

REFLECTIONS OF THE MOURNING LIGHT

Mourning and Consolation
in Jewish Law & Thought

Given by Rabbi Larry Rothwachs

MONDAY NIGHTS AT 8:30
at Congregation Beth Aaron
950 Queen Anne Road Teaneck NJ

- ▶ **MAY 2** Sacred Passage: Escorting Loved Ones During the Moments of Death
- ▶ **MAY 9** "And To the Dust You Shall Return": Before, During and After the *Levaya*
- ▶ **MAY 16** The Mourning Light: Perspectives on *Aveilus* in *Halacha* and *Hashkafa*
- ▶ **MAY 23** The Comfort Zone: Practical *Nichum Aveilim* in *Halacha* and *Hashkafa*
- ▶ **JUNE 6** "May the *Neshama* Have an *Aliyah*": Memorializing the Soul of a Loved One

This lecture series is generously sponsored by:

Allen and Rachel Friedman in memory of Allen's mother Dvora (Rakover) Friedman z"l
Alden and Evie Leifer in memory of Alden's parents, Hy and Trudy Leifer,
Chaim ben Nachman Moshe z"l and Gittel bas Shlomo Yaakov halevi z"l

*“AND TO THE DUST
YOU SHALL RETURN”:*
BEFORE, DURING AND
AFTER THE FUNERAL



❖ ואתה תבוא אל אבתיך בשלום תקבר בשיבה טובה (בראשית טו:טו)

❖ ויגע וימת אברהם בשיבה טובה זקן ושבע ויאסף אל עמיו (בראשית כה:ח)

❖ ושכבתי עם אבתי ונשאתני ממצרים וקברתני בקברתם ויאמר אנכי אעשה כדברך (שם מז:ל)

❖ והנה אנכי הולך היום בדרך כל הארץ (יהושע כג יד)

❖ פטירה

❖ יציאה

❖ מנוחה

ברכות י. – אמר ר' יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי...דר במעי אמו
ואמר שירה שנאמר (תהלים קג) ברכי נפשי את ה' וכל קרבי את שם
קדשו, יצא לאויר העולם ונסתכל בכוכבים ומזלות ואמר שירה
שנאמר (תהלים שם) ברכו ה' מלאכיו גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמוע
בקול דברו ברכו ה' כל עבאיו וגו'...נסתכל ביום המיתה ואמר שירה
שנאמר (שם קד) ברכי נפשי את ה' ה' אלהי גדלת מאד הוד והדר
לבשת מאי משמע דעל יום המיתה נאמר

מועד קטן כה: – בכו לאבלים ולא לאבידה, שהיא למנוחה ואנו
לאנחה

אבות ד:כב – הוא הָיָה אֹמֵר הַיְלֹדִים לָמוֹת וְהַמֵּתִים לְהַחַיִּוֹת



ספר

גשר החיים. חלק ג'

הסתכלות על החיים ומעברם

פרק א'

השקפה על המעבר

Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l
1872-1955



אנינות

משנה ברכות ג:א – מי שימתו מוטל לפניו, פטור מקריאת שמע, ומן התפלין

פני משה ריש פ"ג דברכות - אם מפני כבודו של מת שמראה עצמו שאינו חשוב בעיניו להתאבל עליו או משום שטרוד הוא שאין לו מי שישא משואו להתעסק בקבורתו

TWO Reasons:

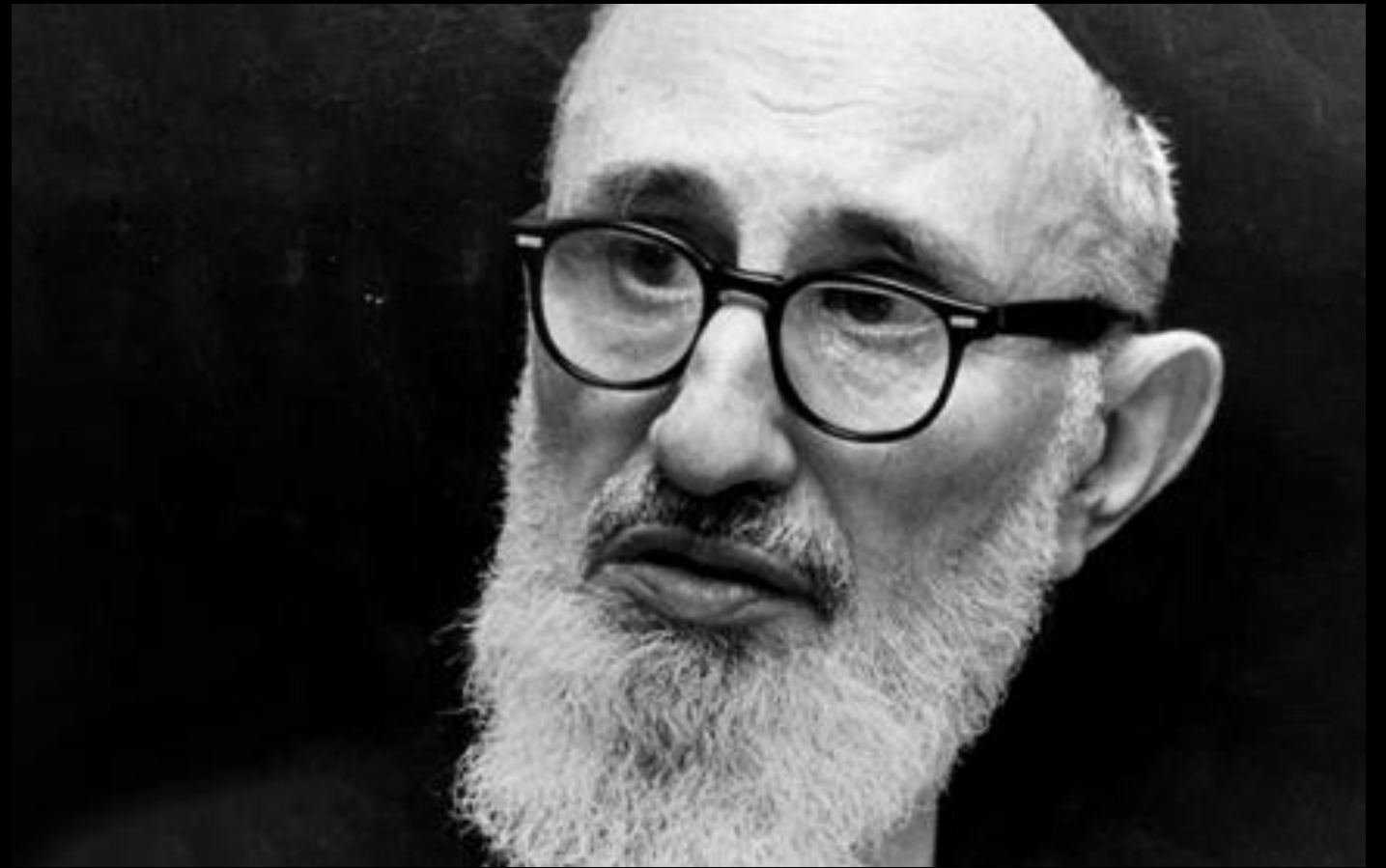
- 1) Honoring the deceased
- 2) Preoccupation and mindset of the mourner

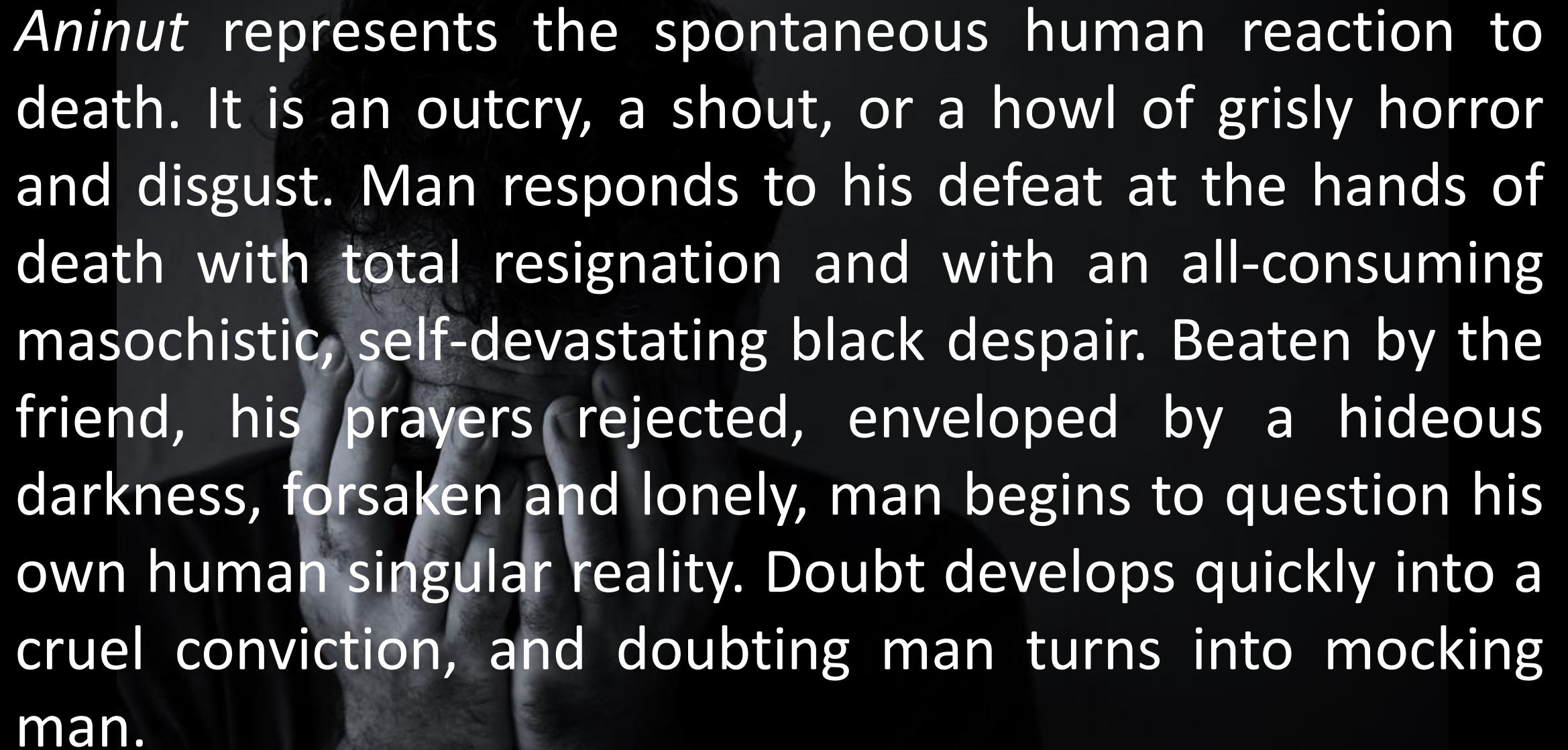


Out of the Whirlwind

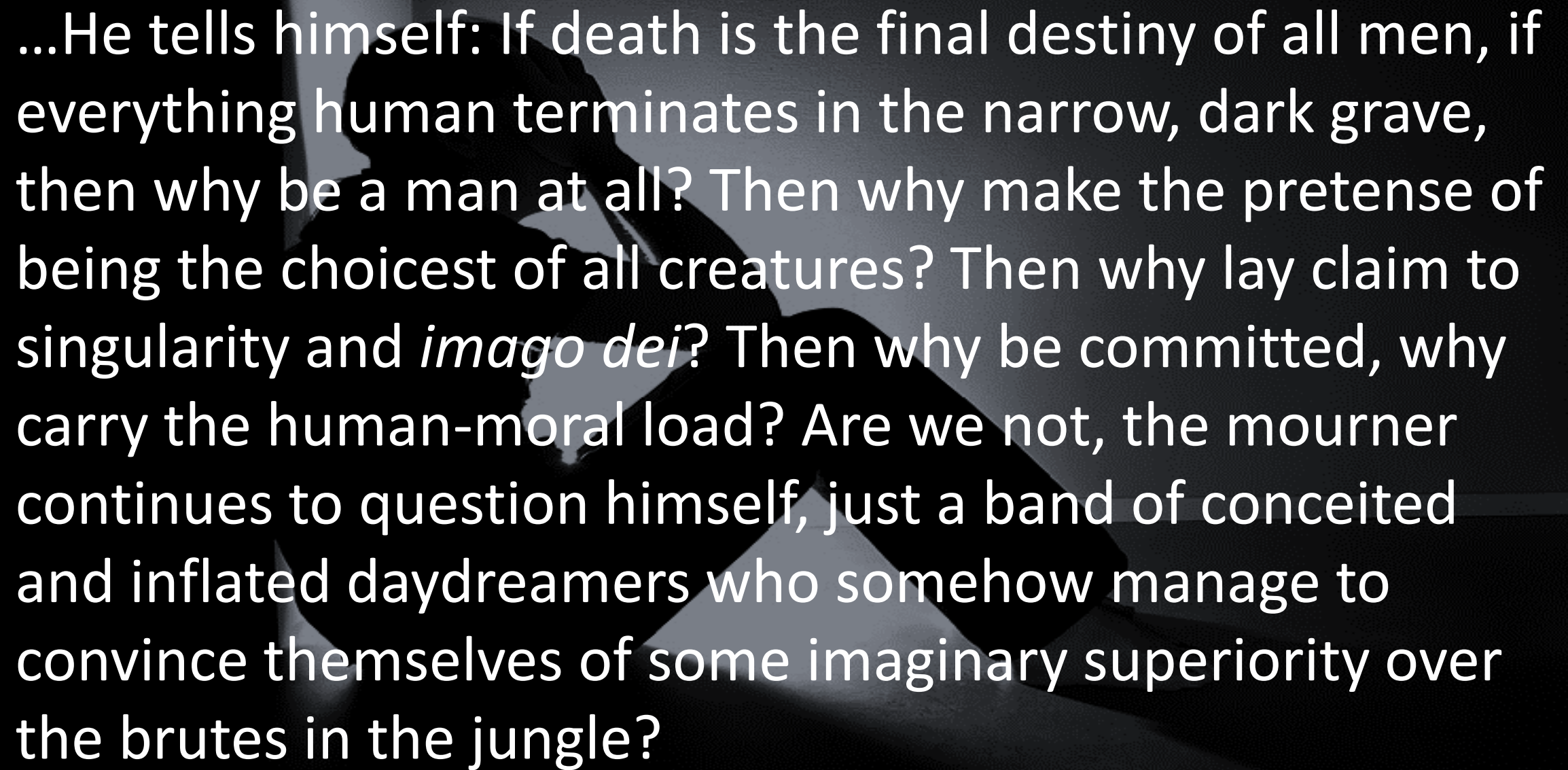
*Essays on Mourning,
Suffering and
the Human Condition*

By Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik



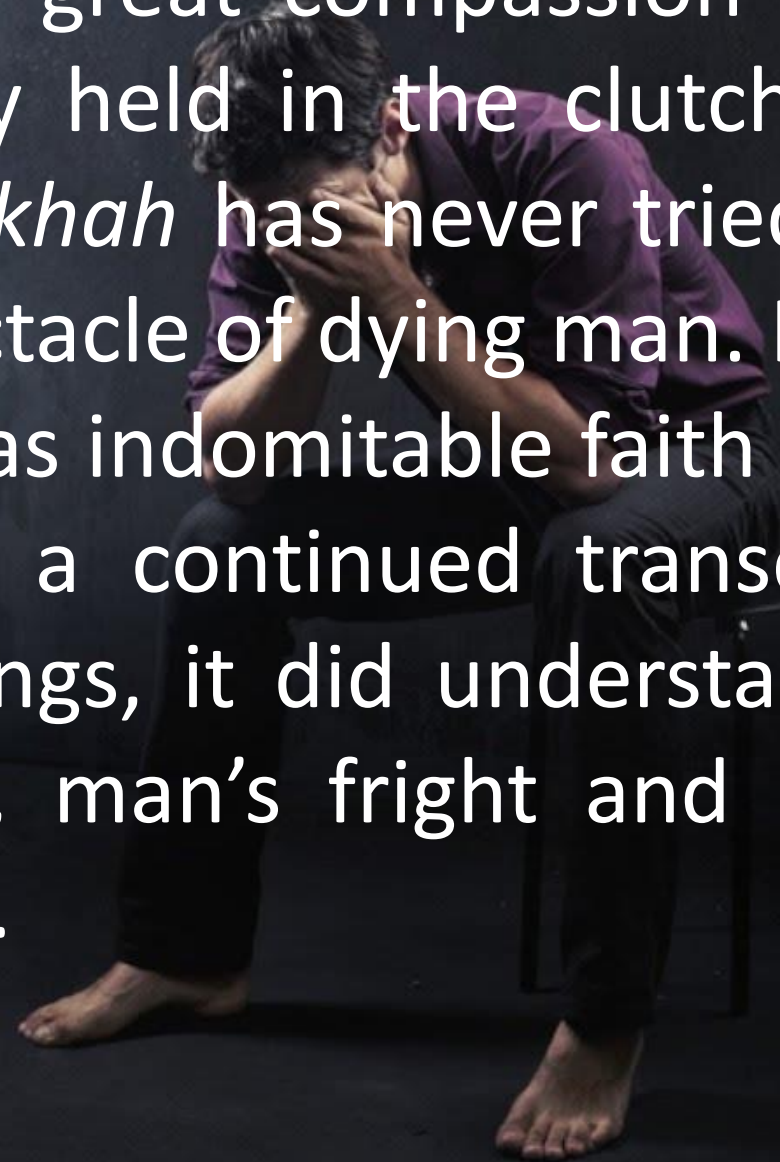
A black and white photograph of a man covering his face with his hands, suggesting despair or grief. The image is dark and moody, with the man's hands and face being the central focus. The background is mostly black, with some faint highlights on the man's hair and clothing.

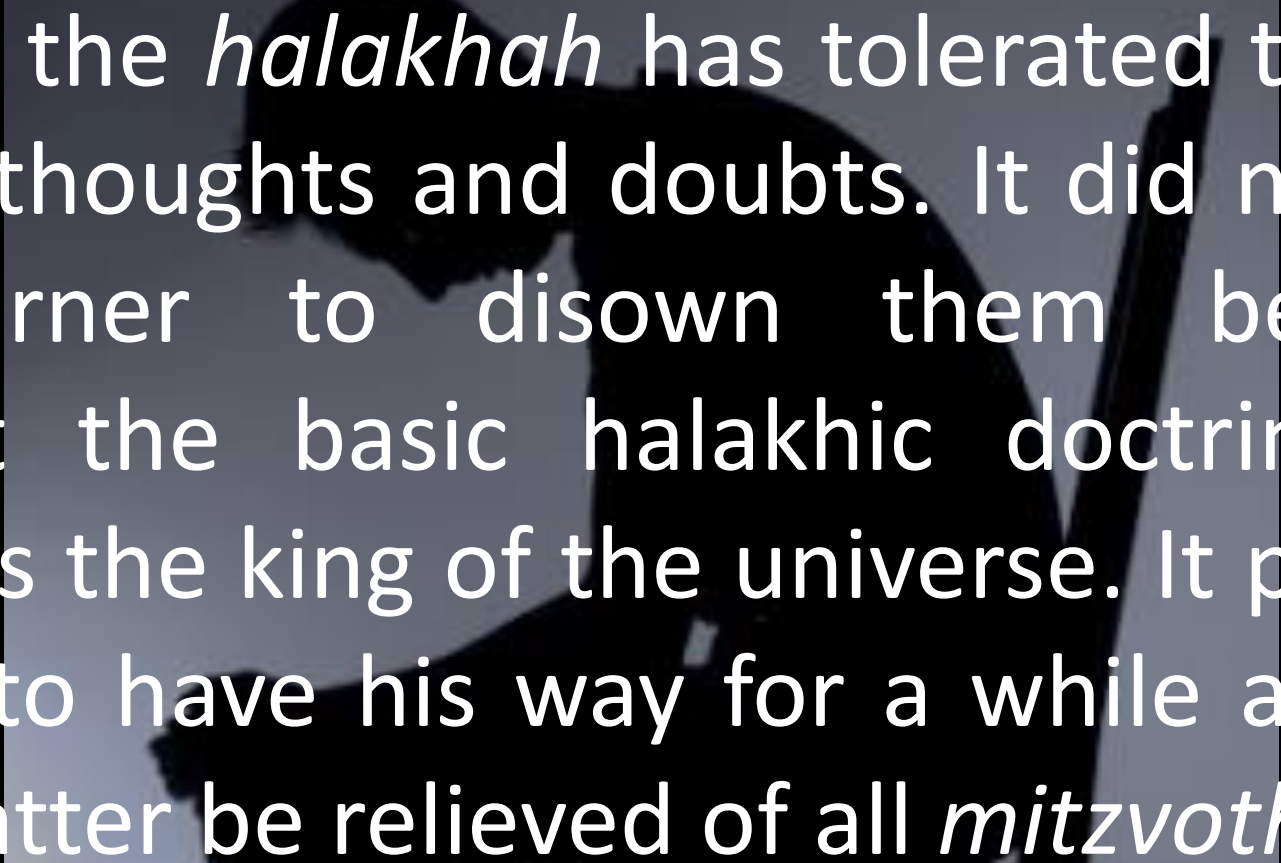
Aninut represents the spontaneous human reaction to death. It is an outcry, a shout, or a howl of grisly horror and disgust. Man responds to his defeat at the hands of death with total resignation and with an all-consuming masochistic, self-devastating black despair. Beaten by the friend, his prayers rejected, enveloped by a hideous darkness, forsaken and lonely, man begins to question his own human singular reality. Doubt develops quickly into a cruel conviction, and doubting man turns into mocking man.



...He tells himself: If death is the final destiny of all men, if everything human terminates in the narrow, dark grave, then why be a man at all? Then why make the pretense of being the choicest of all creatures? Then why lay claim to singularity and *imago dei*? Then why be committed, why carry the human-moral load? Are we not, the mourner continues to question himself, just a band of conceited and inflated daydreamers who somehow manage to convince themselves of some imaginary superiority over the brutes in the jungle?

The *halakhah* has displayed great compassion with perplexed, suffering man firmly held in the clutches of his archenemy, death. The *halakhah* has never tried to gloss over the sorrowful, ugly spectacle of dying man. In spite of the fact that the *halakhah* has indomitable faith in eternal life, in immortality, and in a continued transcendental existence for all human beings, it did understand, like a loving, sympathetic mother, man's fright and confusion when confronted with death.





Therefore the *halakhah* has tolerated those "crazy," torturing thoughts and doubts. It did not command the mourner to disown them because they contradict the basic halakhic doctrine of man's election as the king of the universe. It permitted the mourner to have his way for a while and has ruled that the latter be relieved of all *mitzvoth*...

...How can man pray and address himself to God if he doubts his very humanity, if speech is stripped by his doubts of its human characteristics and turned into mere physical sound? How can the mourner pronounce a benediction or say "amen" if he is "speechless"? He is still capable of producing sounds, but a benediction consists of spiritual words and not just of physical sounds.

- Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l



LAWS OF אַנִּינּוֹת

- 1) Exemption from מצוות לא תעשה, must still adhere to all מצוות עשה
 - Examples include: עניית אמן, ברכות, תפילה, etc.
 - Although technically only an exemption, it is treated as if mandatory
 - Exceptions:
 - a) Washing before bread
 - b) ציצית
 - c) ספירת העומר (?)
- 2) Prohibition of eating meat/poultry/wine until after funeral
- 3) Restrictions of אבילות apply (i.e. bathing, haircut, etc.), but not ניהוגי אבילות (i.e. sitting on floor, no leather shoes)
- 4) No תהלים nor recitation of תלמוד תורה
 - Preparation for eulogies are permitted
- 5) Prohibition of personal business activates
- 6) No אבילות on שבת ויו"ט (with the exception of private restrictions of אבילות)

הלנת המת

דברים נא – וכי יהיה באיש זוטא משפוט מות והומת ותלית אתו על עץ. לא תלין נבלתו על העץ כי קבור תקברנו ביום ההוא כי קללת אלהים תלוי ולא תטמא את אדמתך אשר יהוה אלהיך נתן לך נחלה.

- Every effort should be made to proceed with burial ASAP
- In the absence of any unique extenuating considerations (as determined by *halacha*), it is prohibited to delay the burial from one day to the next.
- If family wish to delay the funeral to allow for close relative(s) to attend, halachic guidance should be sought



טהרת המת / PURIFICATION OF THE BODY

- Performed by חברה קדישא, with modesty and dignity
- Done as close to קבורה as possible
- 3 Main components
 - רחיצה / Washing
 - טהרה / Ritual purification
 - הלבשה / Dressing
- (Placed in simple, plain ארון)

MANY customs and rituals throughout this process

PREPARATION FOR FUNERAL

- Discuss all details with funeral director BEFORE funeral. ALL expectations, intentions, wishes and related details should be clearly spelled out and agreed upon in advance.
- If the deceased had issued any specific requests or had made any prearrangements, the officiating rabbi should be informed as soon as possible.
- Attire and related considerations
- Who should attend?
 - Children
 - Pregnant wife of *kohen*
 - Other pregnant women



קריעה / RENDING OF GARMENTS

- Many examples from תנ"ך of individuals tearing garments in moments of tragedy. However, these are all situations of unnatural, tragic deaths.
- Source for obligation for קריעה in all situations of death is from ויקרא י: ו, where it states: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֱהֲרֹן וְלֵאֲלֵעָזָר וְלֵאִיתָמָר בְּנֵי רָאשֵׁיכֶם אֲל תִּפְרְעוּ וּבִגְדֵיכֶם לֹא תִפְרְמוּ וְלֹא תִמְתּוּ
- Reasons:
 1. Arouses one to emotional pain and reminds him of the loss
 2. To distract him from the loss
 3. Represents the loss of the body = “clothing” of the soul



קריעה / RENDING OF GARMENTS

- מעיקר הדין it is done at time of death, accepted מנהג is to wait until funeral:
 - Moment of greatest emotion, realization of the loss
 - To arouse the assembled to tears
 - To insure it's done properly
- Permissible to change clothing before tearing
- For a parent:
 - Tear shirt/blouse and jacket/vest (not coat nor undergarments)
 - Left side
- For other relatives:
 - מעיקר הדין only "בגד עליון" (although unclear what that is)
 - Right side
- ברכת דיין האמת recited beforehand
- It is customary to have someone else start the tear
- Must be a vertical tear of at least 3.5 inches over heart, not on seam

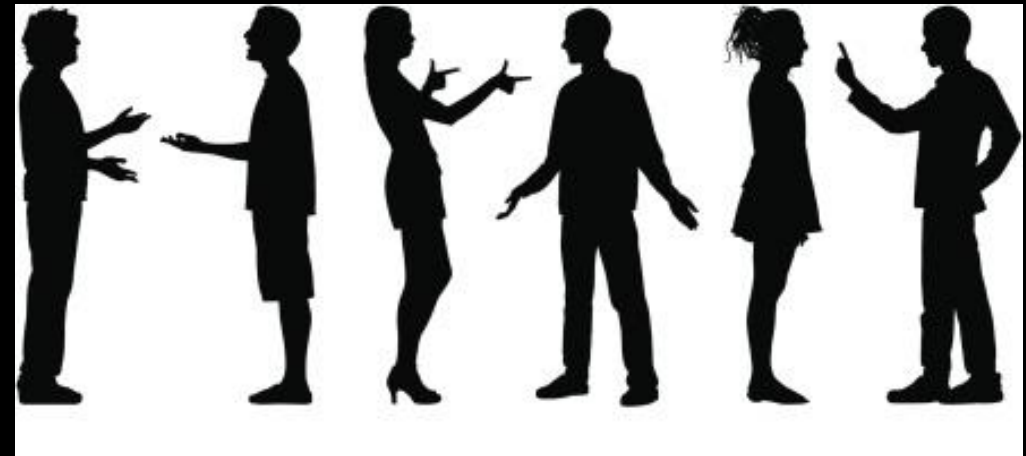
EULOGY / הספד

- Great mitzvah and kindness to deceased
- Especially fitting for a son to eulogize a parent
- Brief biographical sketch is appropriate
- מדות טובות should highlight distinguishing qualities, מספיד should
- According to tradition, ב"ד של מעלה considers words of מספידים very seriously. Thus, should be positive, substantive and truthful (slight exaggerations are permissible). הספידים should not include words that reflect קלות ראש.
- Days when there are no eulogies



FUNERAL / לוייה

- Before קבורה there should be no formal receiving of מנחמים nor should words of נחמה be extended:
אבות ד:יח רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר...אל תנחמנו בשעה שמתו מוטל לפניו
- Mourners and/or guests should not extend formal greetings to each other at a לוייה
- Mourners and/or guests should not stand around and schmooze at לוייה, especially inappropriate to have conversations in room with the מת



FUNERAL / לוויה

- If one will not be escorting the מת to the cemetery, should be מלווה the ארון at least 4 אמות.
- ארון should be carried and handled exclusively by Jews (mourners themselves should not participate). Occasionally, there may be extenuating circumstances, whereby the officiating rabbi determines that assistance from the cemetery employees is necessary to guarantee a safe and proper burial. This decision should be respected and it should be understood that when deemed appropriate, the delegation of these tasks to the cemetery employees is considered a demonstration of כבוד המת.
- At cemetery, as ארון is being carried to grave, תהלים פרק צא is recited and 7 "מעמדות" (stops) are made.
מס' ב"ב ק: – ת"ר אין פוחתין משבעה מעמדות ומושבות למת כנגד (קהלת א) הבל הבלים אמר קהלת הבל הבלים הכל הבל
- Try to avoid walking on other graves (only if possible)

BURIAL / קבורה

- Assembled should participate in the burial
- Shovel not passed directly to another
- First 3 shovels of dirt with back of shovel
- לכתחילה the entire grave should be filled in by Jews, with the assembled remaining present
- Should make a צורת הקבר and place a marker or stone by grave



צידוק הדין



- צידוק הדין is recited by אבלים together with others assembled
- 3 major themes in צידוק הדין:
 1. Death is ordained by God and His decrees are justified
 2. We pray for mercy and compassion for the survivors
 3. God is the one who gives and the one who takes. We thank Him for the time that is given to us

קדיש הגדול / BURIAL KADDISH

- קדיש הגדול, also known as the “burial kaddish” is a unique קדיש. Touches upon the following major themes:

1. God will create the world anew
2. There will be a תחית המתים
3. There is a future for the dead
4. ירושלים will be rebuilt
5. The ביהמ"ק will be rebuilt

- Omitted on days when in there is no תחנון
- Requires a מנין



קדיש הגדול
ביום שאומרים צדה"ד מתחילין
בנוסח זה:
יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ
רַבָּא, בְּעָלְמָא דְהוּא עֵתִיד
לְאַתְחַדְתָּא, וְלְאַתְתָּא
מִתָּא, וְלְאַסְקָא לְחַיֵּי
עָלְמָא, וְלְמַבְנֵי קַרְתָּא
דִּירוּשְׁלַם, וְלְשְׂכָלֵל
הֵיכְלָהּ בְּגוֹהַ, וְלְמַעְקַר
פּוֹלְחָנָא נּוֹכְרָאָה מֵאַרְעָא,
וְלְאַתְבָּא פּוֹלְחָנָא דְשְׁמַיָּה
לְאַתְרָהּ, וְיַמְלִיךְ קוּדְשָׁא
בְּרִיךְ הוּא בְּמַלְכוּתָהּ
וְיִקְרָהּ, [וְיַצְמַח פּוֹרְקָנָה
וְיִקְרַב מְשִׁיחָה],^{125a}

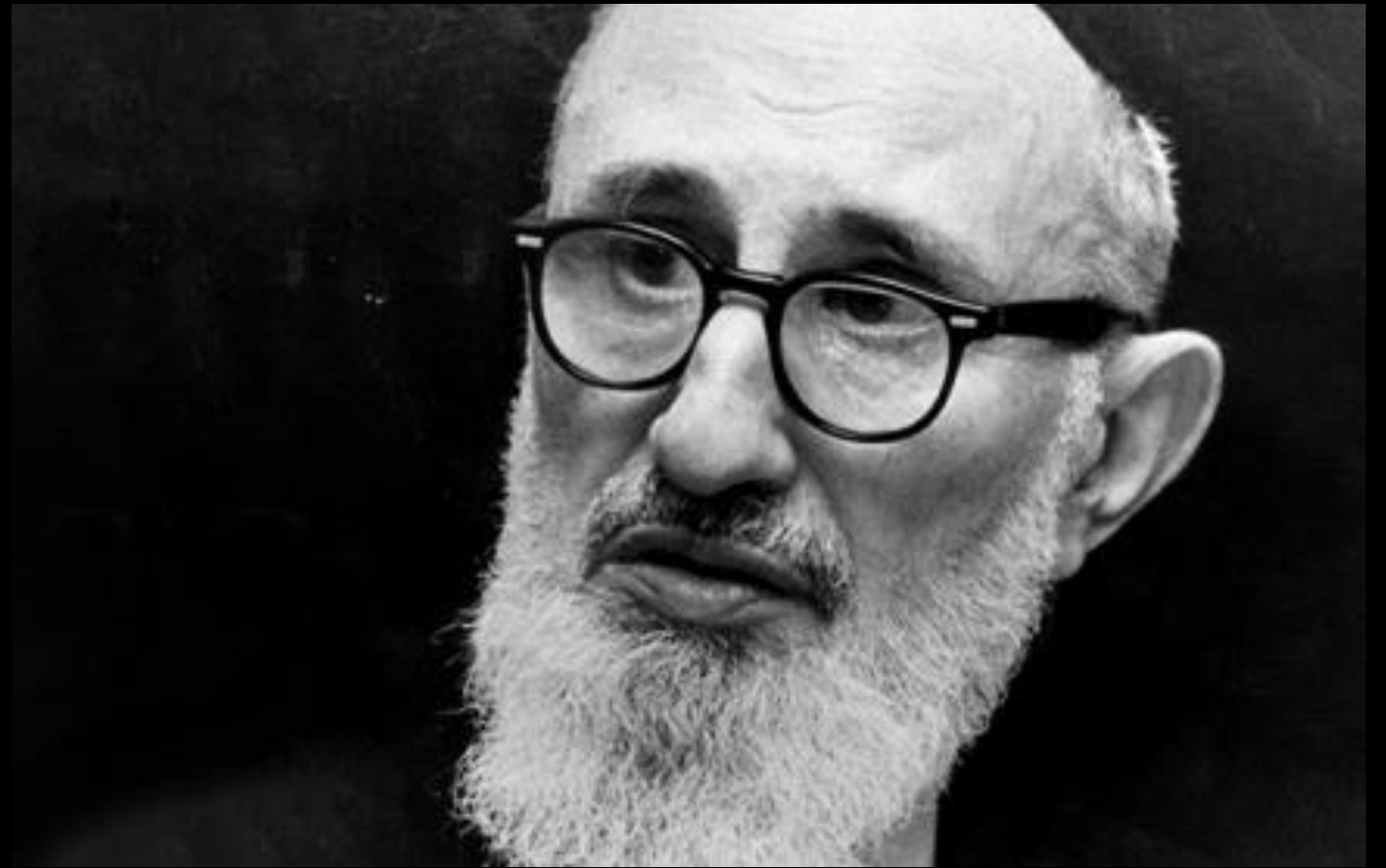
CONCLUDING RITUALS

- Ask מחילה from deceased
- change shoes, as אבילות period officially commences
- Two שורות are made, whereby the assembled express first formal words of נחמה.
 - Note shift of attention from נפטר to the mourners, transition from אבילות to אנינות
- Customary to remove some grass and throw over shoulder and say, "זכור כי עפר אנחנו"
- Improper to visit another קבר after a funeral
- Wash hands upon leaving the cemetery, 3x בסירוגין, don't pass כלי, don't dry hands

Out of the Whirlwind

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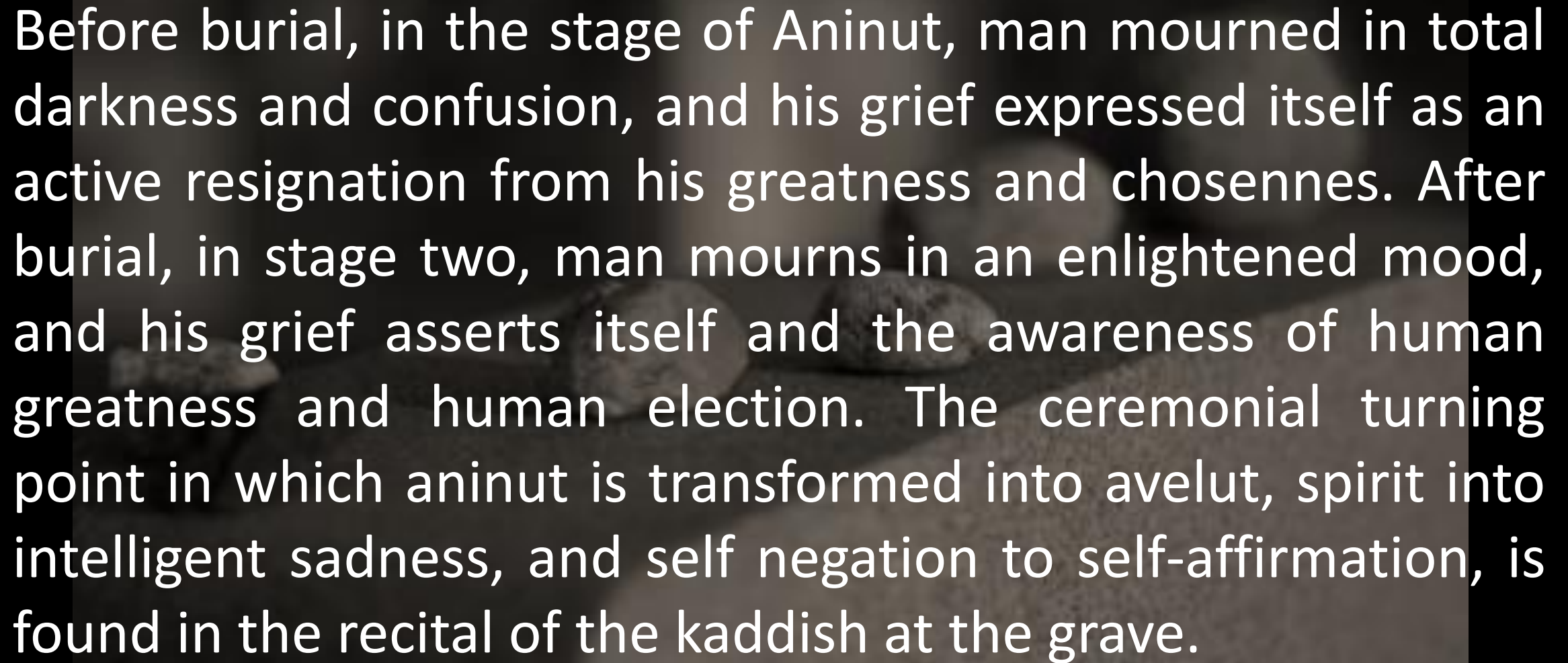
At this point, the dialectical *Halakhah*, which has masterfully employed both the thesis and the antithesis in her treatment of antinomies, makes an about-face. The *halakhah* is firmly convinced the man is free and that he is master not only of his deeds but of his emotions as well. The *Halakhah* holds the view that man's mastery of his emotional life is unqualified and that he is capable of changing thought patterns, emotional structures and experiential motifs within an infinitesimal period of time.

Man, the Halakhah maintains, does not have to wait patiently for one mood to pass and for another to emerge gradually. He disengages himself, quickly and actively, and in a wink replaces a disjunctive frame of mind with a cathartic-redemptive one. Hence, the Halakhah, which showed so much tolerance for the mourner during the stage of Aninut, and let him float with the tide of black despair, now – forcefully and with a shift of emphasis – commands him that, with internment, the first phase of grief comes abruptly to a close and a second phase – that of Avelut – begins.

With the commencement of Avelut, the Halakhah commands the mourner to undertake a heroic task: to start picking up the debris of his own shattered personality and to reestablish himself as man, restoring lost glory, dignity and uniqueness. Instead of repeating to himself time and again that man has no preeminence over the beast and that all is vanity, he is suddenly told by the Halakhah to be mindful of the antithesis: "Thou hast chosen man at the very inception and Thou hast recognized him as worthy of standing before Thee" (*Yom Kippur Neilah Amidah*).

Yes, the Halakhah tells man, death is indeed something ugly and frightening, something grisly and monstrous; yes, death is trailing behind every man, trying to defeat him, his ambitions and aspirations; all that is true. Nevertheless, the Halakhah adds, death must not confuse man; the latter must not plunge into total darkness because of death. On the contrary, the Halakhah asserts, death gives man the opportunity to display greatness and to act heroically, to build even though he knows that he will not live to enjoy the sight of the magnificent edifice in his construction he is engaged, to plant even though he does not expect eat the food, to explore, to develop, to enrich – not himself, but coming generations.

Death teaches men to transcend his physical self and to identify with the timeless covenantal community. Death, the Halakhah warns the mourner, not only does not free man from his commitment but, on the contrary, enhances his role as a historic being and sensitizes his moral consciousness. The day is short, the workload is heavy, the master is strict and demanding (Avos 2:20), and the commitment is therefore great.



Before burial, in the stage of Aninut, man mourned in total darkness and confusion, and his grief expressed itself as an active resignation from his greatness and chozennes. After burial, in stage two, man mourns in an enlightened mood, and his grief asserts itself and the awareness of human greatness and human election. The ceremonial turning point in which aninut is transformed into avelut, spirit into intelligent sadness, and self negation to self-affirmation, is found in the recital of the kaddish at the grave.

The Kaddish marks the beginning of a new phase of courageous and heroic mourning to which the message of salvation is addressed. What is the relationship between the proclamation of the solemn doxology and burial? Through the Kaddish, we hurl defiance at death and its fiendish conspiracy against man. When a mourner recites "Glorified and sanctified be the Great name...", he declares: no matter how powerful death is, notwithstanding the ugly end of man, however terrifying the grave is, however nonsensical and absurd everything appears, no matter how black one's despair is and how nauseating an affair life is, we declare and profess publicly and solemnly that we are not giving up, that we are not surrendering, that we will carry on the work of our ancestors as though nothing has happened, that we will not be satisfied with less than the full realization of the ultimate goal – the establishment of God's kingdom, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life for man.



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