

Rallying behind these words can be an outrageous expectation of a mourner. We have questions about the nature of God, of justice, of the universe. Yet the cauldron of mourning and the *Kaddish* can open a belief system that has suddenly become too small to hold the great paradoxes of holiness and horror that dwell together in our universe.

Find Holiness: Making Peace with Life

As old assumptions about faith and/or meaning are shattered and a new worldview comes into being, we enter a spiritual domain that can slowly bring a new peace to what life has brought. This peace, often called acceptance, signifies that mourning never entirely comes to an end and that healing does not mean the cessation of grief. Rather, with healing comes an ability to integrate the death and the grief into our lives.

This understanding of the ongoing, changing nature of our grief is also addressed by the wisdom of the Jewish mourning path. After the first year of mourning, traditionally we no longer stand for the *Kaddish* at every service. However, the Jewish mourning path wisely provides us with five days a year on which we are encouraged to attend to our grief. These are the four days when the memorial prayers are said (*Yizkor*) and the anniversary of the death (*Yahrzeit*). These days help us bring the wisdom and insight we gather with the passage of the seasons to our renewed relationship with the deceased. We say *Kaddish* with a full understanding of its meaning and with gratitude that our relationships with those who are gone are still part of our life. Over time, with attention to the grief work and the process of healing as framed by the *Kaddish* and each mourner's understanding of it, the mourner can come to terms with its words.

Out of the darkness in which old concepts of faith have ceased to serve, a new theology may emerge.

Know That Wholeness Is Possible

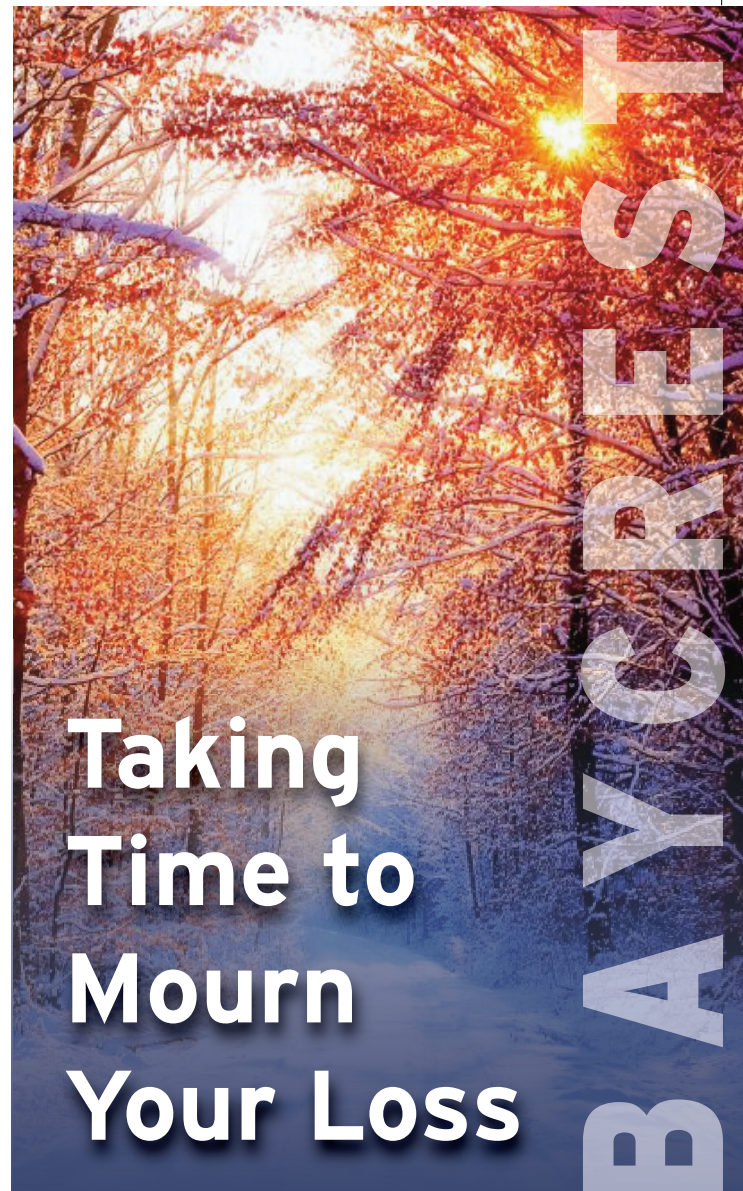
When we are newcomers to grief, it is impossible to imagine that we can ever experience peace again. We have an image of what healing will look like based on the life that we lived in the past. We hold fast to that image until the expression of our grief reshapes our sense of the universe. Out of that new construction, new possibilities emerge that somehow can find wholeness in a world that can encompass both intense pain and extreme beauty. But it takes time to build that new world. It takes time to come to terms with what it means to be human. Please, give yourself some time.

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Taking Time to Mourn Your Loss

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New to the World of Grief

When we are new to grief, it almost seems as though we are being pursued by our own terror in the midst of the chaotic flood of emotions that is common to mourning. We may also feel as though we are being pursued by the callous attitudes toward grief and mourning that are common in Western culture - attitudes that increase the difficulty of this already difficult part of life.

The turmoil of chaotic thoughts and feelings are common to mourners. In such cases, it is wise and appropriate to consult a doctor and to reach out to others for help. Mourners need to hear that their difficult or peculiar behavior is not abnormal. They need to be acquainted with the resources they can rely on to help navigate grief's emotional landscape.

Valuable Lessons in Grief

As a culture, we don't give adequate attention to the challenges that come in the wake of loss. We seldom encourage mourners to take time for grieving. We pressure them pressure to "get back to normal" as quickly as possible and to behave as if their lives have not changed radically. This pressure denies them community support, the tools of mourning, and the time they need to transform their lives. This stress

causes mourners to doubt their appropriate responses to the trauma that entered their world. It often propels them to search for cosmetic approaches to mourning. People ask, "How can I hide my grief?" instead of "What can I learn from it?"

Mourning Rituals as Vehicles to Care

Jewish mourning rituals give us time to absorb the lessons of grief and acknowledge the changing needs of mourners. Whether we observe the traditional mourning rituals or adapt them for our grieving process, we can invoke them as a sign to the outer world that there are sanctions enabling us to take time for grief. They can also be a reminder to ourselves that our grief will change over time. This can be a soothing touchstone when the wells of tears, anger, and anxiety seem to be infinite. By setting aside time we can focus in our own way on our loss.



Let the Community Take Care of Us

In the stunned, early phases of grief, we need physical care-taking: rest, nutrition, and exercise. Vulnerable to the high stress and confusion of raw grief, mourners are likely to neglect themselves. The Talmudic injunction that mourners must be fed by the community

guarantees that mourning begins under the concerned, caring communal eye. People bring food to the house of mourning in the week following the burial.

The nourishment becomes emotional after the week of *shiva* (the traditional seven-day period of mourning immediately following burial, during which time the mourner stays at home), as the traditional mourner goes to the synagogue to say *Kaddish* and the community holds the mourner in its embrace. Here the *Kaddish* gives structure to the world and provides a place to stand at a time that we may be struggling to find balance.

Open Our Heart to the Expression of Feelings

As the numbness begins to wear off, we need emotional care-taking. We may benefit by working with a bereavement counselor, joining a bereavement group, or keeping a journal to focus on the changing feelings of our grief. At this time, the words of the *Kaddish* can be the vehicle for continued communication, a line between the living and the dead that enables the mourner to do the emotional work essential to grieving. Mourners can find the voice for their guilt, regret, anger and love; honestly expressing all their feelings. The *Kaddish* can be the vehicle for working through unfinished business and finding healing.

Find Meaning: Create a New Contract with Life

Our thoughts need care-taking as well. The meaning of the words of the *Kaddish* is sometimes less of a balm and more of a challenge. The words ask us to praise God so that the entire universe will be infused with God's Holiness. But the death of someone close often provokes a profound spiritual crisis.