

June 18, 2010

Shabbat Shalom!

How do we pay tribute to our loved ones who have died?

Judaism offers rituals that help us through the initial days, weeks and months of mourning as well as the anniversaries of a death in future years. Lighting a yahrzeit candle, or simply remembering a relative who has died and considering his or her legacy, or putting a marker on the memorial wall before the Kaddish at a service at Temple Israel, can enable us to express feelings of connection and warmth that still abide with us.

In the Torah reading for this week, Chukat, the passages that speak of the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, Moses' siblings, are brief, considering the impact that the two of them made on the Israelites. Death and the transition to new leadership were seen as a part of the cycle of community life, and the eulogizing that is not reported in the text likely took place in people's own minds and hearts.

During our visit to the Midwest several weeks ago, Rhonda and I took the opportunity to stop by the graves of my parents at the cemetery that is in the shadow of the former site of my home congregation. We carry the memories of my parents with us all the time, but there was something special about being there and being able to put stones on their markers, and to think about what me might say to them about our life in New Hampshire, and what they might say to us in response.

I believe that we honor the memory of our loved ones not only through remembrance, but also through all that we do because of what they taught us and how they made an impact on our lives. We also have a chance, through our actions, to leave a legacy to future generations. May we do so in the best way possible.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry