

Jewish Women's Network
Bereavement Booklet for Jewish Women.

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INTRODUCTION

Why write this booklet?

The Jewish Women's Network (JWN) held a national conference in response to the publication of the 'Women in the Jewish Community Review' (1994). This gave women an opportunity to discuss issues which arose from the publication. Some of the recommendations centred on mourning and bereavement, and our conference provided a safe place for women to talk about their experiences and concerns. It became apparent that women often felt invisible and unable to actively participate in the mourning rituals. Some even said this affected their ability to complete the grieving process.

(When we use the term 'mourners' here, we are referring to anyone who has been bereaved - those who feel sorrow when a person dies, as well as those who are bound to keep the rules and practices of Jewish mourning according to tradition.)

The 'Women in the Jewish Community Review and Recommendations', paragraph B7.1 reads: "Guidelines on women's participation in religious observance, such as the saying of Kaddish. Where this is not possible, special emphasis should be paid to the need for women suffering bereavement to have available other and equivalent modes of religious expression". Some women across the spectrum read this paragraph to mean that we should ask for guidance from the Rabbis; others believed we should be taking our own initiative. Choices will often be made according to our specific affiliations: religious through to secular.

In the light of the above, the Jewish Women's Network then provided a series of Bereavement Workshops where a wide range of issues were discussed. We recognised the need for more knowledge specifically for Jewish women, including information and support as well as spiritual and practical guidance. As a result we decided to produce a booklet, exploratory in its nature, with the aim of moving things forward for Jewish women. We welcome further discussion, which no doubt will take place.

This booklet, although very comprehensive, does not claim to be

authoritative, or to be the definitive word. Our aim is to respond to specific requests for information on issues such as Shiva and funerals. We hope this will be a step towards developing ongoing communal education which also meets women's needs. JWN's objective is to reach Jewish women across the spectrum, both religious and secular. Historically, it has been the province of men in the Jewish community to actively arrange and participate in bereavement rituals. Hopefully, this booklet will give women increased awareness. It should also give them confidence to approach this often daunting aspect of our lives before they are in what is often a stressful and emotionally vulnerable situation. Women who wish to can then more actively participate in the continuity of the Jewish people from generation to generation.

Writing this booklet has been an immensely satisfying, and often challenging experience. At times we commented: "we have embarked upon a journey without a map". We repeatedly asked ourselves whether we were succeeding in including women across the spectrum. This was especially so when we consulted on the customs or practices of different sections of the community and were frequently told: "it depends on who you ask". Even at its completion we are uncertain as to whether we have succeeded in maintaining a balance in writing about this sensitive issue. No doubt readers will have their views. We look forward to continuing the debate together. The Network is, after all, about creating a place for women to debate, learn from one another and act more effectively as a result.

Acknowledgements.

The JWN would very much like to appreciate Vicky Grosser and Estelle Pearlman, who did the majority of work in putting this booklet together. They were ably assisted by Mildred Levison. Sharon Lee, Hilary Nissenbaum and Hana Schlesinger took the lead in setting up the early JWN workshops on bereavement, and made many crucial contacts for this publication. Rabbi Sheila Shulman assisted us with learned content. Gail Pearce and Miriam Greenwood contributed to the layout and style, and Oriole Newgass designed the cover for the booklet. The JWN would also like to thank all members of the JWN Working Group who read several drafts; and in particular the many

women who participated in our workshops and contributed their personal experiences which make this booklet so genuine.

Emotional Responses to Bereavement

This section includes:-

- Looking after your own emotions when grieving
- Supporting a grieving person
- Supporting a dying person
- Meeting your own needs when in a supportive role
- Unresolved family issues

Looking after your own emotions when grieving.

Emotional responses to bereavement may differ enormously. They depend on numerous circumstances including how close we were to the deceased, what else is going on in our lives and the levels of support we receive.

During some of our workshops on bereavement we asked how each woman can get her emotional needs met. Some spoke about their feelings after a bereavement, whilst others spoke of their distress at living with a relative with a long-term illness such as Alzheimer's.

It became clear that for some women in the past practical events had overtaken their emotions at first. Decisions about, for example, whether or not they wished to participate in traditional Jewish mourning rituals such as saying Kaddish often got in the way of emotions. In addition, many women found they were supporting others during the death of a close relative or friend, and so it became hard to get their own needs met.

For women living along-side a relative or friend with a long-term illness, strong feelings of loss may arise long before they die, as expressed in this poem by Leah Thorn.

Enduring Power

Be strong in the honour of your father and do not leave him all the days of your life. Even if he loses sense, let him do all that he wishes and do not shame him all the days of his life.

Ben Sira [3:12-13]

remember by recital by ritual
remember zakhar a sacred command
remember one hundred and sixty nine times
remember talmudic dictum
remember ache in commemoration
remember the secret of relief is remembrance

I am the keeper
of my father's memory
I have learnt him
by heart I steal
enduring power of attorney
of his words, gather fractures
as he forgets
what he has forgotten

my father is a funny man *I'd die of fright if I wasn't buried correctly, the Jewish way* my father is a poet *I'm going to see where quarter to two is* he is newly articulate *it doesn't look like a row crowd* I follow the snail tail of his words leave a polite amount of time [though not always] then seize a pen catch him catch my father in flight in exodus

food flies as he eats and my father wears a wraparound pinny
I've never seen one of these before
he struggles with loops and strings and I offer to tie a bow at his waist
you can do that? he is incredulous
you know how to do that?
I impress him at last

I may remember I don't want to remember anything I may notice I don't want to notice anything I will keep busy, a positive busy, something to do during the jerky fracture of my father's life mind a memorial to him, a more lasting obituary than three lines in the expensive columns of the Jewish Chronicle I will keep him alive I will let him go

my father holds his head holding tight to what's left
you've made a hole in my head mourning what has died
a daily shiva a daily kaddish a minyan without the
required number of men

I am the tailor's daughter who cannot find the thread
I must bind my parents overlock them together
but my needles break threads break stitches skip
stitches loop material puckers I check upper tension
is not too tight

my father jungle-hacks through jumbled thoughts wills me in
and at moments of connection, eyes wet, he smiles
squeezes my hand I imprint his jangles into my brain
magpie his phrases to savour him later

once
you were my magician
now frantic
I perform tricks
to magic you
back

crack a gold line in two lean forward till you are off balance
expect to be caught I am here daddy remember

by Leah Thorn

In discussions in preparing this booklet we were in agreement that in reality emotions don't come in neat packages. Kubler-Ross suggests that denial is a common first response, sometimes followed by anger (including at the person who has died). Some people experience depression. And all of these emotions can precede a final acceptance of the loss.

Women may express their emotions in varying ways. It is common for mourners to cry after a death and others may be able to accept this as a suitable expression of emotion. However some people may laugh loudly (a common response to fear or tension). How many of us would feel this was an appropriate response? Women need to feel that they have space to express emotions as they arise.

'Began To Cry'

I knew that she was dead
but with a copper at the door
I knew it once again

behind his blue head
market carts rumbled
Portobello fruit like artwork
vegetables agog with
their own aplomb

the mucky yellow wall
to wall sticking
to my shoes in sympathy
the basement ceiling
leaning low
to whisper consolations
in my ear

somehow we were sat
inside the gloomy room
the law and I
I didn't want to but
he said I should I think
he thought that I would faint

later, Lily took to following
me I couldn't get away
round my legs, on my lap
purring in my ear
and then I realised

in some mysterious way
she knew about it all and she
was looking after me, I
was her kitten, the one
she'd never had, and then

I began to cry.

by Berta Freistadt

Supporting a grieving person.

Supporting a grieving person needs some flexibility in accepting the emotions as they arise, including how they are expressed.

If the emotions experienced by a grieving person are hard for them to accept, or they are having difficulty focusing on their life after a

period of time, then counselling or support may be very beneficial. At the end of this booklet we have included a list of agencies and reading materials which women have found helpful in responding to the emotional side of bereavement.

Supporting a Dying Person.

Another area of emotional need which arose in our JWN workshops was the reality for some women of not only physically supporting someone with a terminal illness, but listening to their emotional fears and concerns. There are many unpredictable aspects to illnesses, such as terminal cancer. These can lead to many physical demands in the care required by the dying person, and a need for flexibility of response to their emotional needs.

My Uncle was a very undemonstrative man all his life. At 82 years, on his deathbed he put his hands out and held onto me. I was very moved, but it made me think of so many missed opportunities. We should make ourselves available not just emotionally and intellectually but physically, so that we can embrace.

Esther

Meeting your own needs when in a supportive role.

Understandably the emotional needs of the carer can be neglected. If you are in this situation, it may well be useful to get others to assist you to think about how you will get your own emotional needs met.

When we have "best friends" in early adolescence, we assume these special relationships will last forever. Most times we form new alliances as we change and develop, but very occasionally such relationships last and grow into close lifelong friendships.

I was fortunate to have such a special friend for over fifty years, and we shared so much history. When she died very suddenly I was totally devastated. I had not had a chance to say goodbye as only immediate family were allowed to visit in the hospital. My role at the funeral and in the weeks afterwards was to offer comfort to the family. Although I was glad to do that I felt that my own family and

friends did not acknowledge my very deep sense of loss and that I was also in mourning.

Rose Conway

I went overseas to be with my Uncle who was dying of cancer. I was pleased to go with him to treatments, to rest with him, and to help him to take care of himself.

A friend helped me notice that I could do this best by also caring for myself. In between hospital visits and other appointments I would play hard with my young cousins, go and swim, and treat myself to some new clothes (I'm not usually much of a shopper).

Rebecca

Unresolved family issues.

It is useful to remember that members of the same family may have different responses to the bereavement. The actual loss can also highlight previously unresolved family conflicts. The shared act of grieving may assist with overcoming them. On the other hand rifts may continue or even worsen. This may add an additional set of painful emotions to those of the bereavement, both for the direct mourners and others such as extended family and friends. We thought it important to refer to these feelings, as we heard a number of women refer to them in our workshops.

My mother died as autumn changed into winter. Her passing meant that she would never abuse me again. It was over. For months I sat in the corner of the settee watching TV and waiting to die. Later on, I found a photo of her as a teenager dancing, and then a second one of us together in her last year when we had become friends. These two photographs started my healing process. I was cut out of the Will because I had spoken our family secrets aloud. But I am still her daughterprogress is erratic and sometimes painful but I am getting there.

Ruth

From Death to Burial.

This section includes the following:-

- Practical information
- Aninut
- Chevra Kaddisha
- Keriah
- Funeral
- Burial
- Cremation

Practical Information.

According to Jewish law a funeral should take place as soon as possible after a death. However, this cannot be done until the death has been registered according to English law. The deceased's Synagogue (if they are a member of one) and relevant Burial Society must be contacted. Jewish Burial Society's may be contacted direct if the deceased did not belong to a Synagogue, and they will require proof of the deceased's Jewish identity. The following should be adequate:-

- proof of past Synagogue membership
- Ketubah (marriage certificate)
- parents' Ketubah
- proof that the deceased's mother is buried in a Jewish cemetery.

a) Registration of a death

The registration of the death must take place at the Register Office in the area where the death occurred (not the place where the person lived, unless he or she died at home). The medical certificate issued by the hospital doctor, or the doctor who attended the deceased if she or he died at home, is taken to the registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths. Three certificates are required:

- a 'green certificate' for the Burial Society or funeral directors
- a 'Death Certificate'
- a 'white certificate' - this is for national insurance purposes.

The Registrar will require basic information about the deceased, including their Birth certificate. If you do not have all the necessary

information the Registrar may allow the burial to proceed if he or she knows it is for religious reasons.

For information about Jewish Burial Societies see the resources list at the back of the booklet.

Aninut.

Aninut is the period between death and burial. It literally means 'mourning'.

Traditionally, burial has been left to men to organise and perform. Women may choose to be involved, or have access to involvement, in different ways. In the 'Women in the Jewish Community' Review and Recommendations, central orthodox women are quoted. "Over and over again, women expressed the need to mourn publicly - 'like the men'." For example, "they felt angry at being asked to leave the room during prayers at a Shiva House..." (p.73). Two thirds of women interviewed endorsed the view that women should be able to say Kaddish at a funeral, Shiva or during the year of mourning....." (P.93 WITC 'Survey Report')

Practices appear to differ throughout the country, but many women, at our JWN seminars, expressed very strong concerns about what they experienced as the exclusion of women. There is a great deal of material available to read concerning traditional Jewish practices of mourning, but they often assume the reader is male. We therefore endeavour to provide a focus on women in the following.

Chevra Kaddisha.

Jewish tradition requires that a body is accompanied at all times, as a sign of respect.

Mum died at around 4.30am on the first day of Chol Hamoed Succot with all her immediate family around her. My eldest brother immediately took over and did all the things required with regard to covering the body and placing her feet-first toward the door. At this point the body was not allowed to be left alone and here I was struck

by the equality between women and men - any of us were allowed the honour of being with my mother and saying the Tehillim - a man did not need to be involved in this important Mitzvah.

Sam Cohen

The *Chevra Kaddisha* (sacred fellowship) can offer a number of rituals, including *Shmira*: (guarding of the body). *Taharah* (the ritual cleansing of the body) is the main role of the Chevra Kaddisha. This “ceremonial washing, dressing in shrouds, and placing the body into the coffin..... is the ultimate expression of respect for the physical person.”. Women attend to the bodies of women, and men to the bodies of men, but family members / close friends are not expected to attend to the body of those close to them.

Michelle E. Friedman writes in ‘Lilith’ magazine (‘Ties that Bind’ April, 2000): “The procedure is a supremely respectful one. The *mais* (the body) is kept covered at all times. We make a drape of sheets, before cutting off the hospital gown. Next, we remove all stigmata of final illness, indignity or unnatural intervention. The body will be returned to nature, delivered to the ground, without bandages or catheters. We, in the women’s *chevra*, frequently perform half manicures, taking off chipped nail polish and swabbing grime from beneath stiffened finger nails. We do not pass materials over the *mais* - all necessary items are handed around the side of the table. This body once housed a living spirit and our ritual honours that sanctity.”

This custom is not practised everywhere. If there is a Chevra Kaddisha in your community, the Burial Society or Rabbi will be able to help you locate it. Re-claiming of Chevra Kaddisha in Reform communities has been happening for some years, with several already having them in place and others considering introducing them.

Keriah / Keri’ah.

This is a traditional expression of grief - the tearing of their clothes by the mourner before the funeral service. It is an outward sign of grief

and an acceptance of death.

Erlene Wahlhaus, in her paper ‘The Psychological Benefits of the Traditional Jewish Mourning Rituals’, writes: “it is the first symbolic expression of grief by the mourner of the shock and rupture of death. It is a cathartic experience, a violent gesture, to cut and rip a piece of clothing. It is an external statement of the inner feeling of being torn apart. It shows the mourners wound to the world, a visible tear which mirrors the inner tear which can never be repaired. It is a moving and symbolic gesture, an acknowledgement of the loss and separation. The psychological benefit here is in the cathartic expression and externalisation of the wound. It prevents self-inflicted damage. *Keriah* provides an antidote to the initial defences of numbness and denial. Some consider *Keriah* too provocative, others may consider it an inappropriate and distressing expression of grief (Rabbi Jonathan A. Romain: ‘Faith & Practice: A Guide to Reform Judaism Today’) and still others consider it barbaric and superstitious. For some, grief may be a very private expression, and they have ‘little need of externally imposed forms’ (Rabbis John D. Rayner & Bernard Hooker: ‘Judaism for Today: an Ancient Faith with a Modern Message’) of expression.”

I was raised in the Orthodox tradition, but for many years prior to my fathers death had been very active in the Reform movement. When he died, the tradition of *Keriah* gave me an opportunity to express in a practical and obvious way some of my grief.

Esther

For further information about cutting *Keriah* you might like to read: ‘*The Jewish Mourners Handbook*’ (see resources pages at the back of the booklet).

The Funeral.

Levayah means “to accompany” and is the Hebrew word for funeral. In *Saying Kaddish* Anita Diamant writes “until modern times, most funeral services were conducted in the family home, a practice that is now rare”. Today there are a number of options, the funeral service can be held in the *Ohel* (Prayer Hall) or chapel, or beside the grave.

Funerals are not, according to Jewish law, permitted on Shabbath or Holy Days. This is because these days are primarily for joy, and not for sadness.

Each of the Jewish groupings in England have a fixed funeral service, although they are fairly similar to each other. In general, the officiating Rabbi will read a selection of the Book of Psalms. Then the *hesped* (eulogy) is delivered. It is a speech or piece of writing about the deceased which is said either by a family member or the officiating Rabbi on their behalf. Finally, the *El Malei Rachamim* (memorial prayer) is recited.

Rabbi Sheila Shulman: “a fairly typical example of a Reform burial service would be that the service up to and including the *hesped* would be held in the *Ohel* (tent) or chapel. Then everyone follows the coffin to the grave, and the service, depending on the weather will either be said at the graveside, or everyone will return to the *Ohel* for final prayers or *Kaddish*”.

Progressive funeral services may add music or poetry to the fixed service.

When the women are left at home.

The women in my family never went to funerals. We went to the House of Mourning, prepared the food and waited patiently for the men to return. When my father died I was expected to stay with my Mother and her sisters and my tentative suggestion that I might go to the grounds with the men was greeted with horror. The two hours we sat there were the longest ever. I tried to envisage what was happening and at what time my father would be put in the ground. Because I have never attended a funeral I had no idea of the ritual of burial.

For many months after I was haunted by the memory of seeing my father's coffin go out of the door with no sense of where it had been laid to rest. Eventually I went with a close friend to the grounds and stood by that sad heap of earth. Although it was very painful to face

the reality of burial it also helped me to move on and begin to confront my father's death. It also left me determined in future to take an active part in the funeral. It was an essential part of the process of grieving.

Janet Cohen

The religious *hesped* may be the norm. However some secular Jews may choose a *hesped* which specifically does not put the emphasis on religion or God.

‘A Tribute to EF’ reads: “So a picture emerges of an active, energetic woman, determined to engage fully with life and to enjoy it, facing steadily outward into the world. It seemed her way of loving was to be, and to do, to briskly cheer people on, rather than to respond with the resonant empathy that might have come from a more contemplative person.That ability to make someone feel better, more alive, just by being who we are, is a large part of what it means in my tradition to live as if we were truly made in the image of God. So let’s keep in mind, now, that she lived a loving life, and a long, full one. May she now be gathered into the bundle of life.”

Burial.

In addition to *Kaddish* a prayer is traditionally said at the graveside: *Tzidduk Hadin* (acceptance of God’s judgement).

In Orthodoxy the chief male mourners traditionally shovel three spadeful of soil back into the grave. However, it is not unknown for Orthodox women to choose to participate in this ritual.

My mother was buried at the Adas Yisroel cemetery in Cheshunt at 4pm that day. The Adas has never really liked women to come to the cemetery at all; this is made fairly clear by the sign in the hall which tells women to cover their heads and not to talk. The inequalities of the funeral started just before the pall-bearers wheeled my mother’s coffin out of the hall: the Rabbi announced that the coffin would be followed by the male mourners, then all the other men, then the female mourners and then the rest of the women. This meant that my

maternal grandmother, sister, maternal aunt and myself were way behind the male mourners during the walk to the graveside and therefore did not see the coffin go into the ground. If it had not been for my amazingly strong grandmother, I would not have been allowed to undertake the important act of throwing earth onto the coffin. My grandma just pushed through the men and told the Rabbi she was going to throw earth on her daughter's coffin; the Rabbi did not dare contradict an 87 year-old woman who had just lost her daughter. Only once she had done this did other women, including me and my sister, dare to step forward to throw earth too.

Sam Cohen

'Breaking Glass'

Against the gathering crowd of backs
I hear the dreadful sound of earth
on wood. Knock knocking on that solid
door. Knock knocking to see if you
are there. The worm winds slowly round
of people in their sober best.
This final act to say farewell
as earth flies soft, complicit, deep
I cannot do. I stand and weep.

by Berta Freistadt

There is much excellent material about Jewish funerals on Internet Web-sites. One which you might like to visit is:
jewishfunerals.com/mourning.html'.

Cremation

Traditional Jewish practice is internment. There is a *Halachic* (Jewish law) prohibition against cremation. However, Progressive authorities declare that so long as the human remains are placed in contact with the earth the actual mode of burial is merely a matter of custom rather than law" (RSGB pamphlet on 'Cremation').

A decision about cremation as opposed to burial will generally depend on the wishes (if known) of the deceased. You will find many materials referred to at the back of this booklet useful to read in relation to burial and cremation.

Kaddish, Shiva & Yahrzeit.

This section includes the following:-

- Kaddish
- Sheloshim
- Shiva
- Stone setting
- Yahrzeit

Kaddish.

Anita Diamant tells us in 'Saying Kaddish' that *Kaddish* (the traditional Aramaic prayer for the dead) is in effect "a self-contained miniature service". She continues: the traditional "requirement of a minyan (men only...) for Kaddish also turns the prayer into a communalising force, keeping the mourner among the living - both literally and metaphorically. Indeed the power of *Kaddish* comes, in large measure, from the consolations of being in a group that recognises and embraces the bereaved".

It may be for this very reason that in the seminars which JWN has held over past years on bereavement, the saying of Kaddish was one which caused much concern to women. Many said that being excluded from this ritual had been very distressing to them. Some even said they thought it had blocked their grieving. Yet, other women said that they did not feel a personal need to say Kaddish but had experienced what they called exploitation from men who said it on their behalf e.g., one woman was very angry about having to pay a man to say Kaddish for her.

"In the late 17th Century, Rabbi Yair Bakharkh (*Responsa Havvot Ya'ir, number 222*) dealt with a case of a man in Amsterdam who died leaving only daughters and asked that a special *minyan* be set up to enable them to say Kaddish. The scholars and lay officials did not prevent them from doing so. Rabbi Bakharkh conceded that "there is no proof to contradict the matter," agreeing that the

daughters Kaddish brings *nahat ruah* (repose) to the deceased, that women participate in the mitzvah of *kiddush haShem*, and that Kaddish could be said because a minyan of men is present. But in the final analysis he would not allow her to say Kaddish, for he feared that such an innovation might weaken allegiance to existing Jewish customs..... There is no attempt made to suggest that the *halachah* dictates forbidding the woman to say Kaddish. On the contrary, Rabbi Bakhrakh rules that despite the apparent permissibility of her doing so, he must forbid it because he fears the negative impact that a permissive ruling might have on the fabric of his community”

The Halachic legitimacy of women saying Kaddish is unassailable, even if not universally acceptable. Thus, even if a Rabbi feels that it is in society’s best interest not to allow an orphaned daughter to say Kaddish, he should make it clear that he knows other *poskim* (people who make decisions) that hold otherwise. That is the approach responsible *poskim* regularly follow in other areas of Halachah, when answering personal questions.” (Women & Kaddish: Joel B. Wolowelsky - Journal: Judaism. Pub. American Jewish Congress, Summer 1995)

In summing up, Halachah does not appear to technically prevent women from saying Kaddish. However women wishing to do so appear to provide a threat to existing male status in the community.

The following section does not tell women what they should or should not do in relation to Kaddish. It does however provide information and give examples of what some women have done in recent years in relation to it. Hopefully this will encourage us all to think about what choices we would like to make for the future.

My father died when I was 16 and my sister was 12. I felt it was up to me to say Kaddish but had no inkling whether this was considered the right thing to do. I set off on the walk to our shul, a United Synagogue in South Africa, full of uncertainty. On the way there a dog jumped out from a garden and bit me. Such was my sense of

insecurity that I took this as a sign that what I wanted to do must be wrong, and didn't consider it again for the next 30 years.

Then, in England I learned from JWN sourced information, that it was possible, and halachic, for women to say Kaddish. I sought guidance from one of our members and she advised me to approach the Rabbi of our London shul as a courtesy, armed with examples of women in other US shuls in England who were saying Kaddish. When the Rabbi seemed hesitant I quickly cited the other examples, and when I pointed out that there was no other blood relative available, he agreed on that basis.

It was initially daunting to approach the minyan to ask them to put up the temporary Mechitza in the small weekday shul. Some of the men carried on as if I weren't there- others, including the retired older Rabbi, came over and wished me long life. As I had been told by my woman guide that technically only another woman could really give the responses to me, I persuaded my sister to come one year, but she became too incensed by what she saw as being caged in behind the trellis of the makeshift Mechitza. After the first year, my husband also started coming to support me, and sometimes one of our sons. Although I do not feel a full participant with the male Kaddish sayers, the ritual retains enough significance for me to keep on doing it, as well as feeling that perhaps by acclimatising the men to my presence, it will be less daunting for any other woman who chooses to mark the remembrance of someone close in this way.

Avril Mailer

Henrietta Szold (1860 - 1945) - who was a United States Zionist leader, responded to the offer from a man in her community: “It is impossible for me to find words in which to tell you how deeply I was touched by your offer to act as ‘Kaddish’ for my dear mother. I cannot even thank you - it is something that goes beyond thanks. It is beautiful what you have offered to do - I shall never forget it.

You will wonder, then, that I cannot accept your offer. And yet, I

cannot ask you to say *Kaddish* after my mother. The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community, which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family. I must do that for the generations for my family.”

I am writing this on the 2-year anniversary of my mother’s death. Mum held the family strongly together and her very quick and clever humour made us collapse in stitches. Her loss was felt very deeply throughout the ranks of my family.

I was 27 when my Mum died and although I have always been an active member of a United Synagogue congregation, the way in which the Orthodox community dealt with women’s bereavement left me hurt and frustrated. My sole concern throughout the year after Mum’s death was to do everything possible to honour and remember her; instead I found that my actions placed me in the centre of a political battle and that I was perceived to be taking a feminist stand when all I wanted was to be able to honour my Mum as my brothers could.... We returned from the graveside to the main hall and my two older brothers recited Kaddish. To be honest, I was so exhausted and emotionally overwhelmed that part of me was grateful that I did not have to get through saying Kaddish for the first time. Another part of me, however, thought that I shared the same duty as my brothers and that I should have been pouring out my grief with them rather than staying silent.

As Mum had died during Chol Hamoed, the Shiva was postponed until after Simchat Torah and we had to wait 6 days. This interval, although awful in most respects, provided an opportunity which few people get to think about what I wanted to do during the Shiva and the year ahead. It was during this time that I found out the Halachic position on women saying Kaddish and then decided that I did want to say Kaddish at the Shiva. Moreover, I made a commitment to make it to Shul for every Shabbat and festival during our year of

mourning in order to say Kaddish.

I think it was important to have people (women) around me who knew what the Halachic position was and were very supportive and encouraging of me doing what I wanted to. In the interests of gaining further support, or just avoiding a scene, I did actually ask the Shul Rabbi whether my sister and I could say Kaddish during services – no woman had ever said Kaddish within the Shul until this point and I knew that it would be considered fairly radical for a United Synagogue.

The Rabbi’s response was that we could say Kaddish, “as long as you say it quietly”. This response has always puzzled me; I have a lot of respect for him for saying yes, but the “quietly” part leaves me perplexed. Clearly there was no halachic problem, or he would just would have said no. Rather, I think his concern was that as women, it would be immodest for us to draw attention to ourselves. Well, I did want the attention. I’d just lost my world and I wanted to mourn publicly....

My sister and I kept our commitment of getting to Shul to say Kaddish on Shabbat and festivals. We mostly went to the United Synagogue Shul which we had attended in previous years with our mother. I might add that we never said it quietly, we said it very audibly together with our brothers who were downstairs.

We had hoped for some sort of solidarity or support from the women in the Shul, but unfortunately we were largely disappointed. Most women initially were shocked at what we were doing and some looked disapprovingly at us. It upset me that so many women didn’t know it was alright for us to say Kaddish and we sometimes felt like walking round the ladies gallery educating people. The most painful thing was that very few of the women standing near to us ever responded “Amen” to our Kaddish – they remained silent. What we eventually realised was that this was not a rejection of us as women – these women didn’t respond to the men’s Kaddish either. The issue was the larger one of women’s silence and lack of engagement with the service and I realised that we have to tackle this problem first before women’s Kaddish can even be addressed.

There were more positive moments, however: occasionally a woman would come up to us and say that she had wanted to say Kaddish when she had been bereaved, but had not done so as she had not

known what to expect from the community. I was lucky - I had my sister and we could do it together, ignoring the lack of response. These women were generally very encouraging and supportive of us and recognised that we would hopefully make it easier for women in the future. My sister and I were not saying Kaddish because we wanted to change things in the United Synagogue, we just wanted to show that we were grieving for our mother. However, I do hope that our actions will give other women in the Shul more confidence.

Sam Cohen

The traditional mourners Kaddish is said in Aramaic, which can be found in any daily Shabbat Siddur and funeral prayerbook.

TRADITIONAL MOURNER'S KADDISH (transliterated)

Yit-ga-dal v'yit-ka-dash sh'meh ra-ba,

B'al-ma di-v'ra chir-u-teh v'yam-lich mal-chu-teh,
B'cha-yeh-chon u-v'yo-meh-chon
U-v'cha-yeh di-chol bet Yis-ra-el,
Ba-a-ga-la u-viz-man ka-riv, v'im-ru A-men.

Y'heh sh'meh ra-ba m'va-rach, l'a-lam ul-al-meh
al-ma-ya:

Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach, v'yit-pa-ar, v'yit-ro-mam,
V'yit-na-seh, v'yit-ha-dar, v'yit-a-leh, v'yit-ha-lal,
Sh'meh di-kud-sha, b'rich hu.

L'e-la min kol bir-cha-ta v'shi-ra-ta,
Tush-b'cha-ta v'ne-che-ma-ta,
Di-a-mi-ran b'al-ma, v'im-ru Amen.

Y'heh sh'la-ma ra-ba min sh'ma-ya v'cha-yim
A-le-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'imru A-men:

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom,
A-le-nu v'al kol Yis-ra-el, v'imru A-men.

Traditional Mourners Kaddish in English

Let us magnify and let us sanctify the great name of God in the world which was created according to God's will. May God's kingdom come in your lifetime, and in your days, and in the lifetime of the family of Israel – quickly and speedily may it come. Amen.

May the greatness of the Eternal's being be blessed from eternity to eternity.

Let us bless and let us extol, let us tell aloud and let us raise aloft, let us set on high and let us honour, let us exalt and let us praise the Holy One – blessed be God! – though God is far beyond any blessing or song, any honour and any consolation that can be spoken of in this world. Amen.

May great peace from heaven and the gift of life be granted to us and to all the family of Israel. Amen.

May the Eternal who makes peace in the highest bring this peace upon us and upon Israel. Amen.

Preparation for saying Kaddish.

- Saying Kaddish is a particularly important ritual to consider before you are bereaved. For some women it may involve quite a bit of preparation.
- Think about why you want to say Kaddish. For example, you might see it as an obligation (mitzvah), as a form of acknowledgement of the continuity of the Jewish people from generation to generation or even as a way of coming to terms with the bereavement.
- Discuss saying Kaddish with family and friends. You may find that some people are more firmly on your side than others, especially if this is not the norm in your community.
- If you are a member of a synagogue you may well want to talk with your Rabbi about saying Kaddish. You may consider taking someone with you if you are uncertain whether your Rabbi will be sympathetic.
- If you are neither a member nor regular synagogue attender but you want to say Kaddish in a synagogue, consider who you might

approach.

- You may like to learn about Halachic interpretations concerning women and Kaddish.

After my father's death, I joined my Uncle in saying Kaddish at the Shiva house. Some of my relatives and friends from the United Synagogue said that it was unusual to hear a woman saying Kaddish, but apart from these comments I heard no adverse criticism.

Esther

As my husband and I had no sons, only daughters, and being a person of religious sensitivity, I had often pondered the question of women saying Kaddish....

When my husband died I informed the officiating minister at the (Orthodox) funeral of my wish to say Kaddish, and there was no suggestion that I could not. During the shivah, we had prayers at home morning and evening, with a different Rabbi or prayerleader each time, and they were all totally supportive. Only once was an adverse comment made, when someone said that a man should not hear a woman saying Kaddish. I respectfully suggested that this could be avoided by the Rabbi announcing that the ladies would be saying Kaddish, and that any man who did not wish to hear it could go and stand in the kitchen for a few minutes....

I decided to obligate myself to say kaddish for the traditional thirty days mourning period for a spouse. Women often don't say Kaddish because of the timing: early morning and then evening. One of the rabbis I knew recommended that I attend the lunchtime *minyán* at Chabad House. I made contact with the rabbi there before I attended, and made the point that I would not sit behind a curtain. In fear and trepidation I presented myself at the Chabad House, and was most warmly welcomed by the rabbi. I simply stood at the back of the very small room, with a siddur in my hand, a Jew among Jews, and fulfilled the mitzvah of saying Kaddish. I went there every weekday until the thirty days were up, and received nothing but kindness and compassion....one of the men said it was an honour to have a woman there.

I have since spoken with many women who have been bereaved, and they all feel that they would have benefited from the opportunity to say Kaddish. The public declaration, the corporate act of worship, the honouring of the memory of a loved one, are all very human needs.

Renee Bravo

Besides the Aramaic Kaddish, alternative prayers have been written in recent times. Here is 'Kaddish' by Marge Piercy:-

Look around us, search above us, below, behind.
We stand in a great web of being joined together.
Let us praise, let us love the life we are lent
passing through us in the body of Israel
and our own bodies, let's say amen.

Time flows through us like water.
The past and the dead speak through us.
We breath out our children's children, blessing.

Blessing is the earth from which we grow,
blessed the life we are lent,
blessed the ones who teach us,
blessed the ones we teach,
blessed is the word that cannot say the glory
that shines through us and remains to shine
flowing past distant suns on the way to forever,
Let's say amen.

Blessed is light, blessed is darkness,
but blessed above all else is peace
which bears the fruits of knowledge
on strong branches, let's say amein.

Peace that bears joy into the world,
peace that enables love, peace over Israel
everywhere, blessed and holy is peace, let's say amein.

Sheloshim.

Sheloshim incorporates the thirty-day period from the day of the burial, including the first seven days: *Shivah* - a time when the mourner can withdraw from the pressures and demands of everyday life in order to grieve.

Shivah.

Our focus here is on women as mourners and on those visiting during the time of Shivah.

Before Shivah.

There are many resources available about Shivah and sitting Shivah, in pamphlets, books and on the Internet. Details of some of these resources can be found at the end of this booklet; for example preparation for Shivah: A Guide for Women Mourners compiled by 'Women in the Community' Glasgow.

During Shivah.

Traditionally, during the *Shiva*, mourners do not go to work, and sit on low stools in the *Shiva* house. It is a time for the community to look after the mourners. Only basic personal hygiene is maintained by the mourners and men traditionally do not shave. It is also customary not to buy or wear new clothes, or have hair cut. In addition music is not listened to, nor Television watched. They also abstain from sexual relations.

A memorial candle is lit for the duration of the Shiva. It is also common for mirrors to be covered, which is often explained as the bereaved needing to focus on their grief during a period of transition.

Traditionally, mourners do not greet visitors at the Shiva house. Instead visitors wait for the mourner to start any conversation, and take the lead from them in discussing the deceased person.

Shivah enables the mourner to focus on their feelings, to share memories and to be cared for both in practical and emotional terms by the community. Today many cut the *Shivah* from seven to three days. This may be for a number of reasons, including the speed of

life, feeling that it is an imposition on others, or depending on the relationship with the deceased.

Some visitors choose to bring food to the Shivah house in order to relieve the mourners of the burden of the every day practicalities of life.

A relevant, informative and very supportive chapter on *Shivah* can be found in Anita Diamant's book 'Saying Kaddish'.

Women may find that they will be expected to be in a separate space from the men during prayers. 'Women in the Community' Glasgow states that if the seating is arranged suitably women can participate in the prayers along with the men. They do, however, say that you should check with the Minister and inform whoever is leading the prayers that you wish to remain in the room and participate in the service.

Julia Bard writes:

At the Shiva we insisted that the women should not be relegated to the back of the room. This was not universally approved of, and there were continual attempts at what I can only describe as sabotage. The rabbi conceded by making a tactical decision about which direction was east so that the women and men were side by side. (my mother, who has lived in the flat for more than twenty years was so astonished, she checked on her compass after everyone had left - and she was right, he was facing north.) One evening, an orthodox male relative who was leading the prayers marched determinedly up to one end of the room, egged on by some male 'friends' of the family, as far from the women as he could be - even if that meant facing due west. I was forced into an unseemly confrontation, and brought him back. Dad would have enjoyed that. (Essex Jewish News, 1999)

When my Grandmother died I stayed at home with my Mother and helped the Aunts to prepare the food ready for when the men returned from the grounds. Whilst everyone else subsisted on black

coffee and cigarettes, I kept sneaking into the kitchen to surreptitiously pick at the smoked salmon beigels and herring and rye bread. I was so ashamed of this urgent need for food. I felt I was being greedy and not showing respect for the dead or indicating a suitable level of grief.

Judith

Visiting a Shivah House.

Your visit to the mourner at home is more than a courtesy call. This visit is about bringing comfort to someone in need. You may feel uncomfortable which is understandable but your presence in the mourner's home is about consolation.

- Let the mourner talk
- Listen considerately
- Show concern for the mourner's well-being
- Take the lead from the mourner rather than attempting to distract them
- Do speak about the departed and share memories
- Humorous anecdotes of the deceased spoken respectfully are in order.
- This is a time to be sensitive about whether you speak of your own past bereavements.
- It is not helpful to offer advice about how the mourner should feel or respond to their loss.
- It is traditional to leave with the phrase 'I wish you long life'.

If you are unable to visit the Shivah house, writing a letter of condolence can be a great comfort and serve as a memento to the bereaved. It is customary to end with the sentiment "may you and your family be spared further sorrow for many years to come".

The Conclusion of Shiva.

Mourners, when they get up from Shivah, may choose to take a walk to symbolise their return to society and the real world.

In addition to saying Kaddish and sitting Shivah it has long been

customary, in honour of the deceased, for family and friends to give charity, study, endow or increase existing voluntary work.

Stone Settings

Stones, unlike flowers, do not perish; they are a permanent reminder of the memory of the person.

After the burial, the grave is only marked by the name of the deceased. Then the stone can be set at any time after thirty days (Sheloshim). In the UK this is generally within a year of the death.

The origin of stone setting dates back to Biblical times. It has been the custom to place an inscribed stone at the head of the grave bearing the name of the departed written in Hebrew followed by son / daughter of the mother of the departed not mentioned. But nowadays the English name is inscribed together with date of birth or age and if applicable details of spouse and family.

Prior to the visit to the grave by family and friends, a simple ceremony takes place in the prayer hall where psalms are read out and a *hesped* (short sermon) given by a member of the family, or a friend, who has known the departed. At the graveside the inscription is read out. (The orthodox say an extra psalm and Kaddish is recited if a *minyán*: ten men, are present at the graveside.)

It has become the custom for those present to be invited to join those close to the departed to gather together for refreshments at the end of the ceremony, either at home or in a hired hall.

So far as practicalities are concerned the relevant burial society (Chevra Kaddisha) will be able to recommend a stonemason to prepare the inscription, whose charges will depend on the size and type of stone. Other expenses, in addition to the stone include the local council fee for permission to erect a stone and the cost of using the cemetery (usually covered by the Synagogue membership of the departed). If the departed did not belong to a Synagogue it will be necessary to negotiate with the respective burial society.

The stone setting can be a very expensive process. I found it very stressful having to think of a date for the stone setting in the very early days when I was still dealing with my grief after my father died. The Burial Society is inundated with requests for Sunday stone settings, so we had to book well in advance - in fact very soon after the funeral.

Ordering the stone was an emotional experience. We had reserved the next door plot for my mother. I had to discuss the question of a single or double stone with my bereaved mother. Not surprisingly she said: "it's up to you". The decision became easier when she added: "we always shared a double bed".

Rachel

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit literally means 'year time'. Traditionally it is the period of mourning which is one year of twelve Hebrew (lunar) months for parents; for a spouse, brother, sister or child it is thirty days.

On the eve of the Yahrzeit itself a candle or special light is lit at sunset and burns until sunset the following day. Kaddish is also traditionally said by the mourners on the Yahrzeit.

Difficult Bereavement Issues Raised by Women at JWN Workshops.

This section includes the following:-

- Loss of a child
- Miscarriage, stillbirth and abortion
- When children are bereaved
- Children of Holocaust survivors
- Suicide
- Non Jewish partners / family members
- Creating our own rituals

Loss of a Child.

This is an enormously painful bereavement, and one which is rightly covered in many publications. How do the parents who lose a child cope?

The following are two personal pieces from parents who have lost a child. They speak for themselves.

'Time Heals'

It is the only cliché I heard that gave me any hope at all. Everything else seemed to hurt even more or just make me angry. I know people wanted to help, to show us they cared. However, being told, "You're young, you'll have more children," only made me want to scream. This wasn't a favourite book that I had mislaid. I had lost my baby.

Zoe was with us for 10 short days, but I loved her with all my heart and soul. For nine months, I knew when she slept and when she would kick. I knew that if I ate chocolate, half an hour later she would start trying out for the Israeli national soccer team.

She was born in Jerusalem. I held her and nursed her. She was my little girl. How dare anyone tell me that it was better that she died before we got too attached to her. A little girl, conceived in New York, at a time when we should have been packing boxes a month before we made aliyah.

She was lent to us for a short time. Yet she touched more peoples hearts than most of us ever will in a lifetime. Through her we saw the true kindness of strangers and a depth of love from our family and friends that was staggering. We had been here less than a year, yet it felt like a lifetime, so strong were the warmth and love we experienced.

My memories of Zoe are cherished, memories not only of the 10 days she lived and of the two days after she died, but also of the way in which we were able to say goodbye to her. Zoe died shortly

before midnight on Friday 26 August 1995, of complications from a rare congenital disease. After she was disconnected from all of the medical equipment, I wanted to hold her. After a few minutes, the head nurse tried to separate us. But I was not ready to go. I realised that while I had not been able to stop Zoe from dying, I could make sure that I said goodbye the way I wanted. And I could try to make sure she was buried the way I wanted. We stayed with Zoe for almost half an hour. When we left, I made the nurse promise that my little girl would stay wrapped in her blanket and that no one would touch her until we had decided what to do next.

Even though Zoe was less than 30 days old - the age at which a baby is considered a person and therefore worthy of being mourned and buried according to Halacha -- the Sephardic Chevra Kaddisha had treated her with respect and had washed and wrapped her in a white shroud, as they would any other woman. Then I wanted to see her, to uncover her, to say goodbye. They kindly allowed Zoe's Mummy and Daddy to kiss her one last time, to see her beautiful face.

They told us that Zoe would be buried in an area with other children. When we reached Har Hamenuhot, we were stunned by the perfectness of her final resting place looking out towards Nebi Samuel, over the beautiful Jerusalem hills, on the top of the world. Zoe would watch us whenever we left Jerusalem and whenever we returned. She had guaranteed we would never leave for long.

Yaacov (man from the Chevra Kaddisha) carried Zoe like any baby, cradled gently in his arms. The funeral was quiet, dignified and private: our friend the rabbi; a neighbour; and us. We wanted to say goodbye without any fuss, just us. After the brief ceremony, Yaacov told us that Zoe was now at peace, that she had completed the work of a soul that had gone too soon. She did not want us to mourn for her too long, he said. She only wanted to bring joy into our lives and our home. I thought Yaacov truly was a messenger from God.

Slowly life started returning to normal. That was the hardest part. I had been pregnant for nine months and instead of a new baby, all I

had was a terrible pain that wouldn't go away. We decided to visit my family in Brighton, England. The different environment allowed us to try to forget the pain, just for a little while.

And then we returned to Israel. Its Mediterranean coastline never looked so wonderful. As we climbed the mountains on the road to Jerusalem we looked up and waved to Zoe. Somehow, it didn't hurt quite as much.

Time really does heal.

Fiona Sharpe

Stillbirth or death of a baby at less than thirty days, has in the past been dealt with in a very 'matter of fact' manner. There has not been traditionally a proper funeral service or *Shivah*. The baby was placed in an unmarked grave because it was thought best to put it behind you and think about other children. Now it is realised that a bond has been formed and the loss is as painful as for any other child.

My wife and I had a tough time after the death of our child. I used to come home on pins and needles. "How was your day?" I would ask her, knowing it had been terrible. I had befriended a psychologist, and she gave us such a gift. She met with us and said: "Look, I know you're in trouble. You're afraid of each other. You're afraid you're going to say something that will hurt the other. You can't talk to each other. I want to give you a homework assignment. For the next six days, you're going to sit across from each other, look each other straight in the eye, and talk about A. for 15 minutes."

You know what happened? The weight of the world went off our shoulders. Because we had to, we talked about A.. We cried. We laughed. It is so important to communicate with each other. We became better people because of it.

David Techner (Another Kind of Weeping)

Miscarriage, stillbirth & abortion.

Some may say that loss of an unborn child, or a baby who dies before or during birth is not as important as the loss of a child later in life. But if we listen to women who have had these experiences we would have to notice that the pain can be immense. A baby may have been wanted for a long time, or preparation made for it's arrival. And after all, how can we judge one kind of loss above another.

Historically we do not have rituals or burials of babies who die within the first 30 days. This may have been because years ago many children died in early infancy, and taking time to grieve was not available to women working outside the home or raising other children.

'Another Kind of Weeping', produced by a number of women, including Rabbis, does much to acknowledge the losses for women of babies through termination, stillbirth, infertility and death of a newborn within the first 30 days. You can find information about their pamphlet in the back of this booklet.

Other useful reading is 'Taking Up the Timbrel' (Ed. Rabbis S. Rothschild & S. Sheridan) which includes rituals which women have developed, often with the assistance of a Rabbi, to cope with the loss of a baby.

Miscarriage.

I had a miscarriage with my first pregnancy. It all went wrong in the 12th week. I phoned my husband. He could not leave his meeting. I phoned Mammy, she was out. Then I called the doctor's surgery. He came at once and phoned for a specialist who came later and announced that I should go to hospital. Suddenly my Mammy and my husband arrived in time to take me to hospital. I had hoped to have a baby around the same time as my brother and his wife. I dreamed that they could have been friends. This was not to be. I embroidered a table-cloth with my grief. Nobody mentioned the

miscarriage. It seemed like an eternity before I fell pregnant again, and had a healthy daughter some twenty months later.

Naomi

It can also be useful for women to hear the responses of men who have experienced the loss of an unborn child.

After preparing so many speeches in one's head - Yes, they're fine, he looks great, we're going to call him...it's so hard to think of the right way to tell those who have expected to be grandparents or uncles or aunts that, no, the family's new arrival is not going to come, and yes, we're all right really, and no, we'll manage, thanks.

The emptiness is greater because you aren't seen as the one who has suffered and lost. Your task is to support the grieving mother - the one who has actually had her insides scraped out and dumped in a bin, the one whose hormones are still preparing to suckle, the one who has, in all probability, done 90% of the shopping for nappies, changing mats, prams, little vests and baby grows. While she worries hysterically about her 'failure' as a mother - should she have lifted that case? Eaten differently? Rung the doctor earlier? Is she damaged forever? Can she ever have another pregnancy? - you are left alone with your doubts about your semen, your potency, your wholeness as a male. The insecurity is doubly cruel after the joy of starting on the road to parenthood.

Rabbi Walter Rothschild (Another Kind of Weeping)

Abortion / Termination of a pregnancy.

In traditional Jewish law, a pregnancy can be terminated only where the mother's life is in danger: abortion is permitted if continuing the pregnancy would prove fatal for the mother. Yet, if the baby is genetically damaged, or the mother might suffer social or mental health problems, abortion is not traditionally permitted.

Women may have views which differ from these, and each woman who is considering abortion - depending on her affiliation and her support networks - will need to make the decision for herself. Over

recent years there has been more acknowledgement that having an abortion can leave women dealing with a range of feelings which mirror those of other bereavements. Sylvia Rothschild writes a chapter in 'Taking Up The Timbrel' on a ritual for the termination of a pregnancy. The ritual includes the lighting of a candle:

"A candle is lit each evening for seven days after the termination and the verses recited:

'For you will light my candle, the Eternal my God will lighten my darkness'.

'Go in peace, and God be with you.'

'Be of good courage, and let your heart be strong, all you who hope in the Lord.' "

In May 1996 I attended a service at the West London Synagogue organised by Rabbi Jacki Tabick. It was for parents who had lost babies during pregnancy or shortly after birth. My conscious reason for going was because I thought such a service to be a wonderful idea and I wanted to report back on it to my Rabbi. My deeply hidden motive was that I had had an abortion in 1976 with which I believed myself to be completely reconciled.

Rabbi Mark Solomon whose beautiful singing so enhanced the service, greeted me and asked me gently why I had come. I started crying and cried solidly through the entire service while mopping my nose and eyes, observing all the other members and joining in whenever I could. I cried quietly and ceaselessly and could hardly understand that the tears of twenty years were all pouring out in one go. I thought of my baby; I was always convinced it was a girl, and imagined twenty years of her growing up. While realising the rightness of my painfully-taken decision I realised that I had never mourned in a Jewish way in a Jewish setting. I cried through the singing, the prayers, the readings, all carefully chosen, appropriate, comforting. I ran out of tissues and people passed me more.

At the end of the service we were invited to light a Yahrzeit candle. Sodden with tears and shaking with emotion I lined up in the queue.

When my turn came my hands steadied, my mind calmed. As I lit the little flame I whispered to my unnamed lost child "Forgive me". I believe that she has.

Hana Schlesinger.

When children or young people are bereaved.

At one of the JWN bereavement workshops a teenager spoke of her friend dying, and how lost she felt. Several adult women spoke of losing a parent when they were a child.

Bereavement had a profound influence on my childhood, on my growing-up and my relationship with my own children, but it has taken me fifty years or more to begin to understand properly what bereavement – the process and effect of the loss – really means.

My mother had to leave us when I was 6 months old and my sister 2 to go into a sanatorium two counties away, where she died three years later of tuberculosis, having never seen us again. I remember my father, on warm double-summer-time wartime evenings going round our garden cutting flowers to take on his early train journeys the next morning to visit somebody I couldn't visualise, but who was important to all of us. An early memory flash: my third birthday - a cold dark midwinter afternoon - an iced cake with three candles – everyone round me sad and serious. My mother was close to death but I didn't know. I just knew it was a sad birthday. I remember vividly the day she died. I think it was spring – I seem to remember a light evening. My sister and I had been put to bed, but my father came in soon afterwards. He had been away all day, at the sanatorium. He sat on the end of my bed with tears on his face and told us that our mother had died. I was absolutely shocked because I had no idea that grown-ups could cry. I cried too: but for my father. He was all I knew....

I learned so much from listening to women at a workshop on Jewish mothers, as they talked about dominating, difficult & even demented mothers, and in particular about the loss of their mothers, and how & why they loved them. I had only been able before to see it from my

own perspective of never having known any of this myself.

A friend of mine, a Progressive rabbi, told me that when her parents died they had been cremated in accordance with their wishes, but that for herself she would have dearly loved a grave to visit and to care for. From her words came this reflection: maybe we should give more thought to how we prepare our children for our own deaths. As my friend demonstrated, it will matter much more to them how we are commemorated than it will to us, so mightn't it comfort them to be allowed to do this in whatever way feels right for them?

I do know however some of the difficulties this holds. When my daughter was little she used to twirl my gold bangle and say, "Can I have this when you're dead?" and in her teens she'd enthusiastically help me list the music I want played at my memorial. Now that she's 29 she can't bear even to hear where my will is kept, let alone discuss the possibility of my dying. But now I think I'm beginning to understand how she feels, and I desperately want to know what I can do for her and for my other children which will help to comfort them when they become the bereaved.

Shoshana

Children of Holocaust Survivors.

At our last workshop before putting together this booklet, two women spoke of their responses to the death of their parents who were Holocaust survivors. One also mentioned how she is supporting a father who is dying, and the number of issues coming up for her mother who is a survivor.

Recently Naomi Gryn published her book on her father: Rabbi Hugo Gryn's life, including his experiences of the Holocaust: 'Chasing Shadows'. In discussion with us she mentioned: "I realise that one of the liberating aspects of my father's death is that I have in some way been freed from the Holocaust. I helped take care of my father's Holocaust baggage while he was alive, but now he's dead I'm not obliged to anymore. I might feel differently in years to come, and I realise that this could be difficult for others to hear."

Suicide.

There are a number of causes of death which can bring a particular kind of distress, as well as leave the grieving person very isolated.

When we listened to women in our workshops about their experiences, suicide and murder were mentioned - but little was said in detail about them. We noted that others nodded, and that there was sometimes both an uncomfortable silence along-side an element of relief that the unmentionable had been stated.

Suicide leaves many questions for those who are living, including:-

- why did they do it?
- could I have done anything to stop her or him killing themselves?
- was there something they didn't tell me?
- why didn't they tell me what was going on, or that they were feeling so bad?

Shame, anger, disbelief and other feelings may make it particularly difficult to ask for help, and others may find it hard to offer on-going support when somebody has taken their own life. What do you say to a person who has lost a relative or close person in their life in this manner?

The reality is that women grieving because they have lost somebody through suicide need the same things as with other bereavements: patience, loving support and a willingness to listen. Asking questions about memories of the person who has died can be helpful; and awareness that even though the pain may persist for some time the grieving person is not responsible for somebody's choice to kill themselves. We write 'choice' here because however distressed the person is who takes their own life, it does involve a decision. In some cases this may be for more 'understandable' reasons than others: e.g. because they have a terminal illness.

"Sometimes I would want to say that my relative had committed suicide, but I didn't want to handle others shock and questions about why they did it. I didn't have the answers. So I tended to only say if somebody asked how they died - then I could prepare myself for their

responses and not feel so responsible”, one member of JWN said to us.

My mother killed herself (with tablets) several years ago. She had talked about suicide when feeling low, on and off during her life. However it was a real shock when it happened.

My husband and close friends let others know that she had died, but not how she had died. People didn't seem to ask even though she was quite young.

Later I struggled with telling. I seemed to need the question: “how did she die?”. Many people still don't know. I am figuring how to tell some people now; otherwise it's like having a burden. It's a secret which I didn't chose. I've learnt from my experience that it's important to ask how someone died. The bereaved can still chose what they tell, or not.

Sarah

Mourning somebody who has committed suicide can bring some difficulties in our community, especially for observant Jews. Anita Diamant states in ‘Saying Kaddish’: the law prohibiting self-destruction led to sanctions against observance of many Jewish rituals. In the past, mourners of a suicide were not permitted to rend their clothing and no eulogy was delivered at the funeral.” Committing suicide also meant that burial was not permitted with the rest of the community, but instead in a separate area or just outside the Jewish cemetery.

In more recent years Rabbis have tended to view suicide as an act of despair or mental illness, which allows for Jewish rites. So they are not buried away from other Jews and family members are less isolated from what for many are healing rituals of mourning.

Non-Jewish Partners / Family Members

In ‘*When Someone Dies*’ by Joyce Rose (RSGB), it states: “it is not possible for a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery but you will probably want to attend the funeral without taking part in rituals

which are against Jewish belief. You can sit Shiva because that is an expression of your own bereavement and enables Jewish family and friends to give comfort. As an additional resource some Reform Rabbis will take part in a non-denominational service at the funeral of the non-Jewish husband or wife of a Jew in a municipal cemetery or at a crematorium”.

“Many Jewish families have non Jewish relatives, be it as a result of conversions, or through intermarriage..... In Jewish tradition the funeral is understood to be part of the respect shown for the dead. Unless there are strong personal reasons for doing otherwise, one should attend.The mourner may sit Shiva in her or his home as would any other mourner.... prayers are only part of what this institution includes; no less important is the opportunity the Shiva affords for the sharing of grief and of memories with family and with friends. Non Jewish relatives should, if possible be welcome o the Shiva and be included in this dimension of it at least.....The Kaddish may be said for non-Jewish relatives.”

‘The Laws of Life: a guide to traditional Jewish practice at times of bereavement.’ by Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg.

Some years ago I lost a dearly loved non-Jewish friend. He had been my support when I was going through a painful divorce after more than 30 years of marriage. My husband's behaviour had become abusive and intolerable.

Nevertheless I felt bereaved and was approaching the divorce with very mixed feelings. I felt unable to share my grief with my (adult) children or my very elderly parents and found myself in an isolated and vulnerable position. Throughout this time my friend took care of me both emotionally and practically. He gave me a shoulder to cry on and also let me use his home whenever I needed space or a peaceful environment where I could take stock or even just sit and think.

We became lovers as well as close friends and came to rely heavily on each other for some years. However, we lived separately and

most people were unaware of our true relationship.

Just after my divorce was finalised my friend died in an accident. I attended the Christian funeral where I felt like a stranger. I wanted to acknowledge his death in a Jewish way but had no idea which prayers (if any) would be appropriate. In the end I read through the burial service at home, lit a Yahrzeit candle and felt comforted by it. There seemed to be nobody to turn to for advice or guidance.

My children understood the enormity of my loss but I felt unable to seek comfort or sympathy anywhere else within the Jewish community. My parents, extended family and Jewish friends acknowledged that I had lost a non-Jewish friend yet somehow the loss seemed diminished in their eyes simply because he hadn't been Jewish.

Miriam Levy

My secular brother was married to a devout Catholic. When he died my sister-in-law and I had to find a way to negotiate the sensitive area of funeral arrangements. My brother had expressed his own wish for a very simple non-denominational cremation. He accepted that we might choose to have some religious rituals but left it up to us to sort out. Before the cremation, my sister-in-law arranged a High Mass. I went with my husband and children. After the cremation I sat Shiva and had prayers at home and my sister-in-law came with the older children.

Of course it was difficult for all of us. I found the High Mass alien and was upset when the Priest spoke of my brother going up to heaven hand in hand with Jesus. I don't suppose it was any easier for my sister-in-law coming to the Shiva and being wished long life by so many embarrassed strangers who were not sure if she was an official mourner. She must have felt the Hebrew prayers were the Rabbi's way of claiming my brother back to Judaism.

A painful part of the ritual for me was the scattering of my brother's ashes in the gardens of the Crematorium. Having never been to

such a ceremony I was totally unprepared for what happened. The Crematorium Official, obviously aware that my sister in law was a devout Catholic, scattered the ashes in the shape of a cross. I had very strong feelings about this and would like other women to know so they can make sure they get a say if they are in this situation.

Nevertheless we were each able to gain comfort from our own form of religious practice and to be respectful of other ways of mourning. As a woman who had never been actively involved in making funeral and mourning arrangements, perhaps I felt less bound by traditional ritual and more willing to make compromises. What seemed to me important was that my sister-in-law and I were able to find a way to grieve together without conflict.

Janet Cohen

Rabbi Jonathan Romain in *'Mixed Faith Burials'* considers the burial of mixed faith couples and writes: "if we continue to ban such burials, little is achieved aside from splitting a couple at death who had been together in life. It is true that received tradition has taken a different view but it is equally clear that there is enough leeway within the tradition to permit it. Above all there is a responsibility on today's rabbis to approach Jewish life in a way that is positive and forward thinking. If this involves making innovations, then that is part of the dynamic process of tradition. It is also worth baring in mind that what may seem a radical step today might become accepted practice tomorrow. In fact there already exist some Jewish cemeteries elsewhere that permit the burial of non-Jewish relatives and which can be seen as offering a precedent".

You might like to see this booklet to read more on the history behind the current situation in the UK on Jewish cemeteries and mixed faith burials.

Creating our own rituals:

It is apparent that women are increasingly coming together to develop rituals both to celebrate events in our lives such as the end of a piece of education or the birth of a daughter. It is also true that

we can create rituals which assist us with the grieving process.

If you are secular, or wish to create your own rituals you might like to read 'Taking up the Tumbrel' edited by Rabbis Sylvia Rothschild and Sybil Sheridan. This book contains a chapter on creating ritual and Sylvia writes: "A line in the Book of Psalms (69.14)reads, 'And as for me, I am a prayer before you God at the proper time.' It changed my view of liturgy for ever - not the 'prayer' but the 'pray-er' is the focus and the conduit for meaningful connection with God; not the words of the text but the conversation of the heart".

Creating ritual may also be influenced by whether the person who has died was religious, or not.

A funeral for my mother:

My mother died when I was coming up to my 40th birthday, and already exploring a celebration for myself. Her death was sudden, and I and my siblings came together without knowing exactly what she had wanted when she died. She was raised very assimilated, and had never been a member of a Synagogue. She had however found some spiritual pleasure in Quaker meetings at several times in her life.

One thing we all felt sure of was that our mother would not want to be buried - that she would choose cremation. So, how were we going to say goodbye to her, and involve her diverse group of friends in the process?

We chose a Quaker meeting house, where we were warmly welcomed by the Elders. Each of her close family members spoke a little about her, including warm and sometimes funny memories. Friends shared their times with her: painters, walkers, theatre goers and tennis players . We ended with my siblings and I saying Kaddish with my rabbi and a friend: for me this was about saying goodbye to her as my Jewish mother.

I felt pleased with saying goodbye to my mother in this way,

combining respecting her choices and how she had lived her life whilst also meeting my needs as her daughter.

Rebecca Levinson

Sometimes people tell relatives or leave information about what they want to happen, including ritual, when they die.

When my girl friend mentioned that she had been keeping a folder for many years that contained specific instructions about what she wanted to happen when she died, my first response was to think it was rather morbid.

However when I thought more about it I realised that it was a very sensible and practical idea. Although she had written a will that had dealt with larger bequests, by updating her folder she was able to express her wishes about special gifts to her children and grandchildren and friends. She also added poems and readings that touched her and included loving letters for her family.

My friend died very unexpected and the family were greatly comforted by her special folder. They were able to follow her wishes about the funeral, arrange a memorial service, which could include her own choices of music and readings. Her letters to her husband, children and grandchildren were unexpected treasures. Although nothing could ease the loss and shock of her sudden death, the family was helped a little by knowing they were following her wishes.

Rose Conway

This is what is so odd
About your death:
That you will be 34 years old
The rest of my life.
We always said that we would be around
we two,

in our old age
& I still believe that,
however when I am 80
you will still be 34,
& how can we ever understand
what each other has been through?

From 'The Work of a Common Woman' by Judy Grahn.

Resources.

Reading material:-

Women in the Jewish Community: Review & Recommendations

Edited by Judy Goodkin & Judith Citron ISBN: 0-9523543-1-4

What to Do When Someone Dies: by Paul Harris. £9.99 ISBN: 085202715X ('Which Books' from Consumers Assoc.: 0645 123580)

When the Crying's Done: A Journey Through Widowhood: by Jeanette Kupfermann. £8.99 (Robson Books)

Loss & Bereavement: by Sheila Payne ISBN 0335201059

A Jewish Book of Comfort: by Alan Kay. ISBN 0-87668-589-0 (Jason Aronson Inc. USA)

Surviving Your Partner: How to live with the death of the person closest to you, by Sylvia Murphy £8.99 ISBN 1-85703-231-4 ('How To Books')

The Courage to Grieve: by Judy Tatelbaum £6.99 ISBN 0-7493-0936-9 (Vermillion Books)

When Someone Dies: a guide to basic essentials of Jewish funeral arrangements and mourning customs: by Joyce Rose (Reform Synagogues of Great Britain publications)

The Laws of Life: a guide to traditional Jewish practice at times of bereavement by Jonathon Wittenberg. ISBN 0951 8002 56 (Masorti Publications)

Saying Kaddish: How to comfort the dying, bury the dead and mourn as a Jew, by Anita Diamant £8.95 ISBN 0-8052-1088-1 (Schocken Press)

Women & Kaddish: by Joel B. Wolowelsky. Journal: 'Judaism' (Published by. American Jewish Congress) Summer 1995

On Death & Dying: by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. ISBN 0-415-04015-9 (Routledge)

A Jewish Mourners Handbook: by Rabbi Ron H. Isaacs & Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky ISBN 0-88125-415-0 (KTAV Publishing House, Inc.) Also on Website: www.jewishfunerals.com/JMH.html

Jewish Insights on Death & Mourning: Edited by Jack Riemer ISBN 0-8052 1035-0 (Schocken)

Death & Bereavement Across Cultures: Edited by C.M. Parker, P laungani & B. Young ISBN 0-415-13137-5 (Routledge)

A Special Scar, The Experiences of People Bereaved by Suicide: by Alison Wertheimer (Routledge)

Mixed Faith Burials by Jonathan Romain. RSGB Publications

A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort: The Art of Jewish Living, by Ron Wolfson ISBN 0-935665-07-2 (Fed. of Jewish Men's Clubs)

Taking Up The Timbrel: The challenge of creating Jewish ritual for Jewish women today: Edited by Sylvia Rothschild & Sybil Sheridan. £12.95 ISBN 0-334-02806 (SCM Press)

Useful Organisations:-

Jewish organisations:

Board of Deputies Enquiry Desk: 020 7543 5421 / 2

Chai-Lifeline Cancer Support Helpline: 020 8202 4567 / 2211

JAMI (Jewish Assoc. for Mental Health): 020 8458 2223

Jewish AIDS Trust Helpline: 020 8446 8228

Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service 020 8349 0839
- including support for children.

Jewish Bereavement Support Assoc. 020 7286 5991

Jewish Care Helpline: 020 8922 2000
inc. 'Bereaved Partners Group'
& 'Minus One' for people under
50 who have lost a partner.

Jewish Lesbian & Gay Helpline: 020 7706 3123

Miyad Jewish Crisis Helpline: 0345 581 999

Yad b'Yad:
for bereaved children and their carers 020 8444 7134

Non-Jewish organisations:

Cruse Bereavement Care (inc. reading list) 020 8964 3455

Arranging a Funeral

Synagogues:

Each Synagogue deals with the organisation of it's own burials.

Adath Yisroel
40 Queen Elizabeth Walk,
London N16 0HJ
020 8802 6262

Association of Masorti Synagogues
1097 Finchley Rd,
London NW11 0PU
Tel: 8201 8772

Federation of Jewish Synagogues
65 Watford Way,
London NW4 3AQ
020 8202 3903 / 2263

Reform Synagogues of Great Britain
The Sternberg Centre
80 East End Rd,
London N3 2SY
020 8349 4731

Spanish & Portugese Jews' Congregations
2 Ashworth Rd,
London W9
020 7289 2573

Union of Liberal & Progressive Synagogues
The Montagu Centre,
21 Maple St,
London W1
020 7580 1663

Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregation
140 Stamford Hill,
London N16 6QT
020 8802 6226 / 7

United Synagogue Burial Society
Adler House, 735 High Road,
London N12 0US
020 8343 3456

If you are not a member of a Synagogue, you may want to call:
Joint Jewish Burial Society
Alyth Gardens,
London NW11
020 8455 8579