

JUDAISM 101:

Lighting a Yahrzeit (Memorial) Candle



On the eve of the anniversary (*yahrzeit*) of the death in the Hebrew calendar, the family gathers while the special *yahrzeit* candle is lit. The candle is readily available in our gift shop as well as many grocery stores with a kosher section. They are designed to burn in a glass jar for the full 24 hours of the anniversary. While Jewish tradition prescribes no blessing for this ritual, the following prayer may be recited:

At this moment, which bears the memory of our beloved _____, let us join hands in love and remembrance. A link has been broken in the chain which has bound us together, yet strong bonds of home and love hold us each to the other. We give thanks for the blessing of life, of companionship, and of memory. We are grateful for the strength and faith that sustained us in the hour of our bereavement. Though sorrow lingers, we have learned that love is stronger than death. Though our loved one is beyond our sight, we do not despair, for we sense our beloved in our hearts as a living presence. Sustained by words of faith, comforted by precious memories, we kindle the Yahrzeit light in remembrance. As this light burns pure and clear, so may the blessed memory of the goodness and nobility of the character of our dear _____, illumine our souls.

Ner Adonai Nishmat Adam "The human spirit is the lamp of God" (Proverbs 20:27)

Blessed is the Eternal One, who has implanted within us eternal life.

This tradition, which was started by German Jews in the early middle ages, has become universal in Jewish practice. In addition to this home ritual, it is considered praiseworthy to attend Shabbat services during the week of *yahrzeit* and join in saying the *Kaddish* prayer with the congregation. Many also use the opportunity of *yahrzeit* to perform special acts of compassion, social action and *tzedakah* (charity) in memory of their beloved departed.