Prayers at a House of Mourning
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Meditations

Birth is a beginning,
And death a destination:
But life is a journey,
A going — a growing
From stage to stage.

From childhood to maturity
And youth to age.
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
And then perhaps to wisdom.

From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness—
And, often, back again.
From health to sickness
And back, we pray, to health again.

From offence to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding
From fear to faith.

From defeat to defeat to defeat—
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey,
Stage by stage—
A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning.  
And death a destination;  
But life is a journey,  
A sacred pilgrimage  
Made stage by stage—  
From birth to death  
To life everlasting.

Alvin Fine

It would be Wiser  
It would be wiser, since we live in fear,  
To use our sorrow to correct our ways.  
If winter be the colour of our days,  
Then learn of winter to be still and clear.  
The greener spring, the happier new year  
Is not for us but for the birds to praise;  
It is the snow that over autumn lays  
Its quiet hand that is our teacher here.  
For see, it has its lesson for the soul:  
Look how the tree with piety keeps fast  
The bud and the blossom hidden in the bole.  
So bear the winter with its frosty blast,  
And seek, beneath the season of our grief,  
The spring unending and the waiting leaf.

From Autumn Sonnets No. 4 by Robert Nathan
Our Home with God

Our life is a narrow crumbling path
That we tread as we long have trod,
Ice and hail, valleys and precipice
Till we come home at night to God.

We all carry heavy sacks,
Precious gems in some, in others a useless load,
But whatever we bear our backs are bent by the weight,
Till we come home at night to God.

Some hurry, some crawl, it makes no difference at all.
Your road is measured off, each yard, each rod,
Some go miles, some from the cradle but an inch or two,
Till the horizons end and we are at home with God.

My hours grow shorter, more brief my days.
I go about with other people’s tread that I have borrowed.
Any moment the sky on my road may fall,
And I shall find myself at home with God.

Joseph Rolnick

How Suddenly it Comes

How suddenly it comes, this last today;
Tomorrow seems so far away when we are young,
Then it is here;
The end of now.

There was a time, when if I could,
I would have forced the door to yesterday,
To live again the joys of early love,
To feel once more the
Thrust of time into tomorrow’s endlessness.
But I am older now, and know that
There is a last today,
And that the sun will not more rise
To wash with light my clouded eyes.
    Tomorrow?
Who knows where I shall be?
    Perhaps in some eternity
Where all time gone and still to be are one.
    How beautiful is death.
    How gratefully I go.

Efraim M. Rosenzweig
Service at a House of Mourning

In every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.

Wherever you are, seek the Eternal One, your God—if you do so with all your heart and soul you will succeed.

Praise the One to whom our praise is due.

We praise the Eternal One to whom our praise is due for ever.

We praise you, Eternal One, our God, Sovereign of the universe, whose word brings on the evening, whose wisdom opens heaven’s gates, whose understanding changes times and seasons, and whose will sets the stars in their courses in the sky.
You make day and night, rolling light away from darkness, and darkness from light; You make day pass and bring on the night, and separate day from night: You rule the hosts of heaven!

We praise You, O God, whose word makes evening fall.

Unending love have You shown Your people, the house of Israel: Torah and Mitzvot, laws and precepts have you taught us. When we lie down and when we rise up we will reflect on the meaning of Your laws, and rejoice in the words of Your Torah and in Your Mitzvot forever. On them we will meditate day and night, for they are our life and the length of our days, May Your love never depart from us!

We praise You O God: You love Your people Israel.
Hear, O Israel: the Eternal One is our God, the Eternal God is One.

And 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 door-posts of your house, and on your gates.
Be mindful of all My commandments, and do them: so shall you be consecrated to your God. I, the Eternal One, am your God who led you out of Egypt to be your God; I, the Eternal One, am your God.

All this we hold to be true and sure: You alone, Eternal One, are our God, and we are Israel Your people. You have freed us from oppressors, and delivered us from tyrants; You led us out of Egypt, for ever to serve You in freedom. When we witnessed Your power, we praised Your name and gave thanks; willingly we accepted Your rule; then, full of joy, we sang together:
Who is like You, Eternal One, among the gods people worship? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders?

The Eternal God shall reign forever!

And it has been said: ‘The Eternal One has delivered Jacob, and redeemed us from the hand of one stronger than ourselves.’

We praise You, O God, Redeemer of Israel.

Grant, Eternal God, that we may lie down in peace, and let us rise up to life renewed. Spread over us the shelter of Your peace; guide us with Your wise counsel and, for Your names sake, be our help. Shield us from sickness and war, from famine and distress, and keep us from wrongdoing.
Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings, for You are our Guardian and Deliverer, a gracious and merciful God. Guard our going out and our coming in, that, now and always, we may have life and peace.

We praise You, O God: may Your sheltering peace descend on us and all who dwell on earth.

ברוך אתה יי, הפורש כפת שלום עלינו וגוлом
ויישמע תבל.
Eternal God, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise.

We praise You, Eternal One, our God and God of our ancestors: of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; of Sarah Rebekah, Rachel and Leah; great and mighty, awesome and exalted God. You deal kindly with us and embrace us all. You remember the faithfulness of our ancestors, and in love bring redemption to their children’s children for the sake of Your name.

**During the Ten Days of Repentance add:**

Remember us for life, for You, O Sovereign, delight in life; and inscribe us in the book of life, for Your sake, O God of life.

You are our Sovereign and Helper, our Redeemer and Shield.

We praise you, O God, Shield of Abraham and Protector of Sarah.
Unending is Your might, Eternal One; You are the Source of eternal life; great is Your power to redeem.

You cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall, the sun to shine and the dew to descend.

In Your love You sustain the living; in Your compassion You grant us eternal life. You support the falling and heal the sick; You free the captive and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.

Who is like You, Source of all strength? Who is Your equal, sovereign Author of life and death, whose will it is that goodness shall prevail?

**During the Ten Days of Repentance add:**

Who is like You, God of mercy? In Your mercy You remember Your creatures, and grant them life.
Trusting in You, we see life beyond death.

We praise You, O God, Source of eternal life.

You are holy, awesome is Your name; we have no God but You.

We pariase you, Eternal One, the holy God.

_During the Ten Days of Repentance conclude:_

We praise You, Eternal One, the holy Sovereign.

By Your grace we gain knowledge and grow in understanding. Continue to favour us with knowledge, understanding and wisdom, for You are their source.

We praise You, O God, gracious Giver of knowledge.
Help us, our Creator, to return to Your Teaching; draw us near, our Sovereign, to Your service; and bring us back into Your presence in perfect repentance.

We praise You, O God, You delight in repentance.

Forgive us, our Creator, for we have sinned; pardon us, our Sovereign, for we have transgressed; for You are always ready to pardon and forgive.

We praise You, O God, gracious and generous in forgiveness.

Look upon our affliction and defend us in our need; redeem us speedily for Your name’s sake.

We praise You, O God, Redeemer of Israel.
Heal us, Eternal One, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved; grant us a perfect healing from all our wounds.

We praise you, O God, Healer of the sick.

Bless this year for us, Eternal God: may its produce bring us well-being. Bestow Your blessing on the earth, that it may have a future and a hope, and that all may share its abundance in peace.

We praise You, O God, You bless the earth from year to year.

Sound the great Shofar of our liberation; raise high the banner of redemption for all who are oppressed, and let the song of freedom be heard in the four corners of the earth.
We praise you, O God, Redeemer of the oppressed.

Let righteous judges sit among Your people, and counsellors of peace throughout the world. Then You alone will reign over us in love and compassion.

We praise You, Sovereign God: You love righteousness and justice.

Let those who plan evil have no hope of success; may all who go astray find their way back to You; and let all tyranny soon end.

We praise You, O God, whose will it is that evil shall vanish from the earth.
For the righteous and faithful, and all who choose to join our people, and for all men and women of good will, we ask Your favour, Eternal God. May we always be numbered among them.

We praise You, O God, the Staff and Support of the righteous.

Let Your presence dwell in Jerusalem, and Zion be filled with justice and righteousness. May peace be in her gates and quietness in the hearts of her inhabitants. Let Your Teaching go forth from Zion, Your word from Jerusalem.

We praise You, O God, Builder of Jerusalem.
Let righteousness blossom and flourish, and let the light of redemption shine forth according to Your word; for your redeeming power is our constant hope.

We praise You, O God: You will cause the day of redemption to dawn.

Hear our voice, Eternal God; have compassion on us, and accept our prayer with favour and mercy, and let us not leave Your presence empty, for You are a God who listens to all who pray.

We praise You, O God: You hearken to prayer.

Eternal God, be gracious to Your people Israel, and in Your love accept their prayers. May our worship now and always be acceptable in Your sight.
We praise You, O God, whom alone we worship in reverence.

We give thanks that You, Eternal One, are our God, and You were the God of our ancestors. You are the Rock of our life, the Power that shields us in every age. We thank and praise You for our lives, which are in Your hand; for our souls, which are in Your keeping; for the signs of Your presence we encounter every day; and for Your wondrous gifts at all times, morning, noon and night.

During the Ten Days of Repentance add:

May all who are loyal to Your covenant be inscribed for a good life.

We praise You, O God, Source of goodness, to whom our thanks are due.
Supreme Source of peace, grant true and lasting peace to Your people Israel, for it is good in Your sight that Your people Israel, and all peoples, may be blessed at all times with Your gift of peace.

During the Ten Days of Repentance add:

May we be inscribed in the book of life and blessing for a life of goodness and peace.

We praise You, O God, the Source of peace.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, O God, my Rock and my Redeemer.
Abridged Version of the Weekday Tefillah

We praise You, Eternal One, our God and God of our ancestors, Shield of Abraham and Protector of Sarah, Source of eternal life, the holy God.

Give us understanding to know Your ways, consecrate our hearts to revere You, forgive us, and make us worthy of redemption.

Keep us far from sorrow, bestow blessing on the earth, raise high the banner of freedom for the oppressed, and guide us in Your ways of justice.

Let those who go astray return to You, may the righteous rejoice in the building of Your City and behold the dawn of Your deliverance; in Your compassion may the longings of our hearts come true.
Hear our prayer, Eternal God, whom alone we worship in reverence, Source of goodness, to whom our thanks are due.

We praise You, O God, the Source of peace.

May the most High, Source of perfect peace, grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to all humanity.
I lift up my eyes towards the hills:
Where shall I look for help?
My help comes from the Eternal One,
Maker of heaven and earth.

You will not lose your foothold,
for your Guardian does not slumber.
The Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Your God watches over you,
and is your shade close by.
The sun will not hurt you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Eternal one shields you from evil,
and shelters your soul.
The Everpresent God will guard your coming in and your going out,
Now and always.
Eternal God, You are my Shepherd; I shall not want. You make me lie down in green pastures. You lead me beside still waters.

You restore my soul; You guide me in paths of righteousness for Your name’s sake.

Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff: they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in Your house, Eternal God, for ever.
For everything there is a season,
and a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born,
and a time to die;

A time to plant,
and a time to pluck up what is planted;

A time to break down,
and a time to build up;

A time to weep,
and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn,
and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;

A time to embrace,
and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to seek,
and a time to lose;
A time to keep, 
and a time to discard;

A time to rend, 
and a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, 
and a time to speak;

A time to be born, 
and a time to die.

God has given, and God has taken away; may God’s name be praised.

From Psalm 103

Bless the Eternal One, O my soul, and let my inmost being praise God’s holy name.

You forgive all our iniquities, and heal all our afflictions.

You redeem our life from destruction, and surround us with love and compassion.
You are merciful and gracious, abuntantly patient and full of love.

You do not deal with us according to our sins, or requite us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is Your love for those who revere You.

For You know our frailty; and remember that we are dust.

We are mortal, and our days are as grass. We flourish like a flower in the field:

the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

But Your love, Eternal God, rests for ever on those who revere You, and Your righteousness extends to future generations

if they keep Your covenant and live by your precepts.
You make Your throne in the loftiest heights, and Your sovereignty rules over all.

Let all Your creatures praise You, throughout the length and breadth of Your realm.

Bless the Eternal One, O my soul.

Sovereign of all worlds, You have permitted the shadow of death to fall upon this home. But You are close to the hearts of the sorrowing, to strengthen and console them with the warmth of Your love, and with the assurance that the human spirit is eternal. Even as we pray for perfect peace for those who have died, so do we ask You to give comfort and courage to the living. For You know our weakness and understand our needs. Therefore, Eternal God, let those who are bereaved be consoled in the faith that You are our Guardian in life and in death.
For a man

O God, full of compassion, exalted God, God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, abundantly patient and full of love, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your presence, to the soul of . . . . . . . . who has gone to his eternal home. Merciful God, remember his merits and righteous deeds which he performed on earth. Open for him the gates of righteousness and light, of compassion and grace. Shelter him for ever under your loving care, and let his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. May his destiny be with You, and may he rest in peace; and let us say: Amen.
For a woman

O God, full of compassion, exalted God, God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, abundantly patient and full of love, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your presence, to the soul of . . . . . . . . . . . . who has gone to her eternal home. Merciful God, remember her merits and righteous deeds which she performed on earth. Open for her the gates of righteousness and light, of compassion and grace. Shelter her for ever under your loving care, and let her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. May her destiny be with You, and may she rest in peace; and let us say: Amen.

Eternal God: You heal the broken hearted and bind up their wounds. Grant consolation to those who mourn; strengthen and support them in the time of their grief and remember them for a long and good life. Fill their hearts with love and reverence for You, that they may serve You
with a whole heart. And let them have peace hereafter.
Amen.

Even when they are gone, our loved ones are with us, inspiring us to live as, in their higher moments, they themself tried to live. We think of them now, and of everything they meant to us; they are an abiding blessing for which we give the deepest thanks.

Yitgaddal v’yitkaddash sh’meh rabba b’alma di v’ra ch’ir’uteh, v’yamlich malchuteh b’chay-yeychon uv’yomeychon uv’chayyey d’chol beyt yisrael ba’agala uviz’man kariv v’im’ru: amen.

Y’he sh’meh rabba m’varach l’alam ul’almei almaya.

Y’he sh’lama rabba min sh’mayya v’chayyim aleynu v’al kol yisrael, v’imru: amen.

Oseh shalom bim’romav hu ya’aseh shalom aleynu v’al kol yisrael v’al kol b’ney adam, v’im’ru: amen.

Magnified and sanctified be the great name of the One by whose will the world was created. May God’s rule become effective in your lives, and in the life of the whole House of Israel. May it be so soon, and let us say: Amen.

May God’s great name be praised to all eternity.

Blessed and praised; glorified, exalted and extolled; lauded, honoured and acclaimed be the name of the Holy One, who is ever to be praised, though far above the eulogies and songs of praise and consolation that human lips can utter; and let us say: Amen.

May great peace descend from heaven, and abundant life be granted, to us and all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

May the Most High, Source of perfect peace, grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to all humanity, and let us say: Amen.

The Eternal God will wipe the tears from every face. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
May the Eternal God comfort you, and all who mourn.

1. Eternal God, who reigned before
   Your will had caused the world to be:
   Already then You reigned supreme
   In undisputed sovereignty.

2. And when the universe has ceased,
   You will still reign in majesty;
   For as You were, so will you be
   From now until eternity.

3. And You are One, there is none else,
   No equal standing at Your side,
   Without beginning, without end,
   All might and rule in you reside.

4. My living and redeeming God,
   My shelter on a stormy day,
   My banner and my refuge still,
   My cup of comfort when I pray.

5. Into Your hand I place my soul
   Asleep, awake, for You are near,
   And with my soul, my body too,
   You are my God, I shall not fear.
Kindling the Yahrzeit Candle

EITHER

I do not need special moments to think of you, for you are always in my thoughts. Nevertheless, I can give thanks for the blessing of your life, your companionship, and everything you meant to me. Your absence is still a cause of sadness, but your love lives on, and what we were to each other strengthens and sustains me. You live in my heart and your virtues inspire me to make the most of every day.

Kindle light

Your memory is an abiding blessing

OR

We do not need special moments to think of our loved ones who have died, for they are always in our thoughts. Nevertheless, we can give thanks for the blessing of their lives, their companionship, and everything they meant to us. Their absence is still a cause of sadness, but their love lives on, and we are strengthened and sustained by the part they played in making us what we are. They live in our hearts and their virtues inspire us to make the most of every day.

Kindle light

Your memory is an abiding blessing
At a Grave or other Memorial

EITHER

You are no longer at my side, for death has separated us. I cannot look to you to lighten my burdens or to give me the benefit of your strength, your wisdom, your faith. Yet what you meant to me does not wither or fade. I remember so much about you, and the many things we shared. There are times when the pain of missing you seems more than I can bear, yet there is much for which I must give thanks. For life and love, the happiness you gave me, the blessing that you were which I cherish in my heart. Rest in peace, my loved one, I will never forget you.

OR

Death has separated us from those we loved. We cannot look to them to lighten our burdens or give us the benefit of their strength, their wisdom or their faith. Yet what they meant to us does not wither or fade. We remember so much about them, and the many things we shared. There are times when the pain of missing them seems more than we can bear, yet there is much for which we must give thanks. For life and love and happiness, for the blessing that they were which we cherish in our hearts. May those we loved rest in peace, we shall never forget them.
Notes to selected scriptural and modern passages

The texts and English translations have been taken from *Siddur Lev Chadash* and extra material translated in the style of that book.

pp.4-5  *Birth is a beginning*... Rabbi Alvin Fine, p.283, *Gates of Repentance*, CCAR, 1978


p.28 *For everything there is a season* ... Ecclesiastes 3:1–7,1.

pp.29ff *Bless the Eternal One*... Ps. 103:1–2, 8, 10–11, 15–19, 22.

p.35 *The Eternal God* ... Isa. 25:8; 35:10.
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The Montagu Centre, 21 Maple Street, London W1T 4BE

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