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The Jewish Burial Service

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THE JEWISH BURIAL SERVICE

EVERY part of the Jewish burial service, from the confession of the dying person to the mourners' return to the sad house of mourning, shows reverence, shows faith and hope. The Jews have ever given honor to the dead, to their own dead but also to the non-Jew and to the stranger, even to the criminal and the enemy. Normally the duty of burying the dead rests on kinsmen; but if a body is found unattended (the rabbis of old speak of a *met mizwab*, "a body which is a commandment"), there is an obligation to the dead man which claims the service of the finder. For, as the Talmud puts it, "great is the respect due to human beings."¹ Criminals are to be buried, according to talmudic law, in a place apart, but eventually the dry bones are to be gathered and reinterred in the family tomb.² Only the "apostate" is to be refused burial in Jewish cemeteries.

THE CUSTOMS

THAT dust might return to dust—not that this is the only reason—it is traditional to hold the burial as soon as possible. And from earliest times, it has been the prevailing Jewish custom to place the body in the earth or in caves of the rock, a custom so unlike that of many pagan nations that it struck the pagan heart of Tacitus as one of the "base and abominable ways of the Jews" (*Hist.* V, 5). Until about a century ago, cremation was looked on with horror, though it was permitted in

1. Meg. 3b; cf. *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935-48), *Megillah*, p. 14. As is to be expected of the frailty of human nature, so high an aspiration was sometimes lost sight of. There was the more or less general rule of the rabbis that men do not accept condolence on the death of a slave. One rabbi, offered formal religious condolence by his disciples when a slave of his had died, refused it and went so far as to add that the only words to be said in such a case should be the same words that are said at the death of an ox: "May the Almighty replenish thy loss" (Ber. 16b; cf. Soncino ed., *Berakoth*, p. 97).

2. Sanh. 46a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Sanhedrin*, p. 305.

exceptional circumstances, such as an epidemic. Indeed, in biblical days, death by burning was the punishment imposed in certain instances of unchastity (Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14; 21:9), and the burning of the very bones was an added disgrace to a death penalty (Jos 7:25).

For the ancient Hebrew, to die meant "to be gathered to his people," "to rest with his fathers" (Gen 49:29; 47:30), and therefore he longed to be buried with his father and his mother (cf. 2 Kg 19:37). The cave Abraham bought at Sarah's death became the burial ground of the families of the patriarchs. Kings had their sepulchers near the Temple and the wealthy in a garden, as the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea shows, in which the crucified body of Christ was laid to rest. Cemeteries were outside the city, at least seventy-five feet from the wall, but always within easy reach from the gate—a rule implied by the words of the Gospel: "As Jesus drew near the gate of the town, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother" (Lk 7:12). *Bet hayim*, *bet 'olam*, "house of the living," and "house of eternity" or "long home," are among the more ancient terms for a cemetery, while some more recent are "the good place," "the pure place."³

Among the early Jews there were no coffins, and the body was not embalmed, Jacob and Joseph, who died in Egypt, being exceptions. Generally the body was carried to its resting place on a bed or bier. When coffins were used, they were of stone or, preferably, of wood, for it was by a tree that death was brought to man. Later, abuses crept in, the wealthy having elaborate and expensive coffins, so simplicity was enforced: a plain unpainted box became the rule. But in modern times, liberal Jews have broken with this tradition. A touching usage is reported, however, in medieval France: it was from the table at which the poor had been served that the coffin was made.

Simple too has been the clothing of the body, though in our day this is no longer the general practice of all Jewish groups. As soon as the dying Jew drew his last breath, the hand of the oldest or most eminent son, or of the nearest of kin, shut his eyes. (At the death of Jacob, for instance, it was Joseph, and not Ruben, the first-born, who performed this work of piety: cf. Gen 46:4.) Then the mouth was closed and the jaw bound; the body was washed, anointed, and wrapped

3. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, III, 637, "Cemetery."

in linen; the hands and feet were tied with napkins—all of which is seen in the New Testament. For many centuries burial societies, often called "holy companies," have taken over these and other duties, particularly the washing of the body and the preparation of the shroud, for it may not be made beforehand.

The plain shroud, likewise abandoned by liberal Jews, is the result of a long development. At one time, the bodies of persons of high rank were robed in the garments proper to their station. But later, to put an end to excessive display, inexpensive garments became customary, white being the preferred color. "Clothe me in sleeved garments of white," Rabbi Jeremiah asked, "put my stockings on me, and place my staff in my hand and my sandals on my feet, and lay me by a road, so that when [at the resurrection] I am summoned I may stand ready."⁴ Another rabbi, however, told his sons to bury him in dun-colored garments, to bury him neither in white nor in black: not in white, for if he should stand in white among the wicked, he would be like a bridegroom among mourners; and not in black, for if he should stand in black among the just, he would be like a mourner among bridegrooms.⁵

It is traditional to bury a man in his prayer shawl, but the fringes, a reminder to keep all the commandments (Num 15:39), are removed, for death ends the duties of the Law. Formerly, the face was covered only if disfigured, and so it often happened that the faces of the rich were visible and the faces of the poor, marked by trials, livid from years of drought, were covered. And the poor were shamed. In deference to them, therefore, it was decided that everyone's face should be covered.⁶ Only, out of pity, a young bridegroom's face was left unveiled. And on the bier of one who died while betrothed were placed the *huppah*, the bridal canopy, and pen and ink for the signing of the marriage contract. A teacher of the Law was honored by having a sacred Scroll buried with him. Another custom was to perforate the coffin so that the soil might more easily penetrate and bring the body back sooner to the dust from which it came. Often a clod of earth from

4. Gen. R. 100:2; cf. *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), II, 989.

5. Gen. R. 96:5; cf. Soncino ed., *Midrash Rabbah*, II, 890. Also Shab. 114a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Shabbath*, p. 559.

6. *Mo'ed Katan*. 27a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Mo'ed Katan*, p. 177.

the Holy Land was placed on the coffin, with the thought that its sacred soil had an atoning power.⁷

In biblical times, even as early as the days of the patriarchs—when Abraham wept and mourned aloud for Sarah (Gen 23:2) and the sons of Jacob sorrowed over their father in a great and heavy sorrow (Gen 50:10)—it was the Jewish way not to suppress the grief of mourning, a freedom seen in the house of Jairus (Mk 5:38) and at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:33). There seem to have been at one time special refrains of lament when a person of rank lay dead. "Alas, my brother!" cried one prophet at the grave of another prophet (3 Kg 13:30). While spices and sweet perfumes burned for King Zedekiah, who died in the peace of the Lord, the people bewailed him: "Alas, [our] lord" (Jer 34:5). But over an unjust king, who had eyes only for oppression, the people would not cry their grief, Jeremiah predicted; no one would do him the love of saying: "Alas, [my] lord! Alas, the noble one!" (Jer 22:18). At times such lamentation broke forth into poetry. In his dirge over Saul and Jonathan, David called on nature to grieve with him, to let the mountains go without dew, without rain, and the fields without fruit. "Thy beauty, O Israel, upon thy high places is slain!" he mourned:

*How are the mighty fallen! . . .
Saul and Jonathan, beloved and dear,
neither in life nor in death divided.
Swifter they were than eagles,
stronger they were than lions.
Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul. . . .
I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan. . . .
How are the mighty fallen,
broken the weapons of war!*

(2 Kg 1:19, 23-24, 26-27)

Jews have always thought it a meritorious act to assist at a burial, so that, to the present day, as many persons as can attend: it is a religious duty to accompany the departed to their last resting place. In former days, everyone was expected to walk in the procession, if only for a few steps. And if the procession was small, even those bent over the

7. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, IV, 143, "Coffin."

Torah were to interrupt their study, rise, and walk with the rest.⁸ Walking in the funeral procession is indeed an act of love, since the dead cannot repay the kindness done to them. But God rewards it. Thus an old midrash exalts Abraham in the words of Proverbs: "He who follows after justice and love finds life, prosperity and honor" (21:21). In burying Sarah, the same commentary continues, Abraham followed after love, and was thus given long and abundant life. And great was his honor, according to this midrash, which makes the Holy One, blessed be He, say to him: "It is my work to do love. Thou hast embraced my work; come and don my raiment"⁹—old age being, as it were, the garment of God, who is the Ancient of days (Dan 7:9, 13). To those who do not join a funeral procession, the rabbis apply the saying that who shows contempt for the poor insults his Maker, while to those who do join it, they apply the saying that who takes pity on the poor honors God (Prov 17:5; 14:31).¹⁰

Then there are the rites of mourning. Holy Scripture records various expressions of sorrow over the loss of a loved one: the mourner throws dust on his head, wears sackcloth, sits in ashes, plucks out the hair of his head and face, removes his headdress and shoes, covers his lips as a guard of silence (cf. Jos 7:6; Jer 16:6; Ez 24:17). But most of these and other like customs have become obsolete. The rabbinical laws of mourning, as observed by orthodox Jews today, require certain observances on the death of one's father and mother, husband or wife, child, brother, and sister. There is first *keri'ah*, a symbolic rending of the garment: the four-inch cut in the lapel is made immediately before the funeral, while, in a spirit of submission, the mourner blesses God: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, the true Judge." Another rite, which begins on returning from the cemetery, is *shivah*. Except for Friday evening's visit to the synagogue, the mourners do not leave their home for seven days, where, unshod, they sit on the floor or on low stools.¹¹ No work should claim their time, nor any

8. Ket. 17a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Kethuboth*, p. 95.

9. Gen. R. 58:9; cf. Soncino ed., *Midrash Rabbah*, II, 514-515.

10. See *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, III, 436, "Burial."

11. Of Nehemiah, then a cupbearer at the Persian court, it is written that when he heard that those of his kinsmen who had been spared captivity were in great distress, that the wall of Jerusalem was broken and its gates burned, he sat down and wept, mourning for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven, the God of greatness, awe, and mercy (2 Esd 1:4-5).

special care for their own bodies; rather should they devote themselves to the reading of the book of Job. All through the seven days a light is kept burning, a symbol of the departed soul, and a similar light is kindled every year on the anniversary of a parent's death.

The mourners' first meal after the funeral, usually bread with eggs or lentils, is prepared by a neighbor and is called the "meal of consolation." Those who come to console must not speak till the mourners break the silence, and when they do speak, it must be to praise the judgment of God. "May the Almighty comfort you among the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem," should be their parting words, and also their greeting on the mourners' first reappearance in the synagogue. Elaborate though these rites are, the rabbis teach that mourning must not be excessive, for they who overindulge in grief will weep for yet another death. Those who mourn beyond the appointed times are reproached by God: "You are not more compassionate toward the departed than I."¹²

It is against such a background of piety toward the dead that Jesus' deliberately stern demand, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead," must be seen. To Him too, of course, burial was a work of mercy and a dead body a sacred thing, yet these were His very words when one of His disciples begged leave from His company. "Lord, let me first go and bury my father" (Mt 8:21-22), the disciple had asked, which might have meant: Let me go home and stay with my father till he lives out his life, and then I shall follow you; or: Let me go home to attend my father's funeral, and when the days of mourning are over, I shall return and join you again. Whether it meant the one or the other, Jesus replied that following Him admitted of no compromise. The lesser must give way to the greater; human ties, however sacred, to divine ties. Those who have not heard the higher call should indeed bury the dead, but it is the disciple's part to follow Him who is the Life. The Old Testament demanded of the high priest that he not go near any dead person, not even his father or his mother (Lev 21:11). A Nazirite too, being especially dedicated to God and set apart for Him, was commanded not to come near any dead body, not even that of his father, his mother, his brother, or his sister, for he was "sacred to

12. Mo'ed Kaṭ. 27b; *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Mo'ed Kaṭan*, p. 180. On "Mourning" and "Consolation," see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, IX, 101-103, and IV, 233-234.

the Lord" (Num 6:6-8). Small wonder that Jesus expects His disciple to count divine dedication above filial piety!

THE PRAYERS

ALL Scripture teaches that "who confesses and forsakes his sins shall obtain mercy" (Prov 28:13), to which an old commentary on the Song of Songs adds: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, 'My sons, present to me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into gateways through which wagons and carriages can pass.'" ¹³ Hence it is the solemn duty of a dying Jew to make confession, and the solemn duty of the rabbi or those about his bed to urge him to do so. A solemn confession which goes back to about A.D. 1200 has the sick man acknowledge that his cure and his death are in the hands of God. And as he prays for "perfect healing," so also he avows: "Yet I will in love accept death at thy hand." He begs that his death may be atonement for all his sins, iniquities, and transgressions, and that God may make known to him the path of life: "In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand bliss for evermore." Having first confided the care of his loved ones to "the Father of the fatherless and the Judge of the widow," he prays: "Into thy hand I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. Amen, and Amen!" When the end is near, he should say three times: "The Lord is King, the Lord hath been King, the Lord shall be King for ever and ever." Again thrice: "Blessed be His name, whose glorious kingdom is for ever and ever." Seven times, the dying Jew is to exclaim: "The Lord, He is God," and then crown his confession with "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." ¹⁴

The burial service, according to Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, the late Chief Rabbi of England, revolves around five notes: resignation to the divine will, the immortality of the soul, the Judge and His judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the everlastingness of Israel. So dominant is the first of these notes—faith in, resignation to, and adoration of, the absolute justice of God's providence—that in Hebrew the whole burial service is called *zidduk ha-din*, "the justification of the judgment." Its

13. Cant. R. 5:2; cf. Soncino ed., *Midrash Rabbah*, IX, 232.

14. See *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, trans. and ed. J. H. Hertz (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1952), p. 1065.

opening line, taken from Moses' farewell song, is: "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, just and right is He" (Deut 32:4). A little later: "The Rock, perfect in every deed, who can say unto Him, What doest thou?" With the binding of Isaac before their mind's eye—the binding of Isaac, which foreshadowed the nailing of Christ to the cross—the mourners turn to God: "O thou who speakest and doest, of thy grace deal kindly with us, and for the sake of him who was bound like a lamb, O hearken and do." The Christian ear cannot but hear this as the beginning of the full plea, "Have mercy on us for the sake of Him who was slain like a lamb, who is, indeed, the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world." The loving embrace of God's decree comes to its climax in the words of Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21).

These prayers hail God as the rock of unchangeableness, as a strong refuge, as the safety of His children in time of storm. On those days of the year when they are not said, their place is taken by Psalm 15, which speaks of the serenity and joy of those whose portion is the Lord: "Guard me, O God, for in thee do I take refuge. I say unto the Lord, thou art my Lord, I have no good but in thee." This same psalm also emphasizes the second note of the burial service, the immortality of the soul: "Therefore my heart rejoiceth and my glory [my soul] is glad; my flesh also dwelleth in safety. For thou wilt not abandon my soul to the grave; neither wilt thou suffer thy loving one to see destruction. Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand bliss for evermore."¹⁵ Even before the burial, if there is a service at the home, words like these may be said: "The dust returneth to the earth as it was, but the spirit returneth unto God who gave it," or: "In thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light." Later, while the coffin is lowered into the grave, these parting words, "May he come to his place in peace," point to the same hope. On it Rabbi Hertz comments: "The body dies, decays, and is no more. But the soul—a spark of the Divine Being—is immortal. God's protection does not cease at the portals of the grave. And the dead do not merely merge into the All, or become absorbed into the Divine

15. For St. Peter and St. Paul (Ac 2:23-32; 13:30-37), and with them for the Church, these and some of the preceding verses of the psalm tell the promise and the triumphant affirmation of Christ's resurrection.

Source of all being. There is continued, separate existence of the soul after death. . . . This world is but the ante-chamber to the Future Life—man's true home; and that is a spiritual universe."¹⁶ Rabbi Hertz then refers to the often-quoted saying of an ancient Jewish teacher: "In the world to come, there is neither eating nor drinking, neither marrying nor bartering, no envy, hatred, or contention; but the just with their crowns sit around God's table, feasting on the brightness of the divine presence, the Shekinah."¹⁷

That there is a Judge and a judgment day, that man is free and therefore accountable for his acts, that the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished—the third note—underlies all the prayers. Many are the sorrows and pains of those who have followed after false gods. Sinners in their folly wander into night, and "death will be their shepherd" (Ps 48:15). The Shepherd of the just, however, is the living God, the God of the living. Thus the resurrection of the dead—the fourth note—is another wondrous message of the burial service. While the body is carried to the burial ground, those who have not visited the cemetery in the last thirty days pronounce this blessing: "Blessed be the Lord our God, King of the universe. . . . Blessed art thou, O Lord, who revivest the dead." "Thou art mighty to save," they proclaim, "thou sustainest the living with lovingkindness, revivest the dead with great mercy, supportest the falling, healest the sick, loosest the bound, and keepest thy faith to them that sleep in the dust." When the burial is over, all who have been present wash their hands and, as they do, they again rejoice in the God who makes eternity swallow up the dark of death: "He maketh death to vanish in life eternal; and the Lord God wipeth away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it" (Is 25:8).

Before this ritual washing, however, that is, on leaving the cemetery, the mourners and their friends pluck a blade of grass and, throwing it behind them, recall man's frailty: that he flourishes "like the grass of the earth," that he is dust. But no less do they remember, on their return to the hall or funeral chapel, God's marvelous protection. "The Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust," they

16. Hertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 1078-1079. "The soul a spark of the Divine Being" is an unfortunate image, for it gives the impression that the soul is part of the Godhead. But surely any such pantheistic notion was far from the mind of Dr. Hertz.

17. Ber. 17a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Berakoth*, p. 102.

recite, indeed the whole ninetyeth psalm. It is not only the individual but the whole people whom God covers with His pinions and guards beneath His wings; it is over the whole people that He has given His angels charge. This is the fifth note of the burial service. For the sacred writers of Scripture and also for the rabbis—though their understanding of this truth is not altogether the same as the Bible's—the salvation of the individual is closely knit to that of the community. Thus the mourners' *kaddish*, a prayer for the sanctification of God's great name in the world, prays for the speedy coming of His kingdom and asks: "May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen."

The memorial prayer to be said in the house of mourning, as edited by Dr. Hertz, seems to blend all the five notes of the burial service. "Lord and King," it begins, "who art full of compassion, God of the spirits of all flesh, in whose hand are the souls of the living and the dead, receive, we beseech thee, in thy great lovingkindness, the soul of him who has been gathered unto his people." It pleads with the gracious Judge: "Have mercy upon him; pardon all his transgressions, for there is none righteous upon earth, who doeth only good, and sinneth not. Remember unto him the righteousness which he wrought, and let his reward be with him, and his recompense before him." With intrepid hope of everlasting life, the memorial prayer begs: "Shelter his soul in the shadow of thy wings. Make known to him the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand bliss for evermore. Bestow upon him the abounding happiness that is treasured up for the righteous."

Imploring God, who heals the brokenhearted, to console the mourners, the memorial prayer continues: "Put into their hearts the fear and love of thee, that they may serve thee with a perfect heart; and let their latter end be peace. Amen." And again tying the consolation of the few to that of the many, that of the house of mourning to that of the whole house of Jacob, indeed to that of all the children of men, the prayer closes with this triumphant vision: "Like one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you (saith the Lord), and in Jerusalem shall ye be comforted. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. He maketh death

to vanish in life eternal; and the Lord God wipeth away tears from off all faces. . . .”

The beauty and the strength of the Jewish burial service is the strength and beauty of the Bible. There are few words in it, if any, that a Christian could not pray, though some he would understand in a different spirit. Everything a man can say in the sight of death is in it, no kind of prayer is lacking, for there is confession of sin and pleading for forgiveness; submission to, indeed praise of, God just and loving; desire for His light and peace, for the conquest of death in resurrection, for life with Him forever. But for all this wealth, the Christian misses the Voice which alone can say: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

READINGS AND MEDITATIONS

It is an ancient Jewish custom, though no longer observed by all, to make religious study and meditation part of the service in the house of mourning. The meditations are based on holy Scripture and on rabbinical sayings, and the themes are, of course, trust in the Lord, the whence and whither of our existence, the account the majesty of God demands, and the marks of a good life.¹⁸ Among the scriptural texts Rabbi Hertz has chosen for reading and reflection are these: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy willing spirit. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Ps 50:14; 72:25). And this: “As for man, his days are as grass; as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children’s children” (Ps 102:15-17).

Among the rabbinical sayings Dr. Hertz lists are such as stress man the pilgrim. Man enters this world with fists clenched, as if all the world were his to own; he leaves it with hands spread open, as if he wanted to say that he no longer possessed any of the things he once cherished. Yes, life’s briefness is no excuse for wasting it. “The day is short,” said Rabbi Tarfon, “and the work is great, and the laborers are

18. See Hertz, *op. cit.*, pp. 1100-1105.

sluggish, and the reward is much, and the Master of the house is urgent. It may not be given thee to complete the work, but thou art not at liberty to desist from it."¹⁹ Those who take their hands away from the work commanded them and put them to the work of evil are dead though they still draw breath: "The righteous are called living, even in their death; the wicked are called dead, even while they are alive."²⁰ Hence the admonition: "This world is like a vestibule to the world to come; prepare thyself in the vestibule, that thou mayest enter into the banqueting hall."²¹

Solemn too is the warning: "They that are born are destined to die; and the dead to be brought to life again; and the living to be judged, to know, to make known, and to be made conscious that He is God, He the Maker, He the Creator, He the Discerner, He the Judge, He the Witness, He the Complainant. He it is that will in future judge, blessed be He, with whom there is no unrighteousness, nor forgetfulness, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes; know also that everything is according to the reckoning. And let not thy [evil] inclination persuade thee that the grave will be a place of refuge for thee; for not of thy will wast thou formed, and not of thy will wast thou born, and not of thy will dost thou live, and not of thy will wilt thou die, and not of thy will wilt thou have to give account and reckoning before the King of the kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."²²

Thus some of the meditations dwell on the need for, and the beauty of, repentance. In a deliberate paradox, Rabbi Jacob used to say: "Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life in the world to come; and better is one hour of blissfulness

19. Abot II, 15-16; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Aboth*, p. 24.

20. Eccl. R. 9:5; cf. Soncino ed., *Midrash Rabbah*, VIII, 229; and elsewhere.

21. Abot IV, 16; cf. Soncino ed., *Aboth*, p. 53. The teaching of the ancient rabbis on the life to come is not definitive. A beautiful talmudic saying reads: "This world is an inn, and the other world the lasting home," but as one continues, it becomes clear that what is meant by the permanent house is the grave (*Mo'ed Kat.* 9b; cf. Soncino ed., *Mo'ed Katan*, p. 50). For, according to one opinion, the dead are sleeping and will sleep till they rise at the resurrection of all flesh. According to another opinion, the just and the repentant, as they die, enter at once into the joy of the blessed world to come; while the wicked, the idolators, and the foes of the Jewish people go straightway to hell. There are those who say that hell will be forever, and others who say that it will last for a time, short or long. And again, there are those who seem to think that after their punishment in hell has come to an end, the wicked will be annihilated; and others who envisage the annihilation of the sinner at the hour of his death. See C. G. Montefiore, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London: Macmillan, 1938), p. 581.

22. Abot IV, 22; cf. Soncino ed., *Aboth*, pp. 56-57.

of spirit in the world to come than the whole life in this world.”²³ This may be an attempt to compare what cannot be compared: the joy of change and the joy of changelessness; the exhilaration that is in our striving toward the final goal and the peace that comes with the perfect possession of it. But such is the marvel of change: it can be change for the better, the turning of the heart, repentance. “There are those who gain eternity in a lifetime, others who gain it in one brief hour.”²⁴

Repentance is the high way to the world to come. Chastisement too and suffering lead men’s hearts to the Lord, the meditations remind the mourner—chastisement indeed, and suffering, which are precious, beloved, in His sight; “the glory of God rests upon sufferers.”²⁵ Another mark of a good life to be impressed upon the bereaved is humble respect for God’s creatures: “Despise no man, and hold nothing to be impossible. For there is not a man that has not his hour, and there is not a thing that has not its place.”²⁶ Finally, Dr. Hertz’s readings in the house of mourning ask those who grieve: “Wouldst thou glorify God? Seek to be like Him—just, loving, compassionate, merciful.” Indeed, bereavement must not lead to bitterness but to greater love: “Do not unto others what thou wouldst not have others do unto thee. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary.”²⁷

23. Abot IV, 17; cf. Soncino ed., *Aboth*, p. 53.

24. ‘Abod. Zar. 17a; cf. *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., ‘*Abodab Zarab*, p. 88.

25. *Sifre Deut.*, Wa’ethanan, 32, fol. 73b; as cited by Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

26. Abot IV, 3; Soncino ed., *Aboth*, pp. 44–45.

27. Shab. 31a; *B. Talmud*, Soncino ed., *Shabbath*, p. 140.