

JEWISH CEMETERIES



B C Genealogical Society
Box 88054 Richmond B C V6X 3T6

Readers are reminded that the information was taken from some very worn stones. Some dates were barely legible, although every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy, errors or omissions may occur.

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For without the hours of volunteer work, this publication
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Explanation of symbols used:

() = Recorders' comments

/ = End of line on stone.

[] = From Office records.

(Plaque)= New Grave no stone up to time of recording
Funeral marker only.

DEATH AND THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE ...

JEWISH WAYS IN DEATH AND MOURNING

by Rabbi Victor Reinstein

Engraved in the stone gate-post at the entrance to the Jewish cemetery in Victoria are the Hebrew words "Bays Ha Chayim", "House of the Living". Another traditional Jewish term for a cemetery is "Bays Olam", "House of Eternity". These terms reflect continuity, the continuity of Jewish tradition as it passes from one generation to the next, the continuity of historical time as each individual and each age plays its part in the unfolding of eternity, the continuity of life and death as part of one eternal cycle of life. As each person dies, we are, in the language of the Bible "gathered to our people", taking our place in the continuum of a community that transcends time.

Death is a part of life. Our response to death says much about our response to life, as individuals and as a community. The goal of Judaism is to sanctify life. "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy" is the challenge set forth in Leviticus, chapter 19. The goal is to sanctify all of life, to acknowledge and underscore the holiness, to make special, from the most mundane to the most grand, from birth to death.

As the newborn baby is helpless, so the dead who lies before us. As we welcome the newborn with love and selfless caring, so we bid farewell to the dead. One we do in joy, the other in sorrow, two moments in life's turning. The holiness of birth is awesome. To be present at the moment of a life's entry into the world is to be enveloped by holiness, suffused with the sanctity of life and the presence of God. To be present at the moment of death is also awesome, at the moment of a last breath, the departing of a soul. Then too, the room is filled with holiness, with the sanctity of life and the presence of God.

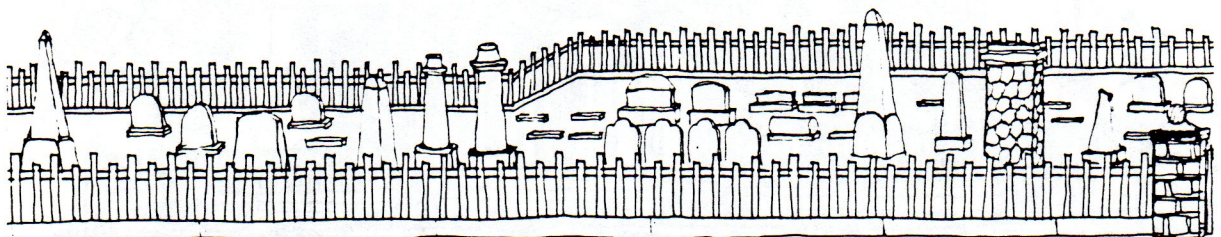
All that we do for the dead, as taught by Jewish law and tradition, is to be marked by reverence. Every act on behalf of the dead, unbeknown to the dead, for which there can be no reward or acknowledgement, is an act of "chesed shel emes", true loving kindness, from the gentle closing of the eyelids at the moment of death and the quiet asking of forgiveness for wrongs we may have done, to the laying of earth into the grave and the comforting of mourners.

Such loving kindness is given practical expression in a Jewish community through the work of the "Chevra Kaddisha", literally meaning the "Holy Society". The Chevra Kaddisha is much more than a burial society, as it is often called. It looks after the various needs attendant upon a death and funeral, beginning traditionally with the providing of "shomrim", "watchers", to be with the body from the moment of death until burial.

The primary function of the Chevra Kaddisha, in which membership is a great honour, is to prepare the body for burial, to bathe and ritually wash and purify the body. As we cleanse and clothe the newborn baby upon its arrival, so we wash and clothe the dead upon their departure. Following the washing and purifying of the body, he or she is dressed in a simple white shroud and then placed in the simplest of coffins, generally a plain pine box without any metal hardware or adornment. When it is a man, the "talis", or prayer shawl, that he wore in his lifetime is placed around his shoulders over the shroud and rendered ritually unfit by cutting or knotting one of the "tzitzis", or corner fringes, since it will no longer be used for the prayerful purpose it was intended. In the coffin of both men and women is placed a small amount of earth from "Eretz Yisrael", the Land of Israel, to signify the eternal bond of every Jew with the place of our birth as a People and to signify the traditional hope of resurrection in the "End of Days", and return to the Land.

The present Chevra Kaddisha in Victoria builds upon the historic self-reliance of the Jewish community here in matters pertaining to death as to life. Within the same organizational structure there is a "chevra" of women to care for women, and a "chevra" of men to care for the men. The members of the Chevra Kaddisha are always volunteers, for no profit is allowed to be gained from a death. Those who participate in this holy work are fulfilling a "mitzvah", a commandment, a holy deed, weaving the way of Jewish life around a universally difficult moment. As there is to be no profit, there is to be absolute simplicity in shrouds and coffin, for in death all are equal. Embalming or other preservation of the body is not allowed. As with the simple shroud and coffin nothing is to impede the return of flesh to dust. The task of the Chevra Kaddisha is a holy obligation and an essential part of the life of a Jewish community. Through the Chevra Kaddisha death truly becomes part of the life of the community.

Jewish laws and customs concerning death and mourning are a reminder to the Jewish community of its responsibilities upon the death of one of its members. The effect of these laws is essentially two-fold, to show respect for the dead and to provide a supportive framework for the needs of the mourners. Though mourning can surely not be determined solely by blood, there are seven categories of immediate relatives who are obligated to mourn and be mourned for: father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter and spouse. Each of these seven categories of mourner is required to perform the rite of "keriah", the rending of one's garment as an emotional release and symbol of the torn spirit within us caused by the death of a loved one. "Keriah" takes place today generally before the start of the funeral service and is done while standing. It is done on the left side, nearest the heart, for parents; and on the right side for each of the other relatives listed above. Upon arrival at the cemetery,



the coffin is carried into the cemetery and lowered into the grave by family and friends. The procession from the gate to the grave pauses seven times, allowing moments of memory and reflection. Mourners and family participate in the shoveling of earth into the grave. It is as though we lay a blanket of earth over the dead as we bring them to their rest. Though emotionally difficult, to so participate provides an important psychological step in the mourning process, and is considered an honour and show of respect for the dead. Whatever needs to be done is traditionally done by those who cared for the person and by those who care for Jewish tradition, and for whom it is not simply a job to be completed. As with all the work of the Chevra Kaddisha, it is a holy task that makes death part of the life of the Jewish community. As Jews leave the cemetery, or upon arrival home, it is customary to pour water over our hands in a ritual manner to symbolically represent purification after contact with the dead and to remind ourselves that life goes on and that now, upon leaving the cemetery, we must turn to the needs of the living.

There are stages in the mourning process, beginning at the moment of death when one becomes an "onen" and is exempt from positive religious commandments. At the time of the burial each of the seven relatives for whom one is obligated to mourn becomes an "avel" or mourner. "Shiva" is the seven-day period of mourning that begins immediately after the funeral. The day of burial is counted as the first day of "Shiva", provided the burial was completed before sunset. The morning of the seventh day is considered a full day and thus the conclusion of the "Shiva" period. "Sheloshim" is the thirty day period of mourning which begins at the time of burial, thus including "Shiva". As with "Shiva", a fraction of a day counts as a whole day in counting the "Sheloshim". A period of abstention from festivity and amusement, the "Sheloshim" constitutes the full mourning period for all relatives other than mother and father. The period of mourning for a parent is twelve months. Counting the twelve months begins from the time of death and not burial. An entire twelve months are counted and not fractions of days as in counting "shiva" and "sheloshim".

The Mourner's Kaddish, the memorial prayer that does not refer to death but sanctifies God and life, is recited for parents for eleven months minus one day, counting from the day of death. For relatives for whom one is required to mourn other than parents, the Kaddish may be recited for only thirty days, though many continue for the entire eleven months minus one day. "Yahrzeit" is the anniversary of a death. It is observed for twenty-four hours on the anniversary of the day of death according to the Hebrew calendar. A twenty-four hour candle is lit in the home and Kaddish is recited in the context of a minyan. Some people fast on a "Yahrzeit". It is also customary to engage in the study of a religious text and to give to charity in honour of the one who is remembered. Since Jacob placed a stone on Rachel's grave, as recorded in the Book of Genesis (35:19-20), it is customary for Jews to place a stone on the graves of loved ones. This is generally done within the first year following the death.

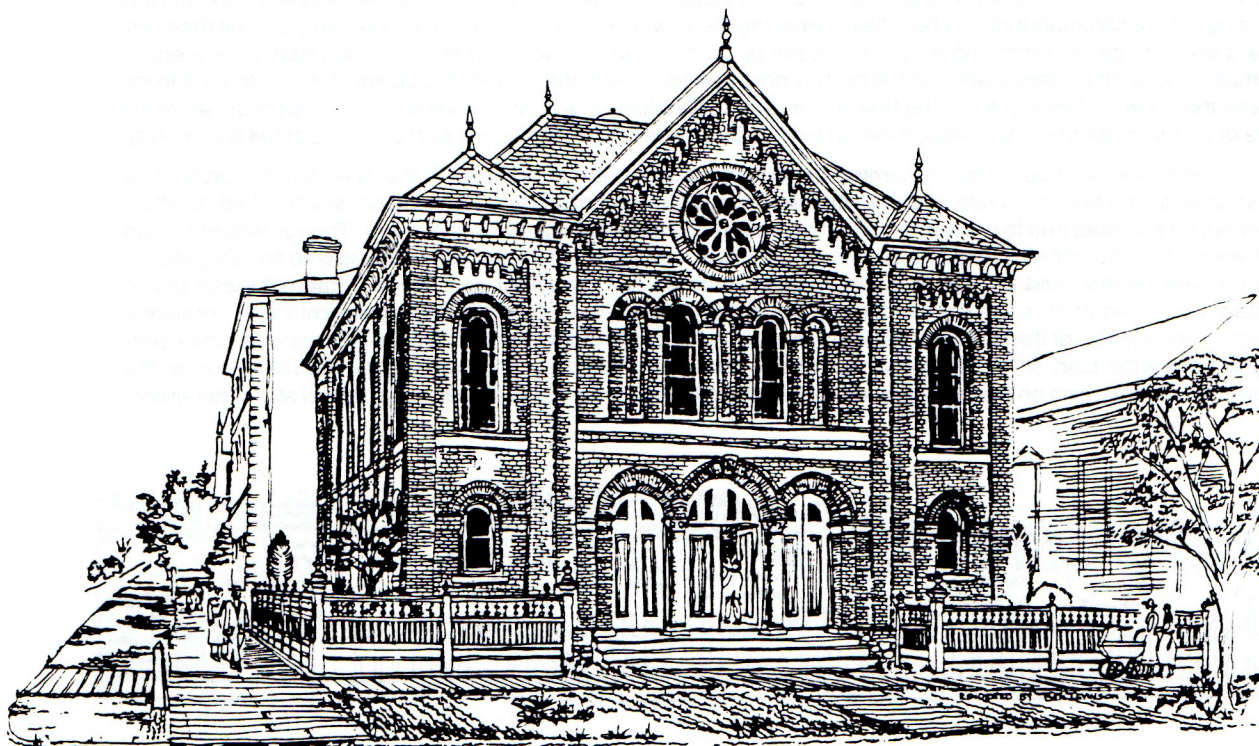
The gravestones in the Jewish cemetery of Victoria tell the story of Jewish life and continuity, of who people were and from where they came, of Hebrew names and the counting of Jewish days by the Hebrew calendar. They came from many places and brought Jewish life with them. Here they have been "gathered to their people", and here they "sleep with their ancestors", a "living" link in the continuum of Jewish life and time.

Traditionally inscribed on a Jewish gravestone are the Hebrew letters, **ת'נ'צ'ב'ה**

They stand for the Hebrew words offered here in the plural as our prayer:

תְּהַיִּנֶּה נַפְשׁוֹתֵיהֶם צְרוּרוֹת בְּצִרוֹר הַחַיִּים.

May their souls be bound up in the bond of life



Beth Tikvah Cemetery
Surrey, B. C.

- 283 -

AMES, Harold (Star of David) / (H.W.) / HAROLD AMES /
Nov. 5, 1916 - July 11, 1991 / Beloved
Husband, Father & Grandfather / AMES

ATNIKOV, Frank R. (Star of David) / (H.W.) / FRANK R.
ATNIKOV / July 1, 1906 - May 12, 1991 /
Beloved Husband & Father / ATNIKOV

COFMAN, Merle (Star of David) / (H.W.) / MERLE COFMAN /
May 19, 1913 - Apr. 24, 1989 / Beloved
Mother & Grandmother / COFMAN

DOBBS, Helen (Star of David) / (H.W.) / HELEN DOBBS /
Aug. 25, 1914 - Mar. 24, 1988 / Always
Remembered / DOBBS

GAYNOR, Rhonda Beth (Star of David) / (H.W.) / RHONDA BETH
GAYNOR / Sept. 16, 1964 - June 24, 1992 /
Beloved Daughter, Mother & Sister /
GAYNOR

HOWITT, Joseph Benjamin (Star of David) / (H.W.) / JOSEPH
BENJAMIN HOWITT / Aug. 1, 1904 - Feb. 7,
1975 / Beloved Husband, Father &
Grandfather / HOWITT

ISMAN, Joshua Aaron (Star of David) / (H.W.) / JOSHUA AARON
ISMAN / Dec. 16, 1991 - Mar. 19, 1992

LAZARUS, Steve Neil (Star of David) / (H.W.) / STEVE NEIL
LAZARUS / Feb. 28, 1953 - July 3, 1990 /
Beloved Husband, Son, Brother & Uncle /
LAZARUS

MAZER, Doris (Star of David) / (H.W.) / DORIS MAZER /
Aug. 15, 1928 - Dec. 28, 1987 / MAZER

MOSS, Helen (Star of David) / (H.W.) / HELEN MOSS /
Oct. 30, 1919 - April 14, 1988 / MOSS

POWELL, Leonard (Star of David) / (H.W.) / LEONARD POWELL
/ Oct. 16, 1920 - Mar. 11, 1988 / Beloved
Husband & Father / POWELL

RITTER, Nealy (Star of David) / (H.W.) / NEALY RITTER /
Dec. 19, 1944 - Nov. 24, 1988 / Loving
Wife, Mother, Daughter & Sister / RITTER

SURES, Louis (Star of David) / (H.W.) / LOUIS SURES /
Aug. 8, 1914 - Jan. 4, 1990 / Beloved
Husband, Father & Grandfather / SURES

Beth Tikvah

- 284 -

VAZ, Ivan

(Star of David) / (H.W.) / IVAN VAZ /
Mar. 22, 1905 - Nov. 13, 1987 / VAZ

WIES, Hymie

(Star of David) / (H.W.) / HYMIE WIES /
Jan. 9, 1909 - Oct. 16, 1990 / Beloved
Husband, Father & Grandfather / WIES