

The Hebrew Cemetery Association

By *Lorrie Klemons, Publicity, Hebrew Cemetery Association*

It is painful to lose someone you love. It is even more painful to grieve by yourself, isolated and alone. One of the great things about being Jewish is our tradition. Just as there is a Jewish way of life, so too, is there a Jewish way of death. Our Judaism provides us with a pattern of practice and ritual for every aspect of death. Keenly sensitive to the needs of the bereaved, our traditions and rituals incorporate the utmost regard for the dying and the deepest concern for those left behind to mourn.

When you lose someone you love you feel shock, despair, isolation, anger, at times, even guilt. How does one cope with the barrage of emotions that arise at such a catastrophic loss? How can one channel these emotions into positive and productive expressions of grief?

Judaism teaches us to love life. That love is so much more passionate when we embrace the traditions and rituals that give it true meaning. When we embrace life in even the most mundane of activities, we bring ourselves to a higher spiritual level. In Judaism, our attitudes about death are shaped by our love of life. For Judaism is a way life. So when we bury someone we love, our being takes on another whole existence

as our Jewish rites of mourning become more for us the living than for the dead.

Our Jewish practices of mourning serve to both honor the deceased and comfort the bereaved. While those who lay



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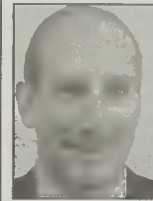
dying often lose their sense of identity, isolated by their very own American society, Jewish tradition recognizes that death is part of everyday life and teaches us to face it with realism and honesty. The tearing of a mourner's garment or the wearing of a torn piece of black ribbon is a sign of the tear in our hearts as we publicly confront the death of a loved one.

We bury our dead in traditional white linen shrouds and plain pine coffins to remind us that death is the great equalizer. According to Rabbis Ron Isaacs and Kerry Olitzky, "In the democracy of death, all are equal, no matter what their social or economic status." It is the soul that ultimately

defines the person, not the material possessions that one boasts. The Zohar states that "That which constitutes a real person is the soul, the rest being only garments which cover the inner essence."

Our Judaism teaches us to love God. At our times of greatest need, our faith can comfort and console. Find a way to bring God into your life at a higher level to further elevate your soul. Allow Him to be both your Protector and your Partner as you face the mysteries and realities of living and ultimately of dying. Allow Him to be your rod and your staff as you seek the strength to overcome the challenges of life and the grief of death.

Your community can also offer you the strength you need. Find that strength by reaching out and joining hands with the other 900-plus Charlottean Jews who together support the ideals of Jewish communal life ... and death ... through their membership in the Hebrew Cemetery Association. Membership in the cemetery helps to elevate your soul by guaranteeing a holy and dignified resting place for all those who precede you in eternal life. For more information about membership benefits, graves, interfaith or cremation areas, prepaid funeral costs, or endowment donations, call Cemetery Director Joe Kodsi at 704-364-4112. ✪



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Jeff Katz

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this is Judaism – your responsibility is to the living. But in addition to that, think of what your dad would want you to do. What would he say? And clearly, his concern was his grandson. So, it was kind of at that point that I went back to a synagogue for the first time in years."

Katz considers his father one of his heroes. "It's going to sound trite but I've come to really admire my father over the years. He came essentially from a tough background. ... I saw my dad work very hard to raise his family, to teach them right from wrong. My dad's admonitions to me were always, 'Don't be stupid.' Look, it's not Plato or Nietzsche, but it pretty much keeps you on the straight and narrow if you follow that advice: 'Don't be stupid.' So I really have over the years come to admire that common sense and that devotion to family."

At home, he and his wife, Heidi, are making a Jewish environment for their three children, Harry, 5, Julia, 3, and Joe, 2. "... It's an interesting situation because my wife grew up Catholic. Of course we were going to be the family where this was not going to be an issue. ... We knew better than anyone else who had ever confronted this. So that's an issue. That's something that's continually evolving. My wife has become, over the years, much more receptive and she's very interested in Judaism and the kids.

"... My wife called my mom a couple of years ago when we

moved into a new home and she was very excited. She said, 'Doris, I just want to tell you we moved into this new house and it's beautiful. We know it's really ours. Jeff right now is outside and he's nailing the *meshuggene* to the door.'" Katz stops to chuckle at his wife's innocent confusion of *meshuggene* (crazy) and *mezuzah*. "She is absolutely trying and I don't ask any more than that."

When asked what else could make his life in Charlotte complete, Katz responds, "I'm still looking for chopped herring." ✪

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