



Central Synagogue

Resource Guide

A CENTRAL RITUAL

Unveiling a Gravestone

How do we cope with the sadness of loss? Our Biblical ancestors took time to grieve the loss of their loved ones, beginning in the book of Genesis. On his beloved wife Rachel's gravesite, Jacob set up a pillar to serve as a monument. Today, months after a funeral, we unveil a tombstone, praying that the soul of our loved one is safely at rest -- and encouraging our own souls to focus on life on Earth in memory of those who have died. Marking an eternal resting place for our loved one reflects the tender care we have shown for our relative -- and enables us to return to this exact spot at poignant moments throughout our lives.

Unveiling: A Monument In Remembrance

The Basics

- An unveiling, a ceremony in which we remove a cloth cover to dedicate a recently erected gravestone, typically takes place **a little under a year** after the death of a loved one.
- The finality of a gravestone can encourage continued **emotional healing in the mourning process**, moving further from grief and sorrow to acceptance and healing.
- The permanence of a monument, as well as the stones we place on top, serve as **a reminder of our rock-solid, eternal commitment** to our loved one's memory.



Rabbi Maurice Salth

Unveiling rituals are often led by family and friends of the deceased because you are the ones that knew your loved one best. In so many ways the key part of an unveiling is your very presence; you and other family and friends returning to the place of the burial is a testament of your undying love for the person that has died.

Preparation

- Invite family and friends to attend. While it is customary to recite the Mourner's Kaddish in the presence of a minyan of 10 people during a synagogue prayer service, you can say Kaddish with whomever is present during a cemetery visit.
- Choose your supplementary reading(s) ahead of time (p. 6-10, or of your own choosing) and identify a reader.

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- Designate someone to cover the gravestone and uncover it during the ceremony.
- Print out this packet for yourself and make copies of any shared readings (including Mourner's Kaddish on page 11) for others. Bring head coverings, if you wish.
- If you are not comfortable reading the Mourner's Kaddish, consider assigning to someone else in advance.
- If you are in deep mourning, identify someone else to lead this ritual, if possible. At minimum, be sure to have everything written down to take pressure off yourself in the moment. Ask another attendee to be prepared to step in if needed. No one needs to lead alone.

Decoding the Gravestone

- While not every Jewish gravestone has Hebrew writing or all the details below, this visual can help you decode the various inscriptions on some of the monuments you may encounter in the cemetery.



פ"נ - An abbreviation for "po nikbar" (here lies).

The Hebrew name of the deceased (e.g. Bracha bat Moshe Eliezer).

The Hebrew date (e.g. 5th of Tammuz, 5767).

ה נ צ ב ה - An abbreviation for the Hebrew phrase "t'he nefesh tz'rorah b'tzror hachayvim" (may the soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life).

A Ceremony by Rabbi Maurice Salth and Rabbinic Intern Andrew Kaplan Mandel

<suggested time: 10-15 minutes>

1. **Cover the gravestone ahead of time.** Have someone exit their car first and place a sheet or covering over the gravestone(s). Then gather people around the gravesite so that as best as possible you are in a horseshoe/semi-circle.
2. **Welcome everyone.** Introduce the ritual by explaining what is about to happen.
 - o You might say: *“We are glad we are together to dedicate this stone for our loved one, _____. During our unveiling ritual, we will read a poem or two, dedicate the gravestone, shared a few memories, place a rock upon the gravestone, and say our memorial prayers.”*
3. **Offer a reading or two, based on your preference, from the six selections beginning on the next page or a treasured reading from the family.**
 - o You might say: *“We will begin with the following reading(s).”*

Option A: Ecclesiastes 3 (1-8)

To everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heavens:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to discard;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
A time to be silent, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time of war, and a time of peace.

Option B: Fault Lines

Cracks form as we survive grief
They start with sharp broken edges
Eventually dulled when worn by time
The crevasses remain but they narrow
And rather than fall into them
Hope and light begin to emerge
We can never completely avoid them
They can reappear when least expected
Yet with each day that passes
We learn to appreciate their evocations
The sharp stabs become less and fewer
The colorful memories grow more vivid
Without the gift of deeply loving
The sorrow of grief can't abide
And without the sorrow of grief
The depth of love remains silent
We all heal in our own time frame
May Adonai speed our healing now.
-- Suzanne Sabransky

Option C: When I Die, I Want Your Hands On My Eyes

When I die, I want your hands on my eyes;
I want the light and the heat of your beloved hands
to pass their freshness over me one more time
to feel the smoothness that changed my destiny.
I want you to live while I wait for you, asleep,
I want for your ears to go on hearing the wind,
for you to smell the sea that we loved together
and for you to go on walking the sand where we walked.
I want for what I love to go on living
and as for you
I loved you and sang you above everything, for that,
go on flowering, flowery one,
so that you reach all that my love orders for you,
so that my shadow passes through your hair,
so that they know by this the reason for my song.
-- *Pablo Neruda (in translation)*

Option D: I Haven't Forgotten You

I haven't forgotten you,
even though it's been some time now
since I've seen your face, touched your hand, heard your voice.
You are with me all the time.
I used to think you left me.
I know better now.
You come to me.
Sometimes in fleeting moments
I feel your presence close by.
But I still miss you.
And nothing, no person, no joy,
no accomplishment, no distraction,
not even God,
can fill the gaping hole in your absence has left in my life.
But, mixed together with all my sadness,
there is a great joy for having known you.
I want to thank you for the time we shared,
for the love you gave, for the wisdom you spread.

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Thank you for the magnificent moments
and the ordinary ones, too.
There was beauty in our simplicity.
Holiness in our unspectacular days.
And I will carry the lessons you taught me always.
Your life has ended, but your light can never be extinguished.
It continues to shine upon me even on the darkest nights
and illuminates my way.
May God bless you
as you have blessed me with love, with grace and with peace.
-- *Rabbi Naomi Levy, adapted*

Option E: Psalm 23

Adonai is my shepherd; I shall not want.
God makes me lie down in green pastures;
God leads me beside the still waters.
God restores my soul;
God guides me in straight paths for the sake of God's name.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will
fear no evil,
For You are with me.
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of Adonai forever.

Option F: Psalm 121: 1-2

*Esa einai el heharim, me'ayin yavo ezri?
Ezri me'im Adonai oseh shamayim va'aretz.*
I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Eternal One,
who made heaven and Earth.

4. Unveil the gravestone.

- You might say: *"I will now ask _____ to lead us in the ritual for unveiling the gravestone."*

Unveiling the Gravestone

On behalf of the family, and in the presence of relatives and friends, we consecrate this memorial to _____ as a sign of undying love.

In Hebrew and/or English, with the deceased's name:

נִשְׁמָה שֶׁל _____ צְרוּרָה בְּצִרוֹר הַחַיִּים
Nishmah shel _____ tz'rurah bitz'ror ha-chayyim.

The soul of _____ is bound up in the bond of eternal life.

God of Infinite Love, strengthen us in our sorrow so that we, walking through the valley of the shadow of death, may be guided by Your light. Though a link has been severed from our family chain, help us to be more closely united with the dear ones who remain. May our actions and aspirations honor our loved one as surely as this monument, which will ever be a symbol of abiding devotion. So will _____ live on for blessing among us.

o

5. **Invite reflections.** If you wish, this is a time to include memories from loved ones.

- o You might say: *“I want to invite us to share a reflection or a memory of our loved one. I’ll start.”* [Then, share your memory.] *“Does anyone else want to share?”* [After everyone who would like to speak has spoken, you might say:] *“Thank you for sharing. I know we will be speaking more about our memories today and for the rest of our lives.”*

6. **Encourage those in attendance to place a stone.**

- o You might say: *“In ancient times, our ancestors used piles of rocks to mark the burial plots of loved ones, turning their grief for the deceased into enduring remembrance. I want to invite all*

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who would like to find a stone or rock on the ground and place it on the monument. After we place our rocks on the monument, we will say traditional words of mourning.”

- If you are near the graves of other loved ones, you may place a stone on their monuments, too.

7. If you wish, recite the optional memorial prayer, El Malei Rachamim, in English or in Hebrew.

- Some choose to recite this prayer as a group in English, or to have a volunteer sing it in Hebrew.
- You might say: *“We will now recite El Malei Rachamim, God full of Compassion, a prayer for the soul of our loved one.”*

El Malei Rachamim: God, Full of Compassion

אֵל מֵלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים הַמְּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה
בְּמַעְלֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוּרִים כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ מְזַהְרִים לְנִשְׁמוֹת יְקִירָנוּ שֶׁהֵלְכוּ
לְעוֹלָמָם. אָנָּה בֵּעַל הַרַחֲמִים הַסְּתִירָם בְּצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים וְצָרָר בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים
אֶת נְשָׁמָתָם. יְהוָה הוּא נְחַלְתָּם וַיְנַוְחוּ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבָם וַנֹּאמֶר אָמֵן

*El maley rakhamim shokhen ba-m'romim ha-m'tzei m'nukhah
n'khonah takhat kanfei ha-sh'khinah b'ma'alot k'doshim u't'horim
k'zohar ha-rakiah maz'hirim l'nishmot yakireinu she-hal'khu
l'olamam. Ana ba'al ha-rakhamim ha-s'tirem b'tzel k'nafekha
l'olamim u-tz'ror bitz'ror ha-khayim et nishmatam. Adonai hu
nakhalatam v'yanukhu b'shalom al mish'kabam v'nomar amen.*

God, full of compassion, dwelling in the heavens' heights, bring proper rest beneath the wings of your *Shechinah* among the holy and the pure, who shine like the brilliance of the skies, to the soul of our beloved, who has gone to the eternal place of rest. May You who are the source of mercy provide shelter beneath your wings eternally and bind our loved one's soul in the bundle of life to rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

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8. Recite the Mourner's Kaddish, found on the last page so that you can easily make copies for others.

- You might say: *"We will now slowly read the Mourner's Kaddish prayer. This is a prayer that close family will recite each year on the anniversary of our loved one's death, and during Yizkor, the special memorial prayers recited on Yom Kippur and festivals. You may read along in the Aramaic and Hebrew, or you can say "amen" at the end of each section, which is another way of affirming the content of the prayer."*
- Then recite the Kaddish slowly for all to participate.

9. Conclude.

- **You might say:** *"As we conclude, I have four final statements to make to the dear human being we have loved and lost. After each sentence, please say: 'We will never forget you.'*
 - *Your memory is sacred to us. (We will never forget you.)*
 - *May the ongoing journey of your soul be joyful. (We will never forget you.)*
 - *We will tell stories of your life. (We will never forget you.)*
 - *Send us blessings when you can. (We will never forget you.)"*
- **You might then conclude with:** *"May the source of peace send peace to those who mourn and comfort to all of us who are bereaved. Amen. When we are ready, let's head back to our cars, there is no rush, we can take our time."*
- If there will be a post-unveiling lunch or gathering, announce logistics of time and place at this time.
- *"This formally concludes our service. Thank you for being here."*

Mourner's Kaddish

יְתַגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא
בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ
וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן
יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וְלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמָיָא
יְתִבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקוּדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא
לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשֻׁבָּהּ תָּא וְנִחְמָתָא דְאִמְרֵינוּ בְּעֵלְמָא וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמָיָא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן
עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di v'ra chir'utei; v'yamlich malchutei b'haveichon u-v'yomeichon, uv'hayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba-agala u-vi-z'man kariv, v'imru amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam u-l'almei almay.

Yitbarach v'yishtabah, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam, v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar, v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kudsha, b'rich hu, l'ela min kol birchata v'shirata, tushb'hata v'nehemata, da-amiran b'alma, v'imru amen. Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya, v'hayim, aleinu v'al koi yisrael, v'imru amen. Oseh shalom bi-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael v'al kol yoshvei tevel, v'imru amen.

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May the Eternal One establish God's kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. *May God's great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.* Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be the Eternal, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen. May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. May The One who creates peace in the high places create peace for us, for all Israel, and for all inhabitants on Earth, and let us say, Amen.