

An Unveiling Ceremony

Compiled and Translated by Rabbi Noah Gradofsky

It has become Jewish tradition to have a ceremony for dedicating ("unveiling") the headstone erected in memory of our loved ones. This ceremony is not a Talmudic requirement and therefore there is no set formula. Generally, some scriptures (particularly Psalms) and Kaddish are recited. It is also appropriate for one or more people to say something about the loved one. There is no requirement for a Rabbi to be present, though the family may deem it appropriate for a rabbi to officiate at the ceremony.

Jewish law prohibits performing mitzvot near those who have passed away, as this is considered to be disrespectful of the deceased, who no longer have the privilege of doing mitzvot. Therefore, when possible it is preferable that this ceremony be performed at a distance of at least 4 cubits (amot) from a grave (approximately 6 1/2 feet). The veil can then be removed from the headstone after the ceremony.

There are many customs as to when an unveiling is performed. One consideration is how long it will take for the ground to settle for the stone to be placed. Some customs suggest that one should wait at least six months from the day the person passed away. Another custom is to wait until a year after the person passed away. In this case, the unveiling becomes the formal conclusion of the mourning period.

These texts may be recited in English or in Hebrew, according to each person's preference. They may also be recited individually or in unison.

Note the Hebrew abbreviation ה' is pronounced "Adonai."

Blessing For Seeing a Jewish Cemetery

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין, וְזָן וְכִלְכַּל אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין, וְהִמַּת אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין, וְיִוֹדַע מִסְפַּר כּוֹלְכֶם בְּדִין, וְהוּא עֲתִיד לְהַחְיֹתְכֶם וְלִקְיִים אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מַחְיֵה הַמֵּתִים
 Praised are You, Adonay our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Who formed you in justice, nourished and sustained you in justice, sustained you in justice, took your lives in justice, knows the number of you all in justice, and will resuscitate you and raise you up in the future in justice. Blessed are You Adonay, who resuscitates the dead.

Psalms Chapter 1

אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הֵלֵךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב: כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חָפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁתּוֹלַע עַל פְּלָגֵי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיו יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוֹ לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ: לֹא כֵן הָרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם כַּמָּץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ: עַל כֵּן לֹא יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדוּת צְדִיקִים: כִּי יוֹדַע ה' דַּרְךְ צְדִיקִים וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:

Fortunate is the person who has not followed the counsel of evildoers, and in the path of sinners has not stood, nor joined the company of the insolent. S/he prefers the LORD's teaching and meditates on the teaching of the LORD day and night. S/he is like a tree planted besides streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaves never fade, and s/he succeeds in everything s/he does. It is not so for the evildoers, who is like a chaff driven by the wind. Therefore, evildoers will not succeed in judgment, nor will sinners [succeed] in the community of the righteous. For the LORD knows the path of the righteous and will destroy the path of the evildoers.

Psalm 15

מְזֻמֹּר לְדָוִד: ה' מִי יִגֹּר בְּאֹהֶלְךָ מִי יִשָּׁן בְּהַר קִדְשֶׁךָ: הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפָעַל צְדָק וְדִבֵּר אֱמֶת בְּלִבּוֹ: לֹא רָגַל עַל לְשׁוֹנוֹ לֹא עָשָׂה לְרֵעֵהוּ רָעָה וְחָרְפָה לֹא נָשָׂא עַל קְרֵבוֹ: נִבְזָה בְּעֵינָיו נִמְאָס וְאֵת יְרֵאֵי ה' יַכְבִּיד נִשְׁבַּע לְהִרְעוֹ וְלֹא יִמַר: כִּסְפוֹ לֹא נָתַן בְּנִשְׁדָּה וְשִׁחַד עַל נָקִי לֹא לָקַח עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהֵי לֹא יִמוּט לְעוֹלָם:

A Psalm of David: LORD, who may dwell in your tent, who will reside upon your Holy Mount? One who walks blamelessly, does righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. S/he does not slander with his lips, and does not do evil to neighbors, nor carry enmity towards kinspeople. A contemptible person is disgusting in his/her eyes, and s/he honors those who fear the LORD; [even if] s/he swears to his/her own detriment, s/he will not change. S/he has not lent money with interest, nor taken a bribe against an innocent person – those who act thusly will never be shaken.



For a Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31 "A Woman of Valor"

אִשֶּׁת חַיִּל מִי יִמְצָא וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה: בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בַּעֲלָהּ וְשָׁלָל לֹא יִחְסֹר: גִּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא רָע
כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ: דְּרָשָׁה צֶמֶר וּפְשֵׁתִים וְתַעֲשֶׂה בַחֲפָץ כַּפִּיהָ: הִיְתָה כְּאִנִּיּוֹת סוֹחֵר מִמְּרַחֵק תָּבִיא לַחֲמָה:
וְתִקֶּם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה וְתִתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְחֵק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ: זְמִמָּה שָׂדֵה וְתִקְחָהּ מִפְּרֵי כַּפִּיהָ נֹטֵעַ כָּרֶם:
חֲגָרָה בְּעוֹז מִתְּנִיָּה וְתֵאֱמָץ זְרוּעֹתֶיהָ: טַעְמָה כִּי טוֹב סָחָרָה לֹא יִכְבֶּה בַלֵּילָה גֵרָה: יָדֶיהָ שָׁלְחָה בְּפִישׁוֹר
וְכַפֵּיהָ תִמְכּוּ פֶלֶךְ: כָּפָה פְּרָשָׁה לְעֵנִי וַיְדִיָּה שְׁלָחָה לְאַבְיוֹן: לֹא תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשָּׁלֵג כִּי כָל בֵּיתָהּ לִבְשׁ
שָׁנִים: מִרְבָּדִים עָשְׂתָה לָּהּ שֵׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּמָן לְבוּשָׁה: נוֹדַע בְּשָׁעָרִים בַּעֲלָהּ בְּשִׁבְתָּהּ עִם זִקְנֵי אֶרֶץ: סָדִין
עָשְׂתָה וְתִמְכֹר וְחֲגוֹר נָתַנָּה לְפָנַעְנִי: עוֹז וְהֵדָר לְבוּשָׁה וְתִשְׁחַק לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן: פִּיהָ פְּתָחָה בְּחִכְמָה
וְתוֹרַת חֶסֶד עַל לְשׁוֹנָה: צוֹפִיָּה הֵילְכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ וְלֶחֶם עֲצָלוֹת לֹא תֹאכַל: קָמוּ בָנֶיהָ וַיֵּאֲשְׁרוּהָ בַּעֲלָהּ
וַיְהַלְלָהּ: רַבּוֹת בָּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חַיִּל וְאַתְּ עָלִית עַל כָּלֵנָה: שִׁקְרַת חַח וְהִבֵּל הִיפִי אִשָּׁה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה הִיא
תִתְהַלֵּל: תָּנוּ לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ וַיְהַלְלוּהָ בְּשָׁעָרִים מֵעַשְׂיָה:

A woman of valor who can find? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he has no lack of gain. She does him kindness and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and enjoys working with her hands. She is like a merchant vessel, bringing food from afar. She rises while it is still dark, and gives sustenance to her household, and food to her maidens. She considers a field and acquires it, and plants vineyards with the fruit of her hands. She girds her loins with strength, and her arms are strong. She realizes that her merchandise is good, her lamp does not go out at night. Her hand is set on the distaff, her palm supports the spindle. Her palm is spread out to the poor, and her hand is sent out to the destitute. She doesn't fear for her children from the snow, because her house is dressed in scarlet. She makes herself coverlets, linen and purple are her clothing. Her husband is known in the gates (the equivalent to town hall), where he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen clothing and sells, and her girdles she sells to the merchants. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she celebrates the future. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue. She anticipates the ways of her household, and does not eat of the bread of idleness. Her children rise and extol her, her husband [rises] and praises her. (saying) "Many women have done valiantly, but you are above them all. Charm is deceit, beauty is vein; A God-fearing woman is praiseworthy. Give her of the fruit of her hand, and let her works praise her in the gates."

Psalm 23

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר: בְּנְאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל מֵי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי: נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יִנְחֵנִי
בְּמַעְגְלֵי צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ: גַּם כִּי אֶלֶךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אֲתָה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הֵמָּה
יִנְחֵמֵנִי: תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שַׁלְחֹן נֹגֵד צַרְרֵי דְשִׁנְתָּ בְשִׁמֹן רֹאשִׁי כוֹסֵי רוּיָהּ: אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֹסֵד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי
וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבַיִת יְהוָה לְאָרְךְ יָמִים:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

This translation of Psalm 23 is the King James version.

El Malei Rachamim

The El Malei prayer asks God to find a fitting, peaceful rest for our loved one in the world to come. Traditionally, the deceased's name is used along with the father's name. If desired, the name of the deceased's mother may be included as well.

For a Man

אֱ-ל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים הַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל פְּנֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוֹרִים
כְּזֹהֵר הַרְקִיעַ מְזִהִירִים אֶת נְשָׁמַת (Name of deceased) בֶּן (Name of deceased father) שְׁהֲלֶךְ
לְעוֹלָמוֹ בְּעָבוּר שְׁאַנְחֵנוּ מִתַּפְלָלִים בְּעַד הַזְכָּרַת נְשָׁמָתוֹ, בְּגוֹן עֲדוֹן תִּהְיֶה מְנוּחָתוֹ לְכֹן בְּעַל הַרַחֲמִים
יִסְתַּיְרָהוּ בְּסִתְר כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרָר בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נְשָׁמָתוֹ. ה' הוּא נְחַלְתּוֹ וְיָנוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל
מִשְׁכְּבוֹ וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

God full of mercy who dwells on high, find fitting rest upon the wings of the *shechinah* (divine presence) in the heights of the holy and pure who shine like the glow of the firmament, for the soul of (Name of deceased) son of (Name of deceased's father) who has gone to his (eternal) world. For we pray in memory of his soul, may his resting place be in the Garden of Eden, therefore may the Master of Mercy shelter him in the shelter of His wings forever, and may He bind his soul in the bond of life. The LORD is his inheritance, and may he rest peacefully upon his resting place, and let us say: Amen.

For a Woman

אל מלא רחמים שוכן במרומים המצא מנוחה נכונה על פני השכינה במעלות קדושים וטהורים
 כזהר הרקיע מזהירים את נשמת (Name of deceased) בת (Name of deceased's father)
 שהלכה לעולמה בעבור שאנחנו מתפללים בעד הזכרת נשמתה, בגן עדן תהא מנוחתה, לכן בעל
 הרחמים יסתירה בסתר פניו לעולמים, ויזרר בצרור החיים את נשמתה. ה' הוא נחלתה ותנוח
 בשלום על משכבה ונאמר אמן:

God full of mercy who dwells on high, find fitting rest upon the wings of the *shechinah* (divine presence) in the heights of the holy and pure who shine like the glow of the firmament, for the soul of (Name of deceased) daughter of (Name of deceased's father) who has gone to her (eternal) world. For we pray in memory of her soul, may his resting place be in the Garden of Eden, therefore may the Master of Mercy shelter her in the shelter of His wings forever, and may he bond her soul in the bond of life. The LORD is her inheritance, and may she rest peacefully upon her resting place, and let us say: Amen.

The Mourner's Kaddish

The Mourner's Kaddish is not a prayer of mourning. It is a prayer of hope for the redemption of the Messianic era. This prayer should be recited only when ten Jewish men of bar mitzvah age are present.

<i>May His great name be sanctified and magnified</i>	Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmeh rabbah.	יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.
Congregation responds: Amen אָמֵן		
<i>In the world which He created according to His will</i>	B'alma di berah chir'utay	בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ
<i>and may His kingdom reign</i>	v'yamlich malchutay	וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵיהּ
<i>in our lives and our days</i>	b'chayaychon u'vyomayhchon	בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ
<i>and in the lives of the whole house of Israel</i>	uv'chayay d'chol bayt Yisrael	וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
<i>speedily and at a close time</i>	ba'agalah u'vizman kariv	בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזְמַן קָרִיב
<i>And say: Amen.</i>	v'imru amen.	וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
<i>Amen, may His great name be blessed forever and ever.</i>	Congregation responds: Amen, y'hay shmeh rabbah mevorach le'olam u'le'olmay almayah	אָמֵן יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבֻרָךְ לְעֵלָם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמֵיָא.

<i>Blessed, praised, glorified, raised up, exalted, adored, and lauded be</i>	Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam v'yitnasay v'yithadar v'yitaleh v'yithallal	יְתַבְרַח וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל
<i>His holy name</i>	shmay d'kudsha	שְׁמֵה דְקֻדְשָׁא
Congregation Responds:		
<i>blessed be He.</i>	Berich Hu.	בְּרִיךְ הוּא.
<i>Higher (higher¹) than all</i>	L'aylah (l'aylah ¹) min kol	לְעֵלָא (לְעֵלָא ¹) מִן כּוֹל
<i>blessings, songs, praises, and consolations</i>	birchatah v'shiratah, tushbechata v'nechematah	בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא תְּשֻׁבְחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא
<i>Which are said in the world.</i>	da'amiran b'almah	דְּאָמִירָן בְּעֵלְמָא.
<i>And say: Amen.</i>	v'imru amen.	וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
Congregation responds: Amen אָמֵן		
<i>May there be great peace from the heavens</i>	Y'hay shelama rabbah min shemayah	יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא
<i>and life upon us and all Israel</i>	v'chayim alaynu v'al kol Yisrael	וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כּוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל
<i>And say: Amen.</i>	v'imru amen.	וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
Congregation responds: Amen אָמֵן		
<i>Who makes peace in His heights</i>	Oseh shalom bimromav	עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו
<i>may He make peace upon us</i>	Hu ya'aseh shalom alaynu	הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
<i>and upon all Israel</i>	V'al kol Yisrael	וְעַל כּוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל
<i>And say: Amen.</i>	v'imru amen.	וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
Congregation responds: Amen אָמֵן		

The headstone is uncovered. It is customary for each person to place a rock on top of the headstone. Explanations for this custom abound. Some see it is a symbol of strength. Others believe it is a marker - a signal that people have visited the grave.

¹ The word in parenthesis is recited between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur only.