

Project Proposal

Community Study Group(s) for Writing Ethical Wills

Schedule

One Hour Introduction Session

Followed by Four, 75-Minute, Once-Weekly Study Group Sessions

(Additional Sessions pending evaluation upon completion)

Bio

P.M. Eshel Rosemarin is a writer who formerly specialized in feature interviews in print, radio, and film while living in the Middle East, South and South East Asia, and Washington, D.C. In September 2024, Ms. Rosemarin completed the Chevra Kadisha Certification program with Gamliel Institute, Kavod v'Nichum. The "Community Study Group for Writing Ethical Wills" is her pre-graduation project

Kavanah Intention & Desired Outcome

Based upon the needs in our Jewish community of an organized Chevra Kadisha already being beautifully met, I chose to put my efforts towards establishing study groups for writing Ethical Wills. It was my purpose to organize these groups with the intention of putting pen to paper as quickly as possible, thereby, ending the anxiety of the blank page.

Motivation: From the moment I read about Ethical Wills in my homework with Gamliel Institute, I was entranced with the idea of what we leave behind for our family and family of friends. That very day, I emailed our synagogue rabbi, told her about this wonderful thing I'd just learned about in my studies, and asked if there was a program established in our community to help people write their Ethical Will. As it happened, the Jewish Federation was already on the books for the following month with a presentation that included End of Life issues and decisions. Included on their agenda was the subject of Ethical Wills.

After the series of Jewish Federation presentations, I realized there was still an opportunity to introduce Ethical Wills as a consideration for a community involvement project. I began the framework— and then my father died.

Seven months of grieving...eight...nine...and the same time spent learning with Gamliel Institute, returned me to Ethical Wills with a passion that increased in intensity and speed the closer I came to his Yahrzeit. Over the summer I took a personal retreat, read the Ethical Wills of others, and returned to my outline of how I wanted to organize an Ethical Wills Study Group.

Through it all, my thoughts often returned to an early childhood classroom experience of being given a piece of paper and three crayons, shown a picture of a boat and told to draw from the example. In a herald of how I would interpret directions for much of my life, I ripped and folded

my paper into a rather rugged little boat, used the first crayon to write my name on the side, then wedged it beneath my creation as a rudder, stood the second crayon as a mast, and positioned the third as a tiller.

It's only fair to add, my father had taken my sister and me sailing just a few weeks before, and I'd loved it; eventually.

"Set your sight," my father had urged, wrapping my hand around the tiller. I was scared and said so. "Good!" he'd said, "Remember that feeling. Being afraid is when it's most important to pause, think, and plan before moving forward. Sometimes you'll have to do all three in a spilt-second...Don't let fear stop you...Use it like a tool!"

I was eight years old.

It was a lesson that would save my life more than a few times.

I've included this story from my childhood for two reasons. First, to share that it is the showing through telling of how an experience affects us, especially through a personal relationship, that creates an imprint upon our memories, not the recitation of words, no matter how mellifluous or eloquently strung. Second, and the best motivation of all: I shall have the memory of my father's words for as long as my mental facilities survive. But, had he written down his stories, his dreams, the things he'd learned in his life—I'd have them in his hand, and they would remain alive in the memories of all who read, for as long as the paper and ink would endure.

Audience Who Will be Implementing & Who Will be Affected

Audience is integrated, in that writer (who will be implementing) and reader (who will be affected) will essentially work together—the writer moves the pen, sharing from the wisdom of their experience, and the reader, real or envisioned, forms the motivation and inspiration.

Voice Whose Voice Will be Heard

Voice is the determination of the writer. Generally, as may be written about all good writing, the objective is clarity and simplicity. Even with the writer whose storytelling may be circuitous, writing that is purpose driven provides its own guidance. To be clear, this is not a Writing 121 or a course on memoir, but elements of style may certainly present opportunity for theme. If asked, I will suggest books that may help with writing. I will, however, also strongly advise against using such books until after first drafts are completed, as they may inhibit the writer's natural voice.

Outcome

What is the Desired Outcome

The desired outcome is for all participants to be inspired, and in the midst of this inspiration to invest their time and courage into writing an Ethical Will for themselves and for their progeny. Consideration may also be given to writing Legacy Letters for family, friends, family of friends, organizations, any person or people so chosen by the writer including any with whom there has been a disagreement.

Design

How Will Project be Designed to Reach Desired Outcome

Curriculum

Goal

Ethical Will (either as a finished product, or a work in progress)
Legacy Letter(s)

Objective

Initiate Interactive relationship of organizing what is known to participant(s), with what may be revealed as project progresses, into a self-stylized written sharing of life philosophies, experiences, appreciations, regrets...

Resources

Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them, by Rabbi Jack Riemer & Dr Nathaniel Stampfer
Hebrew Ethical Wills, Selected and Edited by Israel Abrahams
Participant(s) Historical and/or Personal

Strategy

Begin slowly, "baby steps," word prompts, elicit stories from childhood, memories from childhood, memories of our child/family member/friend in childhood/any time during life. Lists, such as 18 Things I wish I knew at 18 (or 80!)

Mission

To show within a setting of community encouragement, trust and general support, that every person has a worthy story of estimable value from the living of their life

Introduction Session

Ethical Wills & Legacy Letters

Days are scrolls—write on them what you want to be remembered-
Bachya ibn Pakuda, 11th Century Rabbi, Author Duties of the Heart

* * *

*The most important legacy we can leave our children is not money or possessions,
but spiritual ideals - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Letters to the Next Generation*

Conversations about death and a blank page are daunting...
Congratulations on having the desire and the courage to begin this process

Our histories begin before we are born. What origin stories have we been told of our ancestors, grandparents, parents, sisters and brothers... Who we are named for? Why?

*“Every person has his own spiritual essence whose uniqueness not only is the result of
of his heredity and education but exists by divine intention. For each and every human
being has a specific task to perform in the world, a task that no one else can accomplish....
-Adin Steinsaltz, The Thirteen Petaled Rose (pg 75)*

A *Tzava'ot* or Ethical Will, is a Jewish tradition that began more than 3500 years ago with Jacob's blessing of his children from his death bed. (Genesis 49: 1-33)

Today an Ethical Will may be shared not just after death, but with family and friends while still living. Some people choose to share letters written during Elul in practice of *Cheshbon HaNefesh*, the accounting of the soul, at Rosh Hashanah.

Personal narrative, a writing style used with Ethical Wills, is the art of unveiling *your* authentic voice, and using your words to share your unique experience of the world.

Intro/Body/Close— One method of writing an Ethical Will is to introduce qualities of appreciation into the Intro and Close, and to use story as the Body (see Simple Draft Outline). We remember through stories. Think of a story you've read or heard. How was the story enhanced by the use of sensory additions of taste, texture, and fragrance, and how did these additions help you to retain the memory of the telling?

Prompt: Practice writing a story as *you* would like to hear it. Begin specific, then widen the lens. Let your story sit for at least 24 hours before beginning to edit.

Another option is to write an autobiography with moments of relevance from your experiences. You may include anything you wish— hopes, dreams realized and not, regrets, accomplishments, enlightenments, gratitude, your “dark nights,” greatest joy(s), and/or fears. This might also be a time to note *Yahrzeits*, family names, photographs with explanations...

Prompt: Practice writing your bio as though it were a Wikipedia page. Include parents, siblings, birthdate, education, occupation, organizations supported, hobbies...add favorite quote and why (which may evolve into a story). Elaborate on questions you've

asked at different times in your life, and answers you've heard or discovered. Again, let it sit 24 hours from first draft to beginning edits.

A Last Will & Testament assigns items of material value. An Ethical Will may offer *values* (principles and ideals) and *ethics* (guide of conduct) that are non-material.

Prompt: Write down the holiday you find most meaningful and why; add a story if you wish. Next, write down Torah text, Talmud... and/or prayer that has brought you comfort. Consider referencing the circumstances that initiated your need. Now, add a list of qualities to which you aspired and by which you are inspired.

Congratulations! You have now begun a word sketch of your personal landscape. Not just how you see your world, but how you are motivated by what you see, think and feel. Once more, let your writing sit for 24 hours before beginning edits.

Use acid free paper for longevity. Video Ethical Wills are an option, and voice recordings are certainly precious, but it's advised to hard copy, mindful of changing technology (e.g., Betamax).

For me, the most fascinating aspect of writing an Ethical Will was looking at my life— what I've cherished and cherish, what I've accomplished and have yet to accomplish — and realizing there was still time to learn or do a thing or two, and setting my goals towards making it happen.

Write as you wish. Edit as you wish to be remembered.

Recommended Follow-Up Text: [Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them](#) by Rabbi Jack Riemer & Dr Nathaniel Stampfer

Suggest storing Ethical Wills and Legacy Letters with your Last Will & Testament, Advance Directive, My Personal Wishes Concerning End of Life Choices

Caution: Be careful not to contradict in an Ethical Will or Legacy Letter anything written in a Last Will & Testament

Before we close, I'd like to lead you through a two minute meditation. Anyone who would prefer not to participate in a guided meditation is invited to help themselves to cheesecake in the hall...

Feet on the floor, hands relaxed in your lap, elbows loose, back flat against your chair, seat planted...Allow your joints and muscles to relax, deep breath, feel your lungs expand and contract, your face to go soft, your eyes open but just barely...feel your jaw relax, ever so slightly opening your mouth...relax your thoughts...I invite you now to create an energetic field that surrounds you in sacred space. In this space of your own making, allow yourself to return to a memory that helped you to become the amazing person you are today. This may be in your childhood, or your later school days, it might be at a time when you faced great tragedy, or great joy. Hold this memory for just a moment. Feel the sweetness of your senses awakening within the memory, what are the fragrances you're aware of, the sounds and sights, colors, music. Is another person speaking to you, do you feel the worn cotton of your grandmother's apron, see

the curl of smoke from your father's Meerschaum, or the face... stay in your memory for an instant as I silently count to ten.

If the whole of your memory is not yet clear to you, perhaps you might choose to return to this in your dreams. And when we again gather to write, you may wish to begin here, with this memory, a letter to those blessed to share your world, a beginning of your Ethical Will. Thank you for the trust you have shared with me in the experience of this guided meditation. Thank you for participating in this session.

One last thought. On my desk is a well-worn 3x5 that reads: "*Write well!*" Mr. Constantine, 10th Grade, English Literature. Somewhere in the midst of this project, it occurred to me the phrase no longer meant syntax. Rather, it had become a reminder to *write* from my *well*. Or more precisely, to not be afraid to go deep.

May you "Write Well!"

Brachot L' Shalom

Simple draft outline: Intro/Body: Experience of Life Relevance/Close

Rosh Hashanah 5785

My Dear Sons,

Thank you for the privilege of having been your mother. I love you. I am sorry for the times I failed to act with what you needed from me. Please forgive me and know I did my best. I do not write these words to defend my choices, but in the hope that when you find you're unable to act with what others need from you, you can allow yourself forgiveness and compassion while continuing to strive towards making the best decisions you can at the time.

For me, some of my most challenging decisions involved letting go of who I thought I was, following my dreams, and embracing a completely new life.

Going to massage school at 48-years-old was just such an experience. Nearly every day, I was equally afraid of failure, and of appearing so foolish as to believe I could begin a new career. After graduation, my practice as a massage therapist gave me purpose and meaning I never imagined. Perhaps most surprising, apart from my amazement with anatomy, was to learn, and I mean *really* learn, that before I could help anyone else I must first find balance in my own physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual health.

Some days were more successful than others.

Modeh Ani became my center point from which I began every day with a prayer of gratitude, and moved forward with my intentions focused. Many are the challenges of living human, and you may hear people claim, "life doesn't come with a manual." To which I'd reply, "It most certainly does!" G-d gave us Torah, and in Torah I've never failed to find the wisdom I seek. When I felt overwhelmed, I had only to say the *Ma Tov*, and everything settled into its place, especially me. If world situations came to worry, fear of uncertainty, no time was ever a match against the power of the *Shema*— with every syllable I felt the courage of our ancestors reminding me that I was born to this moment not by an accident of fate, but by love.

I hope you will think of me when you see a Banyan tree, knowing my roots are your roots. I admire your loyalty to family and to friends, your perseverance, and your sense of humor. I admire the way you live a life that brings you joy while being considerate of others. I pray your children and your children's children will also be blessed with the courage of our ancestors, with strength, integrity, and with loving and knowing the love of G-D, all qualities I see in you, and can not help but feel great pride.

Love,
Mommy

Traditionally Recognized First Ethical Will (Copied from Sefaria)

Genesis / Bereshit 49: 1-33

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִסְפוּ וְאִגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים:

(1)And Jacob called his sons and said, “Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.

הַקְבֹּצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:

(2)Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob;
Hearken to Israel your father:

רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֲתָהּ כַּחַי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת וַיִּתֵּר עָז:

(3)Reuben, you are my first-born,
My might and first fruit of my vigor,
Exceeding in rank
And exceeding in honor.

פָּחוּז כַּמַּיִם אֶל־תּוֹתֵר כִּי עֲלִית מִשְׁכַּבִּי אֲבִיךָ אִז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵהּ: {פ}

(4)Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer;
For when you mounted your father's bed,
You brought disgrace—my couch he mounted!

שִׁמְעוּן וְלוֹי אַחִים כְּלֵי חַמָּס מִכְרַתִּיהֶם:

(5)Simeon and Levi are a pair;
Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.

בְּסֹדֶם אֶל־תִּבָּא נַפְשִׁי בְּקֹהֶלֶם אֶל־תִּחַד כְּבֹדִי כִּי בְּאִפְסֵם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ וּבְרַצְנָם עָקְרוּ־שׁוֹר:

(6)Let not my person be included in their council,
Let not my being be counted in their assembly.
For when angry they slay a man,
And when pleased they maim an ox.

אֲרוּר אִפְסֵם כִּי עָז וְעִבְרַתֶּם כִּי קִשְׁתָּהּ אֲחֻלְקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב וְאִפְיָצִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: {פ}

(7)Cursed be their anger so fierce,
And their wrath so relentless.
I will divide them in Jacob,
Scatter them in Israel.

וְהוֹדָה אֶתְּהָ יוֹדוּךְ אֲחִיךָ יְדָךְ בְּעֵרְףִי אִיְבִיךָ יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָךְ בְּנֵי אֲבִיךָ:

(8)You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes;

Your father's sons shall bow low to you.

גֹּזֵר אֲרִיָּה יְהוּדָה מִטָּרֶף בְּנֵי עֲלִית כָּרַע רֶבֶץ כְּאֲרִיָּה וְכָלְבִּיא מִי יִקְיָמוּנוּ:

(9)Judah is a lion's whelp;

On prey, my son, have you grown.

He crouches, lies down like a lion,

Like a lioness—who dare rouse him?

לֹא־יִסּוּר שֹׁבֵט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחֲקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו. עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילָה וְלוֹ יִקְהֶת עַמִּים:

(10)The scepter shall not depart from Judah,

Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet;

So that tribute shall come to him

And the homage of peoples be his.

אִסְרֵי לִגְפָן עִירָה וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹו כַּבֵּס בַּיַּיִן לְבָשׁוּ וּבָדָם־עַנְבִּים סוּתָה:

(11)He tethers his ass to a vine,

His ass's foal to a choice vine;

He washes his garment in wine,

His robe in blood of grapes.

חֲכַלְיִלִי עֵינָיִם מִיַּיִן וּלְבָן־שָׁנִים מִחֶלֶב: {פ}

(12)His eyes are darker than wine;

His teeth are whiter than milk.

זְבוּלֹן לְחוֹף יַמִּים יִשְׁכֵּן וְהוּא לְחוֹף אֲנִיֹּת וַיִּרְכָּתוּ עַל־צִידָן: {פ}

(13)Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore;

He shall be a haven for ships,

And his flank shall rest on Sidon.

יִשְׁשַׁכֵּר חֲמֹר גָּרָם רֶבֶץ בֵּין הַמִּשְׁפָּתִים:

(14)Issachar is a strong-boned ass,

Crouching among the sheepfolds.

וַיֵּרָא מִנְחָה כִּי טוֹב וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נַעֲמָה וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לְסֹבֵל וַיְהִי לְמַס־עֲבָד: {ס}

(15)When he saw how good was security,

And how pleasant was the country,

He bent his shoulder to the burden,

And became a toiling serf.

דָן יִדִין עַמּוֹ כְּאֶחָד שְׁבֹטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

(16)Dan shall govern his people,

As one of the tribes of Israel.

יְהִי־דָן נָחֵשׁ עַל־דָּרֶךְ שְׁפִיפֹן עַל־יֶאֱרַח הַנָּשֶׁף עֲקֵבֵי־סוּס וַיִּפֹּל רֶכְבוֹ אַחֹר:

(17)Dan shall be a serpent by the road,

A viper by the path,

That bites the horse's heels

So that his rider is thrown backward.

לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה: {ס}

(18)I wait for Your deliverance, O יהוה !

גַּד גְּדוּד יְגוּדָנוּ וְהוּא יִגַּד עַקְבֵּי: {ס}

(19)Gad shall be raided by raiders,

But he shall raid at their heels.

מֵאֲשֶׁר שָׁמְנָה לְחֶמּוֹ וְהוּא יִתֵּן מִעֲדֵנֵי־מֶלֶךְ: {ס}

(20)Asher's bread shall be rich,

And he shall yield royal dainties.

נפתלי אילה שלחה הנתן אמרי־שפר: {ס}

(21) Naphtali is a hind let loose,
Which yields lovely fawns.

בן פרת יוסף בן פרת עלי־עין בנות צעדה עלי־שור:

(22) Joseph is a wild ass,
A wild ass by a spring
—Wild colts on a hillside.

וימרהו ורבו וישטמהו בעלי חצים:

(23) Archers bitterly assailed him;
They shot at him and harried him.

ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרעי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל:

(24) Yet his bow stayed taut,
And his arms were made firm
By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob—

There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel—

מאל אביו ויעזרו ואת שדי ויברכו ברכת שמים מעל ברכת תהום רבצת תחת ברכת שדים ורחם:

(25) The God of your father's [house], who helps you,

And Shaddai who blesses you

With blessings of heaven above,

Blessings of the deep that couches below,

Blessings of the breast and womb.

ברכת אביו גברו על־ברכת הורי עד־תאות גבעת עולם תהיון לראש יוסף ולקדקד נזיר אחיו: {פ}

(26) The blessings of your father

Surpass the blessings of my ancestors,

To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills.

May they rest on the head of Joseph,

On the brow of the elect of his brothers

בנימין זאב יטרף בבקר יאכל עד ולערב יחלק שלל:

(27) Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;

In the morning he consumes the foe,

And in the evening he divides the spoil

כל־אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר וזאת אשר־דבר להם אביהם ויברך אותם איש אשר כברכתו ברך אתם:

(28) All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

ויצו אותם ויאמר אליהם אני נאסף אל־עמי קברו אתי אל־אבתי אל־המערה אשר בשדה עפרון החתי:

(29) Then he instructed them, saying to them, “I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

במערה אשר בשדה המכפלה אשר על־פני־ממרא בארץ כנען אשר קנה אברהם את־השדה מאת עפרן החתי לאחזת־קבר:

(30) the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—

שמה קברו את־אברהם ואת שרה אשתו שמה קברו את־יצחק ואת רבקה אשתו ושמה קברתי את־לאה:

(31)there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—

מקנה השדה והמערה אשר בו מאת בני־חת:

(32)the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites.”

ויכל יעקב לצות את־בניו ויאסף רגליו אל־המטה ויאגע ויאסף אל־עמיו:

(33)When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his kin.

Additional Torah Text For Contemplation & Consideration on Ethical Wills (Copied from Sefaria)

Genesis / Bereshit 48:10-22

ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם אליו וישק להם ויחבק להם:

(10)Now Israel’s eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them.

ויאמר ישראל אל־יוסף ראה פניך לא פללתי והנה הראה אתי אלהים גם את־זרעך:

(11)And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well.”

ויצא יוסף אתם מעם ברכיו וישתחו לאפיו ארצה:

(12)Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground.

ויקח יוסף את־שניהם את־אפריים בימינו משמאל ואת־מנשה בשמאלו מימין ישראל ויגש אליו:

(13)Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel’s left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel’s right—and brought them close to him.

וישלח ישראל את־ימינו וישת על־ראש אפריים והוא הצעיר ואת־שמאלו על־ראש מנשה שכל את־ידיו כי מנשה הבכור:

(14) But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was the first-born.

ויברך את־יוסף ויאמר האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק האלהים הרעה אתי מעודי עד־היום הזה:

(15)And he blessed Joseph, saying,

“The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—

המלאך הגאל אתי מכל־רע וברך את־הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ:

(16)The Messenger who has redeemed me from all harm—

Bless the lads.

In them may my name be recalled,

And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,

And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.”

וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף כִּי־יֹשִׁית אָבִיו יָד־יְמִינוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמַךְ יַד־אָבִיו לְהִסִּיר אֹתָהּ מֵעַל
רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה:

(17)When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's.

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי כִי־זֶה הַבְּכֹר שִׁים יְמִינְךָ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ:

(18)“Not so, Father,” Joseph said to his father, “for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head.”

וַיִּמָּאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדְעֹתִי בְנִי יָדְעֹתִי גַם־הוּא יִהְיֶה־לָעַם וְגַם־הוּא יִגְדֹל וְאוֹלָם אַחִיו הַקָּטָן יִגְדֹל מִמֶּנּוּ
וַיִּזְרַעוּ יִהְיֶה מְלֹא־הַגּוֹיִם:

(19)But his father objected, saying, “I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.”

וַיְבָרְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּךָ יִבְרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר יִשְׁמַךְ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם
לְפָנָיו מְנַשֶּׁה:

(20)So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מֵת וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהִשִּׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶרֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם:

(21)Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your ancestors.

וְאֲנִי נֹתְתִי לְךָ שְׂכָם אֶחָד עַל־אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֲמֹרִי בְּחַרְבִּי וּבַקֶּשֶׁתִּי: } פ

(22)And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”

Community Study Group Sessions 1-4 Plan Outline

ORGANIZER NOTES

Limit participants to six

Email at sign-up to include:

Advisement to purchase recommended text, [Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them](#) by Rabbi Jack Riemer and Dr Nathaniel Stampfer*

Email (and collect at first session, copies of signed) Conduct Code Agreement - Kavod v'Nichum Standard and Norms of Behavior

Advise participants bring a Personal Journal (Computer program, phone app, handwritten...)

All forms of writing tools welcome— iPad, laptop, paper and pen...

*If participant advises purchase of recommended text will be hardship, offer to lend text from personal library

PARTICIPANT NOTES

Session One

Confirm everyone has or will soon receive copy of recommended text (or text of choice)

These four sessions will move quickly. Please don't hesitate to contact Organizer with questions

Distribute business cards with personal cell phone number (and email address)

Distribute handout (for reference) from One Hour Introduction Session

Review definition of Ethical Wills and Legacy Letters

Participant introduction, including previous experience with writing an Ethical Will

First Inquiry (for consideration): Would participants like to pair in a Chevruta? All four sessions, one, two?

Recognize in Torah, Genesis 49:1-33 Jacob gathering his sons and giving them his blessing, and his instructions to be buried in the cave at Machpelah

Review historic Ethical Will by Judah ibn Tibbon ("Make thy books thy companions...")

Second Inquiry on Chevruta; pair as requested

Writing begins with emotions—chemical responses in our viscera and heart— that travel to the mind to be seen through our individual and cultural lens as feelings

WRITING EXERCISE: 1 Minute

Visualize someone you love

WRITING EXERCISE; Continued

In the week between now and Session Two, return to your earlier visualization of the person you love, and do what you can to look at what it is about this person that causes you to feel such love. Such as: This is my child, my progeny, my hope for healing in the world.... My granddaughter inspires me to be my best and most fearless self—

If you can make time, write in your journal three (or more) sentences of advice to this person, based upon your experiences of them, and of life.

You may be aided by inserting a photograph in your journal that you could refer to for inspiration. (Note: My journal has a picture of my dog, Simcha. Some days it's too difficult for me to write in my Ethical Will with a picture of my children and grandchildren. My dog elicits the emotions of unconditional love and encouragement that I need to write.)

Suggested Homework Before Session Two

Review Introduction Session handout

Read from Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them, Forward, Preface...xi-xxxiii, and one or more selections from Part One —Traditional Wills
Note questions in journal

Session Two

Address questions that may have arisen from review of Introduction Session handout

Review Chevruta

Review journal writing

Review text reading and questions that may have arisen from reading

The Proust Effect, so named for 20th century writer, Marcel Proust, is the phrase given to the instant and intense response, particularly to smell, sight, or sound, that takes place in our memory. Our sense of smell activates in the amygdala, deep within our limbic system, the area of our brain that processes emotion and memory. Most authorities believe of all the senses, smell is the most powerful in its ability to access our personal histories

WRITING EXERCISE: 5-7 Minutes

Tell a story, in written words, to the person that you visualized in Session One, or a significant other from your family or family of friends. Write with authentic voice, emphasis on your unique way of carrying yourself with written words. Incomplete sentences are fine here. Just keep writing. Insert words that suggest sensory awareness, particularly smell (i.e. tuberose at dusk, freshly baked challah, musty attic...)

Share

Suggested Homework Before Session Three

Write a recipe in your journal (brief notes are acceptable), then add a story about this recipe (again, notes are acceptable). The objective here is to summon from our recesses of memory
Read from Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them, one or more selections from Part Two— Wills from the Holocaust, and Part Three— Wills from the Land of Israel
Also from Ethical Wills... read Part Six— A Guide to Writing Your Own Ethical Will
Note questions in journal

Session Three

Review journal writing

Review text reading Parts Two and Three, and address questions

Review text reading Part Six: Deciding what to write about...Organizing...Personalizing
Address Part Six questions

As you explore the designs others have used, keep in mind an Ethical Will is a journey. And like any journey, just because you decided upon a destination and the path that would get you there, doesn't mean you can't change your mind and chart a new course. Be brave. Put your writing out there and risk making a "mis-take." One of the most important determinations in the process of decision making is revealing what you don't want. Granted, there are rare occasions when a person knows exactly the approach they wish to take with their Ethical Will. Much like a child who announces at four they want to practice medicine, and never wavers in their pursuit. But for most of us, it's a process of trial and error, baby steps, and that's where writing exercises help.

WRITING EXERCISE: 5 Minutes

Write about your life as if you were creating a Wikipedia page. Include birth name, married name, date of birth, place of birth, spouse(s), children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, grandparents, ancestor migration. Private life. Professional Life. Awards and Accolades. Publications...And anything else you'd like to add

WRITING EXERCISE: 5 minutes

Write about your experience with a favored Jewish holiday, or sacred observance (calendar or ritual)

Share one or both Writing Exercises

Suggested Homework Before Session Four

Read from Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them, one or more selections from Part Four— Wills of Modern Contemporary Jews, and Part Five— Three Wills from Classics of Modern Jewish Literature

Re-Read Ethical Wills... Part Six— A Guide to Writing Your Own Ethical Will

Outline your Ethical Will. Add detail as you wish. Use caution in editing— save all drafts

Note questions in journal

Session Four

Review Chevruta

Review journal questions

Review text reading Parts Four and Five, and address questions

Review outlines of individual Ethical Wills

Share

Schedule individual follow-up session. If consensus, schedule group session 4-6 weeks forward to read “final” Ethical Will. Mindful an Ethical Will is a living document, subject to change in circumstances and revision— just like us.

Cheesecake

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With gratitude and appreciation to Rabbi Janet Madden.
Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia Morgan Eshel Rosemarin