

## 'By your side...'

A selection of poetry, prose and prayers

**Vol 3: Jewish Prayers**

When physically possible, dying is a process of consciously completing a mitzvah-centered life.

The Jewish approach to dying involves several major life tasks including:

### **Teshuvah.**

Engage in all possible healthy efforts to heal open wounds in relationships before your death.

If there are such wounds that you are responsible for keeping open, do everything in your power

to release the person involved from responsibility and make sure he or she is informed.

Leave this world with a clean slate; your ability to do this mitzvah called teshuvah will affect the wellness of future generations.

(To learn more see Volume I, Reclaiming Judaism, pages 15-33)

### **Goses.**

At the point when your doctors report that you are likely to be within three days of dying, you are considered to be a goses, one who is not to be disturbed. In order for families to implement this practice, it is important that they understand it in advance. Tell them, and in your living Will leave instructions, that when this point is reached people should disturb you as little as possible. This does not, however, mean leaving you unattended or in pain; a dying person should not feel abandoned. [Y.D. 339:4]

That said, nothing should be done that might interfere with your soul's work of preparation and departure.

(To learn more see Living Jewish Life Cycle, Volume III of the Reclaiming Judaism series.).

### **Vidui.**

This is a traditional piece of liturgy in which you take responsibility for what you've done in your life. Some elect to add to the liturgy from their own life's specific journey. Those who are uncomfortable with G\*d language may also create their own simple, free-flowing statements.

Often translated as "confession," a process-based approach to this idea is termed "life review." Those clergy with Clinical Pastoral Counselling training can be wonderful guides through an end of life review process.

For an interpretive version of Vidui please see Living Jewish Life Cycle, one then continues with the Shema:

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### Shema.

This is the sacred phrase one says when going to sleep, waking up and leaving this life.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Ehad

All who are able, say the Shema, the Jewish prayer about the unity of All Being, when death becomes imminent. This is like putting a mezuzah up on the threshold of your life, the soul's last major act before leaving the body.

In traditional prayer services, the Shema is bracketed by prayers that are about love. On the threshold of leaving this life, look back on the truth of your life, concluding with those you have loved and those times you love, remembering.

- A traditional Vidui, confessional prayer regarding our efforts in life, is appropriate
- By saying the Shema when you are aware death is coming upon you, you are putting a mezuzah up at the Threshold of your life.
- Your soul may be about to move beyond your body. If tradition has it right, you will be pleasantly surprised.
- Should you not have time to do this, know that it will be done for you if a Jewish hospice or chaplaincy program or a family rabbi is involved in your dying and death process.

**One of the most characteristic of the devotions used by Jews is the Shema.**

The Shema does not have to be recited in Hebrew. It may be recited in any language a person understands.

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### The Shema (English Version)

Hear, O Israel: the Eternal One is our God, the Eternal God is One.  
Praised for ever be God's glorious majesty.  
You shall love the Eternal One, your God, with all your heart,  
with all your soul, with all your might. Let these words,  
which I command you this day, be always in your heart.  
Teach them diligently to your children; speak of them in your home and on your way,  
when you lie down and when you rise up.  
Bind them as a sign upon your hand; let them be like frontlets between your eyes;  
inscribe them on the doorsteps of your house, and on your gates.

(Deuteronomy Chapter 6 Verses 4-9)

### The Shema (Jewish Version)

Sh'ma Yis-ra-eil, A-do-nai  
E-lo-hei-nu, A-do-nai E-chad.  
Ba-ruch sheim k'vod mal-chu-to l'o-lam va-ed.  
V'a-hav-ta eit A-do-nai E-lo-he-cha,  
B'chawl l'va-v'cha, u-v'chawl  
naf-sh'cha, u-v'chawl m'o-de-cha.  
V'ha-yu ha-d'va-rim ha-ei-leh,  
A-sheer a-no-chi m'tsa-v'cha ha-yom, al  
l'va-ve-cha. V'shi-nantam  
l'-va-ne-cha, v'di-bar-ta bam,  
b'shiv-t'cha b'vei-te-cha, uvlech-  
t'cha va-de-rech, u-v'shawch-b'cha  
uv-ku-me-cha. Uk-shartam  
l'ot al ya-de-cha, v'ha-yu l'to-ta-fot  
bein ei-ne-cha. Uch-tavtam,  
al m'zu-zot bei-te-cha,  
u-vish-a-re-cha.

**In addition to reciting the Shema, a staff member who wishes to recite prayers for a Jewish person may:**

- **Read from the Book of Psalms from a Jewish Bible.**
- **Where a Jewish Bible is not accessible reading from a Christian Bible would be acceptable.**