

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 has 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 an 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 past 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.

Psalms Chapter 1

אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשֵׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב: כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חָפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שְׂתוּל עַל פְּלִי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוֹ לֹא יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ: לֹא כֵן הֶרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם כַּמָּץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ: עַל כֵּן לֹא יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדֹת צְדִיקִים: כִּי יוֹדַע ה' דַּרְךְ צְדִיקִים וְדַרְךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּאבֵּד:

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. His preference is for teachings of the Lord, and on the Lord's teachings he mediates day and night. He is like a tree planted besides streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose laves never fade and whatever he does succeeds. It is not so wit 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.

Psalms 15

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: ה' מִי יִגּוֹר בְּאֹהֶלְךָ מִי יִשְׁכֵּן בְּהַר קִדְשֶׁךָ: הוֹלֵךְ תָּמִים וּפְעֵל צְדָק וְדִבֵּר אֱמֶת בְּלִבָּבוֹ: לֹא רָגַל עַל לְשׁוֹנוֹ לֹא עָשָׂה לְרֵעֵהוּ רָעָה וְחִרְפָּה לֹא נִשְׂא עַל קְרֵבוֹ: נִבְזָה בְּעֵינָיו נִמְאָס וְאֵת יְרֵאֵי ה' יִכְבֵּד נִשְׁבַּע לְהִרְעוֹ וְלֹא יָמַר: כִּסְפוֹ לֹא נָתַן בְּנִשְׁוֹ וְשָׁחַד עַל נֶקִי לֹא לָקַח עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹה לֹא יִמוֹט לְעוֹלָם:

A Psalm of David: Lord, who may dwell in your tent, who will reside upon your holy mount? One who walks blamelessly and does righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. He does not slander with his lips, and does not do evil to his fellow, nor carried enmity towards those around him. A contemptible person is disgusting in his eyes, and he honors those who fear the Lord; [even if] he swears to his own detriment, he will not change. He has not lent his money with interest, nor has he taken a bribe against an innocent person - he who does this will never be shaken.

*For a Woman***Ecclesiastes 31:10-31 "A Woman of Valor"**

אִשְׁתְּ חַיִּל מִי יִמְצָא וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה: בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בַּעֲלָהּ וְשָׁלָל לֹא יִחְסֹר: גִּמְלַתְהוּ טוֹב וְלֹא רָע
 כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ: דְּרָשָׁה צֶמֶר וּפְשִׁתִּים וַתַּעַשׂ בְּחֶפֶץ כַּפֶּיהָ: הֵיטָה כְּאִנִּיּוֹת סוֹחֵר מִמְּרַחֵק תָּבִיא לַחֲמָה:
 וַתִּקֶּם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה וַתִּתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְחֵק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ: זָמְמָה שָׂדֵה וַתִּקְחָהּ מִפְּרֵי כַּפֶּיהָ נָטַע כָּרִם:
 חָגְרָה בְּעוֹז מִתְּנִיָּה וַתֵּאָמֶץ זְרוּעֹתֶיהָ: טַעְמָה כִּי טוֹב סָחָרָה לֹא יִכְבֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה גֵּרָה: יָדֶיהָ שָׁלְחָה
 בְּכִישׁוֹר וּכְפִיָּה תִמְכּוּ פֶלֶךְ: כַּפָּה פָּרְשָׁה לְעֵנִי וַיְדִיָּה שְׁלַחָה לְאַבְיוֹן: לֹא תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשָּׁלֵג כִּי כָל
 בֵּיתָהּ לִבְשׁ שָׁנִים: מְרַבְּדִים עֲשֵׂתָהּ לָהּ שֵׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּמָן לְבוּשָׁה: נוֹדַע בְּשַׁעְרִים בַּעֲלָהּ בְּשִׁבְתוֹ עִם זְקֵנֵי
 אֶרֶץ: סָדִין עֲשֵׂתָהּ וַתִּמְכֹּר וַחֲגוּר נִתְּנָה לְכַנְעֲנֵי: עוֹז וְהָדָר לְבוּשָׁה וַתִּשְׁחַק לַיּוֹם אַחֲרוֹן: פִּיהָ פִּתְחָה
 בְּחִכְמָה וַתּוֹרֵת חֶסֶד עַל לְשׁוֹנָה: צוּפִיָּה הֵילְכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ וְלַחֵם עַצְלוֹת לֹא תֹאכַל: קָמוּ בָנֶיהָ וַיֵּאָשְׁרוּהָ
 בַּעֲלָהּ וַיְהַלְלָהּ: רַבּוֹת בָּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חַיִּל וְאֵת עֲלִית עַל כָּלָנָה: שָׁקַר הַחֹן וְהַבֵּל הַיְפִי אֲשֶׁה יִרְאֵת יְהוָה
 הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל: תָּנוּ לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יָדֶיהָ וַיְהַלְלוּהָ בְּשַׁעְרִים מַעֲשֵׂיהָ:

A woman of valour 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 דְּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל מֵי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלְנִי: נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבָב יִנְחֵנִי
בְּמַעְגְלֵי צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ: גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אֶתָּה עִמָּדִי שְׁבֹטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתְךָ הֵמָּה
יִנְחֵמֵנִי: תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שַׁלְחֹן נִגְדַּד צִרְרֵי דְשִׁנְתָּ בְשִׁמֹן רֹאשִׁי כוֹסֵי רוּיָהּ: אֵךְ טוֹב וַחֲסֹד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי
וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבַיִת יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ 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

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים הַמֵּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל בְּנֵפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוּרִים
כְּזֹהֵר הַרְקִיעַ מְזֵהִירִים אֶת נִשְׁמַת (Name of deceased) בֶּן (Name of deceased father)
שֶׁהֵלֵךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ בְּעֵבוֹר שְׁאַנְחָנוּ מִתְפַּלְלִים בְּעֵד הַזְּכָרֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ, בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תְּהֵא מְנוּחָתוֹ לְכֹן בְּעַל
הַרְחָמִים יִסְתִּירָהוּ בְּסִתְרֵי כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרַר בְּצִרְוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ. הִי הוּא נְחֻלָּתוֹ וְיִנוּחַ
בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

Lord 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

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים הַמְצִיא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוֹרִים
 כְּזֹהָר הַרְקִיעַ מְזֻהָרִים אֶת נִשְׁמַת (Name of deceased) בַּת (Name of deceased's father)
 שֶׁהִלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָה בְּעָבוּר שְׁאַנְחָנוּ מִתְפַּלְלִים בְּעַד הַזְכָּרַת נִשְׁמָתָהּ, בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תִּהְיֶה מְנוּחָתָהּ, לָכוֹן בְּעַל
 הַרְחָמִים יִסְתַּיְרָה בְּסִתְרֵי כְּנָפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרָר בְּצִרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתָהּ. הִי הוּא נְחֻלָּתָהּ וְתַנּוּחַ
 בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכְּבָהּ וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן :

Lord 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 day 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	בְּעֻלְמָא 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	בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן
<i>and in the lives of the whole house of Israel</i>	uv'chayay d'chol bayt Yisrael	וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל
<i>speedily and at a close time</i>	ba'agalah u'vizman kariv	בְּעֻגְלָא וּבְזְמַן קָרִיב
<i>And say: Amen.</i>	v'imru amen.	וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.
Congregation responds:		
<i>Amen, may His great name be blessed forever and ever.</i>	Amen, y'hay shmeh rabbah mevorach le'olam u'le'olmay almayah	אָמֵן יִהְיֶה שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבֻרָךְ לְעֹלָם וּלְעֹלְמֵי עֲלְמֵיָא.

<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 וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרֹמֵם 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>Above all</i>	L'aylah (u'laylah) ¹ min kol	לְעֵלָא (לְעֵלָא) 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	דְּאָמִירוּ 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 הֵכ
<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.