LEHRHAUS Over Shabbat

Tetzaveh

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Amidst the war unfolding in Israel, we have decided to go forward and continue publishing a variety of articles to provide meaningful opportunities for our readership to engage in Torah during these difficult times.

OF WARRIORS AND WOLVES

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During this time of intense violence, pain, and suffering, my mind seeks refuge in the fundamental sanctity of human life. Much of the discourse today is operational—what steps should we take to defend ourselves? What response is justified? What tactics should we use? These are all critical questions in such a turbulent and dangerous time, and I obsess over them as much as anyone else. However, I think they push aside a more fundamental set of questions: what do we consider holy, what is our ultimate value, and what is our vision and endgame for the world?

The Torah is far too vast and heterogeneous to allow anyone to claim "this is the Torah's message" on such questions. But I will simply say: this is the message I personally take from the Torah at a time like this. As each new day brings new reports of life lost, these are the passages I read and reread, and these are the interpretations on which I ruminate.

Some of the most fundamental laws of basic interpersonal morality are imparted by the Torah in what seem to be extreme and exceptional cases. We might expect that the Torah would contain an explicit unequivocal prohibition against physical assault, but in fact it does not. To be sure, there is civil law about the payments due in the event that one injures another. However,

there is no direct prohibition per se against inflicting pain and injury on another person's body. It is actually quite shocking, given the breadth and specificity of the Torah's legal codifications, that this is never addressed head-on.

Seeing this gap, the rabbis extrapolate the prohibition from a passage about a person who is found guilty of a sin and is therefore punished with lashes: "He shall strike him forty times, he shall not add" (Deuteronomy 25:3). The officer administering court-mandated corporal punishment to an offender may not add on even one lash of his own accord; he must adhere to the forty lashes prescribed by the law. From this precedent, the rabbis reason, we can deduce that it would be no less of an offense for a private citizen, not appointed by the court, to strike an innocent person who is not deserving of any punishment whatsoever (*Sifrei Devarim* 286:10).

A similar pattern repeats itself regarding the burial of the dead. We do, of course, find many stories about biblical characters being buried. But we do not find anywhere in the Torah an explicit commandment to bury every deceased person promptly and with dignity. This rule is instead derived from the law regarding a person who is executed for a capital offense: "You shall surely bury him on that day" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Once again, the consideration accorded to a criminal is the paradigm from which we can deduce a more general rule (*Sanhedrin* 46b). Certainly, it would be no less of an offense to withhold the dignity of burial from an innocent, righteous person!

There are many acts of kindness that we perform because of our relationship to someone, such as the good we do for a parent, a friend, or a spouse. But sometimes, we are obligated to do good for someone not because of who they are as an individual but simply because they are a member of the human species. The basic prohibition against assault has nothing to do with the particular person we are considering assaulting. Whether the person deserves to be punched or whether they are instead deserving of our compassion is not part of the calculus. It is about the fundamental holiness of the human being created in God's image. The same applies to dignified burial; when we bury a person, it's not about honoring their life accomplishments, our relationship with them, or the extent to which we identify with their values. It honors, rather, the very fact that they are human.

I believe it is for this reason that these laws are imparted in such an obtuse manner. We are not just enjoined against assaulting our dear friends; we are not just commanded to bury our revered ancestors. We are specifically instructed to recognize the fundamental holiness of every human, irrespective of their actions and our feelings toward them, and to accord them certain basic honor in life and in death.

But what does this notion of intrinsic human holiness say about our practical vision for the world? In particular, does it say anything about how we are to conduct ourselves when

confronting violent evil? After all, the Torah recognizes that one can strike or even execute another person in the proper context and with legal justification. Can the forty-lash maximum or the burial of the executed person tell us something fundamental about human dignity even in moments when violence is justified?

A seemingly technical dispute about the laws of Shabbat reveals a deep ideological argument between the *tannaim* concerning universal human holiness, the nature of war, and the meaning of redemption. Rabbi Eliezer maintains that one may wear weapons outdoors on Shabbat without violating the prohibition against carrying items in the public domain. He reasons that the weapons are "adornments" that are more akin to clothing (which of course may be worn outdoors on Shabbat) than a burden which a person carries. The other rabbis, however, reject his opinion, explaining that weapons cannot be classified as "an adornment" because they are quite the opposite—"a mark of shame" (*m. Shabbat* 6:4).

Note that the rabbis concede that weapons may be carried on Shabbat when they are needed for defense—the Mishnah and Talmud in *Eruvin* (44b-45a) address this in great detail. What is disputed is the ceremonial or symbolic display of weapons—is it a sign of glory or debasement? Rabbi Eliezer, for his part, concedes that weapons will not be used in the messianic age. He denies, however, that this is due to fundamental ideals of pacifism or universalism; rather, having triumphed over all enemies, the Jews will have no further practical need to use weapons. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 63a) says he considers them to be merely superfluous in the time of the Messiah but not offensive—"As a lamp in daylight, what utility does it have?"

The Talmud further explains that this debate hinges on the contradiction between two opposing verses. The rabbis follow the verse, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into harvesting shears; nation will not raise a sword against nation, and they will no longer learn warfare" (Micah 4:3). Their vision for the end of days, the endgame of the world, is one of peace, an end to war. All nations play a vital role—the surrounding passage explains—setting aside their differences to serve God in unison. Weapons may be used today with justification, but their use is always shameful, as it demonstrates that humanity, collectively, is not living as it should. Therefore, the weapons cannot simply be cast aside in the messianic era; rather, they must be destroyed or fashioned into useful implements of agriculture. Warfare itself must be forgotten even as a subject of study. It is a shameful fact about humanity's regrettable past.

Rabbi Eliezer, by contrast, glorifies weapons as a sign of power and triumph. He bases this on the verse, "Gird your sword on your hip, champion; it is your glory and splendor." (Psalms 45:4) The verse is taken from a fairly graphic psalm which depicts the king of Israel as a vigorous and triumphant conqueror. In the psalm, other nations appear only as vanquished, their daughters taken as the king's concubines in the context of their defeat. In this view, war is the eternal state of the world. Enemies are eternal enemies, and the only "redemption" is (our) victory. Weapons may become unnecessary if we win decisively enough, but warfare was never

regrettable. No shame attends its paraphernalia, and indeed their display glorifies the victor.

The Halakhah follows the opinion of the rabbis—weapons may not be carried outdoors on Shabbat except in cases when they are needed for practical defense. The rabbis appear to prevail philosophically as well. The Talmud explains that they consider Psalm 45 quoted by Rabbi Eliezer as an allegory for spirited debate about Torah study—verses expertly cited and sharp, logical insights are the glorious weapons to be brandished with pride. Actual weapons are shameful and are not classified as an adornment. Indignity attends their use, even when contemporary circumstances may necessitate it. Our vision for the end of days is one where all nations, ourselves included, destroy their weapons and join together to serve God in harmony. This view recognizes the intrinsic humanity and holiness of all people, their value before God, their critical role in our collective redemption, and the shame and tragedy of warfare—even when justified and unavoidable.

I believe that Maimonides also expresses an awareness of intrinsic human holiness in his vision for messianic times. As we have already seen, the Bible and Talmud are cryptic and often contradictory on this subject, leaving a great deal of room for subsequent interpretation. Maimonides devotes several chapters to articulating his understanding of what this future holds in store. In doing so, he reveals a fundamental belief about human nature.

As a rationalist, he eschews many of the fanciful and supernatural predictions that others entertain, instead insisting that in the messianic era, "the world will function as it functions" (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and Wars* 12:1)—meaning, there will be no change to the laws of science and nature. Rather, he foresees a time of peace and worldwide commitment to holier purposes.

What, then, to make of the famous verse in Isaiah (11:6), promising that "the wolf will live with the sheep, and the tiger will frolic with the goat"? How can that possibly not violate the natural order?

Maimonides responds that this verse is not to be taken literally. Rather, it metaphorically refers to the Jewish people's enemies as predatory animals. It foresees a period when all these human "wolves and tigers" will desist from their hostility and choose a good path, benignly joining the Jewish "sheep and goats" in their pursuit of Torah study and holiness. This is in line with the spirit of the rabbis' view regarding weapons discussed above. All nations will join together and serve God. Warfare will be forgotten.

Maimonides's deflection of the verse also reveals—almost accidentally—a fundamental understanding of the holiness of human beings which is at the heart of his messianic vision. He reinterprets the verse in Isaiah to be talking about people and not animals, which means, apparently, that for animals not to be predatory would be a miracle, but for violent people not to be predatory is natural. Indeed, some animals are fundamentally predatory. If we are rationalists, we do not imagine that, even in the times of the Messiah, the wolf or tiger will "repent" and

change his behavior toward the sheep or the goat. It is simply not consistent with his biological makeup.

By contrast, Maimonides believes that even the most despicable human being guilty of the most heinous acts is fundamentally capable of change. No human being is irredeemable. For this very reason we can envision a utopian messianic era in which the world continues to "function as it functions." There is no barrier to people behaving in a utopian, peaceful manner other than their choices. No miracle is required to effect such a change.

As with the example of court-administered lashes and capital punishment, or the weapon carried on Shabbat for defense, there may be instances of justifiable violence on the circuitous path toward utopia. However, violence can never be the endgame. We cannot bring the Messiah simply by making war until all of our enemies are gone. Redemption must include all human beings, who are all fundamentally holy, and who all must be protected in life and accorded dignity in death. If that is the case, warfare has no place in the ultimate utopian vision. This is a daunting goal. Yet, we are assured that in the long arc of history, if not in the immediate present, it is an attainable one.

Maimonides was also the author of *13 Principles of Jewish Faith, which he writes in his commentary of m. Sanhedrin 10*. One of these relates to the coming of the Messiah—"To believe and affirm that the Messiah will come… and if he tarries, wait for him…" (12th principle). This is a passage I keep coming back to each day of the war. Sometimes I read or see things here in Israel that make me feel that we are at risk of glorifying the carrying of weapons, of reveling in the display of firearms as a fashion accessory or "statement piece." It feels like human dignity is being stained, like our collective souls are being sullied, and that we are thus moving further away from the Messiah, not closer. For the first time in my life, I feel a palpable sense of *tum'ah,* defilement, from the mere contact with death, irrespective of the war's justification or morality. We may have no other immediate option besides violence, and yet this violence carries shame and debasement. It diverts us from the ultimate endgame.

To paraphrase Maimonides, it feels like the Messiah is tarrying. Still, I relate to the fundamental holiness and redeemability of all people as an integral part of a future utopia in which I ultimately have faith. I refuse to accept that any group of people are simply tigers or wolves. All people have an innate holiness and a role to play in the Messiah's utopia. I wait longingly for his arrival every day.

THOUGHTS ON A DEATH

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The Talmud (*Mo'eid Kaṭan* 27b) explains that R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav: "When a person

dies in a city, all the residents of that city are prohibited from performing work" until the dead person has been buried. Jewish laws of mourning exist not only to ensure care for the dead, but also to ensure care for the living. Rules of burial and mourning provide both right and left guardrails for survivors whose relationship with the deceased could have ranged anywhere from incredibly close to completely estranged. Rav's left guardrail, that one must drop everything to care for one's dead, is complemented by his right guardrail, which follows on the same talmudic page: "Anyone who grieves excessively for one's dead will in the end weep for another person." The laws that emerge from this system designate *aninut*, the period between death and burial, as one in which the survivor is not supposed to recite blessings or even to don *tefillin*. They proceed to designate periods of initially acute and gradually less intense mourning, from burial through *shiva*, *shloshim*, and onward.

Although the laws of mourning offer a structure, they are also shaped—or reshaped—to respond to the experience of the moment. In his magnum opus *A Mediterranean Society*, the medieval Jewish historian S.D. Goitein discusses a letter from a Jewish notable named Abū Zikrī living in Cairo at the end of the twelfth century, who pushed the limits of traditional practice when his brother passed away. Goitein explains that "practically all facets of traditional behavior while mourning a beloved are visible here, mostly in exaggerated form."[1] Ritual by ritual, Goitein explains how Abū Zikrī exceeded the limits of the law: instead of simply tearing his garments, he threw them away; instead of simply following the practice of not eating one's own food, he fasted; and the list of dignitaries who visited him at home was epic. This letter, like so many in the Geniza, gives us a window into the personal lives of its *dramatis personae*, and especially into how medieval Jews connected with Jewish law and tradition. In this case, noting that Abū Zikrī had been estranged from his brother for years, Goitein conjectures that Abū Zikrī's exaggerated mourning might have been overcompensation for their estrangement. Goitein points out that, in his letter, Abū Zikrī says "not a word…about the dead brother, his good qualities and merits, which would make the greatness of his loss even more conspicuous."[2] Had he not been estranged from his brother, he might have been able to say something about him.

These brothers might have been separated by business circumstances, or perhaps by more. It is difficult to know. *Anna Karenina* famously begins, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."[3] But I feel a kinship with Abū Zikrī because I, too, recently experienced the death of a family member from whom I was estranged. A few days ago, my father died.[4] Shortly before that, my mother called a local synagogue and asked about funeral arrangements, saying that my father was in hospice care—and a friend who overheard the phone call got the word to my own rabbi and

[1] S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1996), V:177.

[2] Ibid., V:178.

[3] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Rosamund Bartlett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

[4] This piece was composed shortly after Shavuot 5783.

eventually to me. Otherwise, I would never have known that my father was dying. Or perhaps I would have: my mother called my cousin and told her not to tell me, but my cousin was having none of it. She, too, let me know that my father's end was near.

My unhappy family has a history of abuse—physical and emotional—that led me to pull back from any relationship with my parents after leaving their home at the tender age of fifteen. Early college offered me an escape. My sister went off to boarding school the same year. Although there were periods when I did return to their home, emotionally, I was checked out. As far as I could tell, my parents weren't bothered by this. Over the decades, they might have called me as easily as I could have called them. I nevertheless maintained strong ties with my extended family. When, in my mid-twenties, my parents cut off my grandmother and uncles in the wake of a dispute over a minor inheritance, I knew that the rest of my family could now better relate to some of what I was going through and understand the complicated dynamics of being in a relationship with my parents.

Over the following decades, I spent a great deal of time in therapy dealing with my history of abuse. There are still vestiges of that in my personality and disposition—if I don't see you and you touch me on the shoulder from behind, you'll see that I have a startle response that I haven't been able to lose. I also maintain an iconoclasm that serves me well in my professional writing, wherein I break down long-held ideas. But long ago I gave up on the idea that I would have the sort of relationship with my parents I might have wanted, or anything resembling "normal." Seven years ago, I took my then ten-year-old son to the Grand Canyon. My parents were living in Mesa, Arizona, at the time. Thinking it might be nice for *him* to meet his grandparents, we spent two days with them, after which my son and I got in the car and headed north. In our discussion about the visit, even he perceived the demeaning way my father had interacted with me, giving him, for better or worse, a sense of what my childhood had been like. That was the only time my son would ever see my father alive.

In the wake of my mother's call to the synagogue, I arranged to see my father. Unbeknownst to me, my parents had been living just 22 minutes away from my family's home for a year and a half. When I arrived at my parents' house, a police car appeared in the driveway just as I was parking. As I entered the house, I mentioned this to my mother, who mumbled an unintelligible reply. She directed me to the ground floor bedroom, where my father lay in a hospital bed, asleep with labored breathing. Even though he was dying, he did not *look* frail. He was still the nearly six-foot-two man who had hit and beaten me mercilessly as a child and as a teen, and who had insulted me when I had last seen him seven years ago. I was struck by how smooth his fingernails looked, as though freshly manicured. I wondered who had shaved him when I saw the electric razor sitting on the table beside me. Even as death approached, he seemed untouchable.

I can't tell whether my father recognized me or not. For the first twenty minutes or so of that visit, I just sat with him while he slept. The policeman came in to see me and mentioned that my mother

had called him when I drove up. Seeing nothing amiss, he eventually left the house. My father gently awoke. My mother came in, and my father bade her sit down. I can't say for sure, but my father seemed to think I was variously a doctor and a rabbi. When my mother said that I was Phil, his son, he spoke about me in the third person, as though I were not there. He asked about my son and I commented that I had three sons—an allusion to the fact that so much had happened in my life while they had stayed out of it, even now living so close to my own home. But the questions were no more than cursory. Mainly, he wanted to know my specialization—apparently thinking I was a doctor—and he wanted me to know his Hebrew name, apparently thinking I was his rabbi. I couldn't help thinking that he was trying to make sure that I got his name right on a headstone.

I spent about two hours there that day, most of which with my mother in the room. When I left, I said that I would come back the following day. The next day, my mother told me that it wouldn't be long. This surprised me, given how much more intellectually aware he had seemed to me than the day before. As I left, I mentioned to my mother that I wouldn't be coming by for the next couple of days because of the upcoming holiday of Shavuot, but that I would come back thereafter.

I learned two days later that a member of my synagogue works for a funeral home. Word got around on the second day of Shavuot that a "Mr. Lieberman" had been brought in that morning. As the holiday drew to a close, I naively assured my rabbi that the funeral would be the following morning, that I would start sitting *shiva* that day, and that I would get up seven days later, the following Shabbat. I was wrong on all counts.

I called my mother that evening, but I knew what she would tell me even before that because of the raft of text messages from family members on my phone. "We lost Dad," she said. *"No,"* I thought, *"we didn't 'lose' Dad. Maybe you lost him, but I already lost him years and years ago."* She went on, "The funeral will be at the National Cemetery, with a full military honor guard. That was your father's wish. I'll let you know when the funeral is after I have brought in the papers to the cemetery."

Thinking about these plans, Goitein's letter of Abū Zikrī came to mind; Abū Zikrī noted that his brother "willed, to my regret, to be buried in Haifa, which, for some reason, could not be changed." While Abū Zikrī himself lived in Egypt, much of his family lived in Jerusalem, and yet it had been his brother's will to be buried in Haifa.[5] Knowing Rav's dictum that one must bury one's dead with all due dispatch, I was more than a little shocked to hear that my father's funeral would be delayed for days. I soon discovered that the first opening the cemetery had for a burial was indeed the following Thursday, fully five days after my father's death. On the recommendation of the funeral home staff, and in the hopes of a quick and respectful burial that would nonetheless fulfill my father's wishes for military honors—he

[5] Goitein, V:176.

had been a military judge in the National Guard and retired as a lieutenant colonel after 24 years—my rabbi and I drove together to see my mother. Refusing to speak with the rabbi on the grounds that she didn't know him, my mother told me that she alone had the power and authority to make decisions regarding the disposition of my father's earthly remains. I could do nothing but agree with her, while I nonetheless let her know that leaving my father's body in a refrigerator for so many days to no purpose was disrespectful. Our community respects the requirement of a speedy burial, and my rabbi had let me know that our Jewish community cemetery could accommodate my father's desire for military honors. There was certainly no need to delay to accommodate loved ones coming from afar. No one would come.

Leaving my parents' house, I knew that there was little I could do to follow Rav's dictum—to drop everything and ensure a respectful and speedy burial. And anticipating a wait of another five days until the funeral, followed only then by another week of *shiva*, I began to wonder what the point was. I was unable even to tell my friends when they should be available to help make a *minyan* for *kaddish* at the cemetery, when they could pay a *shiva* call, or what the mourning process might look like for me. As friends and colleagues got word of my father's death, messages came in, the writers of which assumed that the funeral had already happened and that I was sitting *shiva* surrounded by family and the comfort of neighbors and friends. In truth, I was in an interminable limbo, in a protracted *aninut* that was going to last nearly a week. Yet my mother had already made clear that my input on that front was not welcome. As in the case of Abū Zikrī's brother, the nature of my father's burial was a *fait accompli*. But receiving the news in Egypt some time after his brother's death, the medieval notable was at least able to mourn; his letter details the visits of his companions who sat with him and comforted him. I, on the other hand, days later, was still not an *aveil*, a mourner, but rather an *onein*.

Even though an *onein* is not supposed to leave the house except on urgent funeral business,[6] I took my dog on a long walk and called my uncle for some support. My father's youngest brother, my uncle Jerry, would likely describe himself as anything but religious, but I have many memories of spending Friday nights with Jerry when I was a child. Jerry and my aunt Grace lived in between my home and my father's parents' home—a total distance of just over a mile and a half—and we would often gather at my grandparents' home for dinner and games. I remember my uncle being a fierce Monopoly player, once taking the rule sheet for the game into my grandparents' home office mid-game and adding to the rules with the typewriter, "People who blow bubbles in their pop cannot use the dog," teasing my sister—whose gamepiece preference in Monopoly was for the Scottie Dog. As I grew older, my uncle became a source of love and support. Since I had grown up in relative proximity to him, he was also a check on the darker sides of my memory—he once mentioned to me that he noted that my parents had a closet door which locked from the

[6] See *Be'eir Ha-Golah to Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Dei'ah 341:5.*

outside. Having been cut off by my parents no less than I, he knew the pain of longing for things to have been different.

I explained to Jerry my frustrations at having to wait days and days for the funeral and being unable to commence *shiva* until my father's body was in the ground. Empathetic, Jerry asked me what I might do to deal with the situation. I mentioned that mourners who send their departed family member to Israel commence *shiva* when the body is put on the plane, even though the funeral has not yet taken place.[7] I mused that since I had no input whatsoever as to how my father's funeral would play out, perhaps I could just give up, not participate in whatever funeral my mother had planned, and commence *shiva*. It bears pointing out that my mother knew that burials at military cemeteries are performed by cemetery staff and a backhoe and not by friends and family with their shovels. When I mentioned to my mother my vivid memories of shoveling dirt into her parents' graves, she snapped, "It isn't my business to make memories for you." Given my exclusion from funeral planning, I no longer felt like an *onein*. Rather, I felt hostage to the very process that our tradition lays out for mourning: *aninut* before burial, followed by *shiva*, *shloshim*, and twelve months of mourning (for a parent).

After my conversation with Jerry, my wife suggested I consult with a well-known Modern Orthodox *poseik* whom I knew from my professional circles and who had always been extraordinarily generous with his time and counsel. When his own father died, I happened to be in New York and was able to make a *shiva* call. I knew that he would be able to offer insight. Although it was late in the evening, he picked up his phone immediately. I explained the situation to him and told him that I felt trapped in a protracted *aninut*, followed by *shiva*, all for a parent I had mourned long ago. His reply shocked me.

"I often counsel children who have been estranged from their parents," he said, "not to sit *shiva* and not to say *kaddish*." He went on to refine his statement: "If you think that your father was a *rasha* [an evil person], you do not need to do these things. But I am not going to make that decision for you. Be advised, though, that a *rasha* isn't someone who is not good to you alone—that could be your fault. This would have to be someone who is generally wicked."

I thought for a moment about how my parents had treated me over the years. I thought about the physical and emotional abuse. I thought about how my father blamed me in the days before his death for ruining our relationship by failing to return a phone call some 23 years before, which my best friend aptly labeled "emotional terrorism." I thought about how my father cut off all contact with his own mother until she was on her own deathbed, all because she had told him that she was going to leave her meager inheritance to my uncle Jerry, the son who had taken care of her for decades, instead of allocating a share of it to my father, who had already received *plenty* from his parents when his

[7] See *Shulhan Arukh*, *Yoreh Dei'ah* 375:2.

father died. I thought about my sister and her family, none of whom had even articulated a thought about coming to the funeral. Was my father terrible to others as well? It would seem so.

I spoke with my local rabbi about this, mentioning that our prominent colleague had laid things out for me. His wise counsel was that I take the week and lay low and take some time to reflect. I said that I might write something about this experience, and that bringing that experience to the fore might help others who share complex feelings around the death of a parent understand that they are not alone. My feelings were not feelings of loss—I experienced those decades ago—but rather, they were feelings that the traditional process of *aninut* and *shiva* was not serving its intended purpose of respecting the dead and supporting the living. Receiving emails from colleagues and friends offering me condolences on the death of my father, I resisted the urge to write, "Thanks for your thoughtfulness, but I'm not really feeling a sense of loss. I dealt with that years ago." Instead, I simply wrote, "Thank you for your thoughtful email." I dreaded the idea of sitting a week of traditional *shiva* and having members of my community, who mostly don't know my personal story, ask me to share a memory of my father with them, and my having to pretend that my father was a good person and father and a truly positive influence in my life. R. Maurice Lamm writes in *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, "… there is always a substratum of goodness and decency in all men which can be detected if properly sought."[8] But my father's substratum was masked by a lifetime of ill-treatment that would make it difficult for me to respond to *shiva* comforters without also feeling that I was being untrue to myself and my experience, and ultimately untrue even to my father.

I found that at least two prominent contemporary authorities have already written about how to deal with the loss of an abusive parent: R. Mark Dratch of JSafe (The Jewish Institute Supporting an Abuse Free Environment) wrote an article entitled "Honoring Abusive Parents,"[9] and R. Dov Linzer of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah wrote an online article called "Honoring an Abusive Parent?"[10] Days in, I felt that I had a way ahead. But when I mentioned this to a friend and teacher of mine who lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh—who would also identify as Modern Orthodox—I got some pushback. I was surprised: my teacher and friend, like me, comes from an abusive home and is also estranged from his parents. He encouraged me—despite the clear alternative—to trust the process and stick with *aninut* and *shiva*.

As I thought about this friend and teacher's counsel, I could not help wondering if perhaps he was projecting his own situation onto mine. What would *he* do when his parents passed away? Would he, like me, take the radical step of foregoing our time-honored rituals? As a well-

[8] R. Maurice Lamm, (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 2000), 49.

[9] Mark Dratch, "Honoring Abusive Parents," *Ḥakirah* (Fall 2011): 105.

[10] https://library.yctorah.org/2018/02/must-a-person-honor-and-mourn-for-an-abusive-parent/.

known rabbi living in a densely populated traditional neighborhood in Israel, his failure to observe *shiva* and to recite *kaddish* would be obvious to all. His choice would be seen as a failure. On top of the pain he had experienced at having been abused, and the loss of being able to imagine that he had a "normal" family life, he would be faced with the additional stigma of not observing the traditional signs of mourning for a parent. Loss on top of loss. I can understand his resistance.

I write this piece in order to drive home Tolstoy's point, that "each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." In the past, when hearing that friends have lost a family member, I have often asked them to send me their eulogy. I ask this of friends to let them know that I care about them, and it has allowed me to get to know my friends and their families better. But I'm not sure I'll do this anymore because I don't have a eulogy to give for my father. R. Lamm is surely correct that I could have found a substratum. But such a eulogy would have been a sham. In fact, there were no eulogies at my father's funeral at all. It was strictly a military ceremony. And even though I have performed tens of funerals in uniform as a military chaplain, my uniform hung in the closet that day. I was joined at the funeral by my oldest son, now 17, and my wife—who never even met my father.

As an observant Jew, I look to the institutions of Jewish life to frame my life and to help me deal with its vicissitudes. One does not look forward to burial, to sitting *shiva*, or to reciting *kaddish*, but those rituals are tools for responding to loss. In many cases, they can engender a catharsis that helps the mourner deal with the situation. For Abū Zikrī, his performance of exaggerated rituals may have made up for his embarrassment at having been estranged from his brother. But in my own case, the rituals are yet another reminder of my loss: the loss of being able to mourn *al pi halakhah*—which would ordinarily mean "according to Jewish law," but which in this case really means "as one goes." This part of my life hasn't gone as I wished it would have, and my inability to perform these rituals is a painful reminder of just that.

I do not write to add to the halakhic discussion of mourning. But as I have shared my experience with others, some have pointed out that *they* too did not sit *shiva* for a parent—or that they know someone who didn't. Knowing that others have followed this same path has taken the edge off. It has made me feel less alone in my mourning the loss of *shiva*. Goitein writes in *A Mediterranean Society* that "official mourning rites were intended for heartless people who neglected the duties of filial piety or family affection."[11] Yet I am not heartless. Without *shiva* as a comfort, I am heartbroken.

[11] Goitein, V:174.