

## **Kever Avot: revamping existing rituals and observances**

**Problem:** How might we augment an existing Jewish ritual to include a symbolic taharah for meitim who, for reasons of safety and concern for the health of loving CK members, did not receive a full taharah/tachrichim before their burial?

**Process:** Rather than present a fixed ritual/ceremony per se, I want to present a list of questions that address the process of deciding how we might address this problem. These are just initial ideas to approach the development of a ritual.

**Proposal:** suggest one possible solution might be to adapt our ritual of Kever Avot, visiting our Jewish cemeteries on the Sunday prior to Rosh Hashanah. Another possibility might be to visit the cemetery on Zayon Adar. We could visit the particular keverot of these meitim and r-create (to varying degrees) a symbolic taharah, for the sake of their souls and ours.

**What rituals/observances do we have already in our “toolkit”?**

- As Chevra Kadisha members: Taharah booklets, buckets,
- As Rabbis: tradition of responding to a sheilah with a teshuvah
- As Jews grieving over loss of parents, grandparents in this time of pandemic, feeling incomplete: needing to know that prayers and rituals can be included, even after the fact of burial.
- Yizkor, yartzeit observances, visits to cemetery – Kever Avot – providing an opportunity for sensory engagement – earth (afar), air (prayers and song), fire (lighting candles at home) and water (Taharah).
- Iranian Jews had a custom of bringing besamim, rose water and flowers to graves.

**How might we adapt traditional rituals to create room for this new pandemic situation to be addressed?**

- Rituals not standardized at present beyond El Malei/Kaddish

- Laying of wicks; Havdalah candles for mourners rather than Yom Kippur candles – adapting an old ritual for modern day purposes, using similar strategies.

### **What are the perimeters (if any) of including new formats of observance?**

- Always the necessity for new'ish ritual to have timing and structure that resonates with already-existing rituals
- Clearing with cemetery owners and other officials.

### **What is the process of consultation with other Rabbonim, or not?**

- Is there a Va'ad or equivalent organization in your locale where such a practice might be discussed?
- Are you working with a synagogue-based or a community-based Chevra?

### **Is there room to develop a new and local minhag, within the changes suggested?**

- Always – already many suggested variations, from including family members or not; literally pouring water over kever, or not; including all Chevra members at each kever, or one person per kever (depending on number of deaths in community).
- Allow that minhag may change: we may decide as CK members to incorporate some ritual every year, beyond this pandemic.

### **How do we manage for both consistency, recognisability and adaptability?**

- Always the goal
- Understanding local customs, minhagim
- An attitude of willingness. Of saying yes to a solution.

### **What is the structure for our Talmud, (the oral teachings) that we might follow when creating these adaptations?**

- Have we created room for a discussion amongst Jewish scholars in our communities?
- Have we asked the question to others in our Kavod v'Nichum community?
- Have we tracked and presented various options?

- What is the process for ascertaining what feels correct in our community, specifically?
- Do we have a custom of being more innovative or more conservative when it comes to change?

**What is the process of moving from an idea to actuality – in a timely manner?**

- If we are thinking to include a new ritual in our community, what is the process for development, for discussion and for decision-making?
- What is the physical/geographical location of your particular cemetery? In a larger Jewish cemetery? In a section of a non-Jewish cemetery?
- Do you need permissions from cemetery owners to use hoses (water)?
- What equipment do you need to bring with you?
- What texts will you use and cite?
- Will you try to re-create an actual taharah over the kever for the neshamah of the met(ah)?
- Will you just symbolically be present and condense the ceremony very briefly.
- What if there isn't buy-in from other Rabbonim?

**Timeline:**

- When do we start this discussion in our communities?
- Some communities (New York, New Jersey) have been very hard hit; might not have the capacity to visit each kever. Can we include an overall symbolic ritual for all those who died in this pandemic?