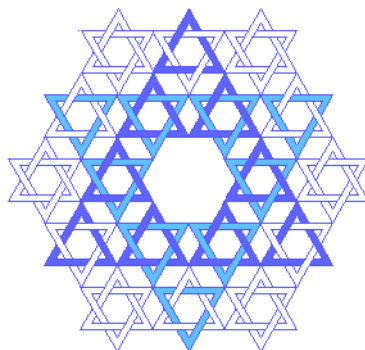




Kahal B'raira /
community of choice

Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

Service During Shiva





We seek fairness and justice, yet what is less just than that a single good person should suffer or die; that a person we love and cherish, a part of our own lives, should be taken from us? In truth, we know that the forces of nature, the mechanisms of biology, the random complexities of our civilizations, are not fair. They don't notice us.

(Together)

It is a fearful thing
To love what death can touch

A fearful thing
To love, to hope, to dream
To be.

A sacred thing,
A human thing
A mortal thing.

We conquer the injustice of the world around us with love, and with the support we give to one another in times such as these. The ancient Jewish traditions of a week of sitting Shiva and a year of restrictive mourning have largely given way to the imperatives of modern life. This makes it ever more important that the great healing power of these traditions not be disregarded. A kind word, the sharing of a memory, a friendly inquiry over the next year, by mail or phone or even e-mail, is our duty as human beings and can be our greatest joy.

Such mitzvot — the tiny deeds that _____ performed, the jokes, the tender touches, the shy smiles, and the hugs – will live forever in our memories. The support we give to each other, and especially to the closest family and friends of _____, over the next year are our own steps toward the only immortality that we mortals can achieve.

Jewish tradition teaches us to cherish our memories of the departed. But remembering at this time is not merely about our pain and grief. We who are so often alone with our thoughts are ever members of communities, Dag Hammarsköld wrote, “What makes loneliness and anguish is not that I have no one to share my burden, but this: I have only my own burden to bear.” So as you share your memories – joys and sorrows, not only the pleasures but also the conflicts – remember that in asking others to help you bear your burden you are also helping them bear theirs.



(Memories are shared)

(Together)

Believe, when you are most unhappy, that there is something for you to do in the world. So long as you can sweeten another's pain, life is not in vain.

Helen Keller

We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in the world – the company of those who have known suffering. When it seems that our sorrow is too great to be borne, let us think of the great family of the heavy-hearted into which our grief has given us entrance and, inevitably, we will feel about us their arms, their sympathy, their understanding.

Please take the hands of those close to you, and let us read responsively:

Leader: Ay-fo oree?

All: Where is my light?

O-Ree Bee

My light is in me.

Ay-fo tikva-tee ?

Where is my hope?

Tikva-tee bee

My hope is in me.

Ay-fo ko-khee?

Where is my strength?

Ko-khee bee

My strength is in me.

V'gam bakh

And in you.