

Book Reviews

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning. By Rabbi Maurice Lamm, Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 2000: ISBN 13: 9780824604233.

Rabbi Dr Sanford H. Shudnow

"Interment in the land of Israel cannot be compared with living in it, nevertheless many great scholars would have their bodies brought there for burial, just as our patriarch Jacob and Joseph did. Maimonides (Laws of Kings 5:11).

I would like to share thoughts, in remembering Rabbi Maurice Lamm, the author of a most popular, but serious, book, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. Rabbi Lamm, *a"h*, may he rest in peace, passed away June of 2016.

A friend of mine in Sydney had mentioned that Maurice Lamm's book had been republished a few years earlier. I've always admired and valued this book, and I admit to owning several copies. As it turns out, it was in fact updated, and is much more inclusive. The older edition, while still usable, is now somewhat out-of-date.

Well, what is this book all about? It's a handbook which explains the traditional Jewish way of dealing with dying, death and mourning, as embodied in the title. This is one great book! What I treasure about the new edition, is its inclusivity. It was always a very special presentation of a difficult subject, demonstrating moderation, and couched in a conversational style. The book always dealt with issues head-on in a serious and correct way - but also in a very compassionate way.

The new volume is more comprehensive, especially in terms of issues pertaining to Jewish women. This is most evident when a Jewish woman is in mourning for her parent, spouse, child or sibling. This has, at times, been somewhat neglected in other works within traditional Judaism. The Lamm book deals with these matters and issues in a straightforward fashion. He offers guidance in what a woman might be able to recite, giving expression to her grief. The book gives advice regarding the public recitation in the synagogue of some of the prayers, and most importantly the Kaddish.

It is well known that the Kaddish, a most significant prayer for a mourner to recite within the context of a prayer quorum or minyan, has been completely reserved for men within a traditional or orthodox setting. Only in recent years is it becoming more and more common to see women reciting the Kaddish along with men, albeit in a low voice and in some

locales, it is frowned upon for a woman to do so. Thus many women have resorted to asking a close male relative or friend to pray and recite Kaddish on their behalf. Rabbi Lamm well knew all of these issues, having served as a pulpit rabbi for many years especially at Beth Jacob Congregation of Beverly Hills, California, a flagship modern orthodox congregation, the largest in the Western United States.

Rabbi Lamm's new edition of *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* deals with many of the modern issues and conflicts that may arise, and these are woven seamlessly into the text, in a matter of fact style. After Rabbi Lamm's passing, the JTA - Jewish Telegraphic Agency - highlighted some of the areas of interest and concern to Jews in the 21st century. They wrote: "*The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, first issued in 1969, has been updated to include 21st century topics such as organ donation, autopsy, the question of a woman's right to say Kaddish, mourning practices related to the stillborn and converts to Judaism mourning their non-Jewish parents."

Of special significance in this new edition are the four appendices: One - Prayers, Readings and Psalms; Two - The Ethical Will of My Grandfather; Three - Preparation of the Remains; Four - Guidelines for Social Conduct, (personally, my favorite.)

I would like to share just a few personal memories of Rabbi Maurice Lamm. He was the brother of Rabbi Norman Lamm, may he live for many, many more years, who has served as the Chancellor of Yeshiva University and at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

Rabbi Maurice Lamm was very involved with the JWB Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy, later known as the JWB Chaplains Council. He was the representative of the RCA - the Rabbinical Council of America - which represented and endorsed Orthodox rabbis as chaplains for the US Armed Forces and Department of Veterans Affairs. He served the US Department of Defense during the Vietnam War as the JWB endorsing agent. Seeing Rabbi Maurice Lamm and hearing him at the various conferences of Jewish Chaplains, all of us as chaplains referred to him affectionately as Moshe, well, maybe 'Rabbi Moshe Lamm.' He was senior to all of us.

The newest version of *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* is a must for every Jewish household. Whenever a relative or friend suffers a loss, I highly recommend the Lamm book in order to help them through a most trying experience they would be going through. I also highly recommend Rabbi Lamm's other books, including: *The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, *Consolation: The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief*, *Becoming a Jew*, *The Power of Hope*, as well as others.