush-b'chata v'nechemata,

da-amiran b'alma, v'imru Amen.

Y'hey shlama raba min sh'maya v'chayim,

aleynu v'al kol Yisrael,

v'imru Amen.

Oseh shalom bim'romav,

hu ya-aseh shalom

aleynu v'al kol Yisrael,

v'imru Amen.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ

וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ

בְּחַיֵּיכוּן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוּן

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,

בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב,

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ

לְעֵלָם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמַיָּא.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח,

וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא,

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא.

לְעֵלְא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא,

תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנִחְמְתָא,

דְאָמִירָן בְּעֵלְמָא, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים,

עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו,

הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם

עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Let the glory of God be extolled, let God's great Name be hallowed in the world whose creation God willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen. Let God's great Name be praised for ever and ever. Beyond all praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom we glorify, honor and exalt. And let us say: Amen. For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen. May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, let peace descend on us, on all Israel and let us say: Amen.

Mi Shebeirach - Debbie Friedman

One of the central Jewish prayers for those who are ill or recovering from illness or accidents is the *Mi Shebeirach*. With a holistic view of humankind, it prays for a physical cure as well as spiritual healing, asking for blessing, compassion, restoration, and strength, within the community to those facing illness.

Mi shebeirach avoteinu

M'kor ha-bracha l'imoteinu

May the Source of strength

Who blessed the ones before us

Help us find the courage

To make our lives a blessing,

And let us say: Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu

M'kor ha-bracha l'avoteinu

Bless those in need of healing

With *refua shleima*:

The renewal of body,

The renewal of spirit,

And let us say: Amen

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is the most common psalm read during a funeral service. Ascribed to King David, the psalm aims to provide comfort to the grieving family. Within the psalm, words of hope are offered with the intention of consoling those in mourning.

יִי רֵעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר.
בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצְנִי עַל־מֵי מְנַחוֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי.
נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבָב יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׂמוֹ.
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגֵיא צְלֻמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע
כִּי־אֲתָה עִמָּדִי שְׁבִטָּךְ וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתְךָ הִמָּה יִנְחֵמְנִי.
תִּעְרָךְ לְפָנַי שְׁלֵחַן נֶגֶד צַרְרֵי דְשָׁנָתְךָ בְּשִׂמְךָ רֵאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה.
אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבַיִת־יִי לְאָרְךָ יָמִים.

Adonai ro-i, lo echsar.

Bin-ot desheh yarbitzeini al-mei m'nuchot y'nahaleini.

Nafshi y'shovayv yancheini v'ma-g'lay-tzedek l'ma-an sb'mo.

Gam ki-aylaych b'gay tzalmavet lo-ira ra

ki-atab imadi, shivt'cha u'mish antecha, hemah y'nachamuni.

Ta-aroch l'fanai shulchan, neged tzor'rai dishantah vashemen roshi, kosi r'vayah.

Ach tov vachessed yird'funi kol-y'mei chayai v'shanti b'vayt-Adonai l'orech yamim.

God is my shepherd, I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures,

leads me beside still waters, and restores my soul.

You lead me in right paths for the sake of Your Name.

Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil,
for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff – they comfort me.

You have set a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of God forever.

We Remember Them

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

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

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

In the shining of the sun and in the warmth of summer,
we remember them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resources and Select Bibliography

All of these resources are available at the 4th floor resource library at CRS
More web references can be found at our website, www.rodephsholom.org, under the
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