

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

JEWISH BEREAVEMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19:  
AN ETHNODRAMATIC EXPLORATION

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**Jewish Bereavement in the Time of Covid-19: An Ethnodramatic Exploration**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the qualitative experiences of Jewish Canadians who were bereaved during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using ethnodrama as the methodology, nine participants were interviewed, and their words were transcribed. The transcripts were thematically analyzed through hermeneutic phenomenology as a point of departure, and organized into the form of a theatrical script to make the results more accessible to an audience, but also to prioritize and stay true to participants' interpretations. While generalizations cannot be made from such a small sample, this study demonstrates the possibility of presenting research in an artistic format, and offers a snapshot in time of the unique experience of mourning during extraordinary circumstances.

*Keywords:* mourning, COVID-19, pandemic, Jewish, ethnodrama

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JEWISH EXPERIENCES OF BEREAVEMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19:  
AN ETHNODRAMA

**Chapter 1. Introduction**

Starting in March of 2020, the world did its best to weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, which robbed people of jobs, homes, health, safety, and – most critically – lives. The wreckage that it left in its wake has been environmental, economic, physiological, emotional, and even spiritual. Many Canadians know someone, directly or indirectly, who died during the pandemic, of COVID-19 or something else.

In addition to the many pandemic-related stressors that already existed for everyone, many people experiencing bereavement during this time were unable to grieve or mourn the way they would have expected, wanted, or hoped. Many who lost loved ones during the pandemic had to modify or forego traditional mourning practices, given government-imposed restrictions on social gatherings and religious services. While this may not have been overly disruptive to some, Jewish tradition dictates tangible and social practices after a person dies (Levine, 2015). While degrees of observance, of course, vary among individuals and groups, rituals are a significant aspect of Jewish mourning: to honour the memory of the deceased, and to acknowledge, share, and support the grief of the bereaved.

With this in mind, the focus of my study was the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic: the qualitative impact of the pandemic and its restrictions on their processing of grief, their meaning-making in the face of such circumstances, and their ability to recover from them. In short, my guiding research question was: what is the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians, having been restricted from traditional mourning practices by the pandemic?

### **Why is it important? (Statement of the Problem)**

Firstly, it has been over a hundred years since the world experienced a pandemic on the scale of COVID-19. So, while we have quantitative data about how many people were tested, diagnosed with, and died from the virus, what continues to yet emerge is the qualitative data on the psychological impact of the pandemic on Canadians, let alone the world. Secondly, with the exception of anecdotal sources, we do not yet know much about how death and bereavement during the pandemic was felt by people, or what meaning they made from having had to grieve, and observe mourning rituals, in the context of a global health crisis. Moreover, Jewish Canadians have been underrepresented in both media and research, which I would like to counter. Finally, this subject is important because Canadians' health involves mental wellbeing as much as physical, and the pandemic may have ramifications that will be felt for generations.

### ***Bereavement During the Pandemic***

Bereavement, by definition, begins with death, which was ubiquitous, unrelenting, and unforgiving during the pandemic. Whether they were afflicted with the virus or not, people died alone in nursing homes and hospitals, unable to communicate or spend their last moments with their loved ones (Cave, 2021; Kestler-D'Amours, 2020; Talbot, 2020). Numbers of COVID-19 deaths were reported every day for the first few months of the pandemic, normalizing death to the point where the "quantitative data replaced the faces and names of the lost" (Thielan, 2020, para. 9).

So many people died in such quick succession that our systems were unable to cope, including funeral homes, forcing the whole process from expiration to burial to happen at a shocking and unprecedented speed (Butler, 2020). Crematoria were in a round-the-clock state of readiness to meet demand (Butler, 2020). Some of the deceased had to be buried in the clothes



that they died in, destroying any expectations or wishes for how they would be put to rest (McKenzie-Sutter, 2020). Families were often given very little time, if any, for valediction or commemoration, both within hospitals or funeral parlours, and outdoors in cemeteries (Butler, 2020; Cave, 2021; Kestler-D'Amours, 2020; Kury de Castillo, 2020; Talbot, 2020).

Much of what contributed to this mechanization, other than sheer numbers, was fear that the virus could spread even more (Butler, 2020). Even once it became known that it was highly unlikely for it to spread from the dead to the living, some of the funerals that were permitted to take place ended up becoming super-spreading events, with the potential to kill even more people (Oldham, 2020). For fear of the virus, the bereaved have had to postpone or cancel altogether their traditional rituals and ways of observing their loss (Talbot, 2020). They have also had to self-isolate and avoid people outside of their immediate bubble, which, for many, has meant the prospect of not receiving a single comforting touch in their state of grief, let alone the company of others (Butler, 2020; Cave, 2020; Kestler-D'Amours, 2020; McKenzie-Sutter, 2020; Talbot, 2020). Those who have had the opportunity to say goodbye to their dying loved one, or to carry out a traditional ritual after they have died, have had to make gut-wrenching decisions about who would be allowed to be by their bedside or attend their funeral (Kury de Castillo, 2020; Rosove, 2020).

### ***The Emotional Response***

Consequently, a fundamental aspect of pandemic bereavement is the effect that the circumstances just described had on people. Based on the portrayal of events in the Canadian popular press, two concurrent, and perhaps overlapping, outcomes on the bereaved population emerged: trauma and resilience.

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While bereavement is always painful, it was compounded by the multiple losses people endured over course of the pandemic (Araneta, 2021). According to mental health experts, grief was interrupted (Talbot, 2020), distorted (Bains, 2020); for the bereaved, it was surreal (Fischbein, 2020; Kestler-D'Amours, 2020), and accompanied by a shattered sense of self and collective anxiety (Talbot, 2020). The pandemic bereaved continued to lack a sense of closure (Kestler-D'Amours, 2020), and many may have experienced Complicated Grief (sometimes referred to as Prolonged Grief Disorder) – a significantly atypical response to death (Zachar, 2023) – which can accompany other emotional and physiological health problems (Bains, 2020; Cave, 2020).

Yet, despite everything, some people found new ways to preserve some sense of tradition and community support. In many cases, funerals, mourning, and worship were adapted to the online world, and held via Zoom (Fischbein, 2020; McKenzie-Sutter, 2020; Schwartz, 2020). In other cases, funerals were held in parking lots, with people staying in their cars, or doing drive-through visitations (Butler, 2020; Donato, 2020). Through these unconventional adaptations, some people found silver linings in their pain, finding gratitude for the existence of technology that allowed them to have some semblance of ritual, community, and support (Butler, 2020; Fischbein, 2020; Horn, 2020; Schwartz, 2020). Meanwhile, others maintained that these methods are not without flaws, and are a wholly inadequate substitute for traditional forms of mourning – a perspective that may in itself have added to their sense of loss in these times (Horn, 2020; Rosove, 2020; Schuck, 2020).

### ***Recommendations and Cautions***

Given the terrible circumstances of pandemic bereavement and the impact they had on people, an obvious question to ask was: how do we move forward? In the Canadian media, the

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answer fell into two camps: what can be done for now (Araneta, 2020; Donato, 2020; Schuck, 2020; Schwartz, 2020), and what needs to be done long term (Araneta, 2020; Bains, 2020), each of which could inform the other.

The immediate advice given to cope was not to forego ritual altogether, not to wait to grieve: to have whatever funerary observance was possible, and to have a proper, more traditional, observance once it became possible (Araneta, 2020). Given that people's experience of grief was so changed and amplified by the circumstances, people were also advised to take their time, to feel what they feel, to share their pain, to use the technology available, and to focus on what *was* within their control (Schuck, 2020; Schwartz, 2020).

Long term, noting the profound and perhaps generational impact that the pandemic will have on young Canadians, one recommendation was for children who were facing death for the first time to receive guidance in mourning (Gregory, 2020). However, Canadians in general may benefit from more grief education and literacy in general, whether they are experiencing it themselves or wanting to support others (Araneta, 2020; Cadell, 2021). While the world has now come face to face with mortality, we are not accustomed to talking about death in an open way, nor can we intuitively know how to cope and support each other when it touches us (Araneta, 2020; Gregory, 2020). It seems obvious, in anticipation of how prevalent Complicated Grief and other health problems may yet become, that a remedy lies in healthcare supports, including grief resources, counselling, coping strategies, and support groups.

Therefore, pre-existing barriers around public access to mental health practitioners still need to be lifted (Bains, 2020). Furthermore, Cadell (2021) argued, more political support and leadership are needed. For every single person that dies, at least five people grieve their loss, meaning that grief support may have become a more widespread problem than the pandemic

itself, and a national grief strategy is already overdue (Cadell, 2021). Promoting awareness, then, is a first step.

### **Why am I interested? (Purpose of the Research)**

At the inception of this project, my interest in death (and bereavement) was rooted in a curiosity in the death positive movement. It seemed to me that the universality and consequence of death would be a topic that could hold my interest for a very long time. As I searched for a specific aspect of death to explore, the pandemic was ongoing. Reports on the daily numbers of deaths became so normalized as to resemble stock market reports, which disturbed me. There were news reports about funeral homes and crematoria not being able to cope, and I wondered what that was doing to the people who were trying to grieve their dead.

By the end of 2020, I myself was afflicted with the very problem I was interested in studying. My mother's brother, and one of the few close family members I have ever lived close to, died of a heart attack. Now, years later, we still have not collectively acknowledged the event, partly because of the pandemic, and partly because of how my family is scattered. My only sense of ritual has been accompanying my mother and my aunt to pick up his ashes, and lighting a candle for him at home. In short, I have both witnessed and suffered the added grief of being unable to mourn a departed loved one.

I suspect that, regardless of the pandemic, my family may not have done much to mark my uncle's death. As an atheist, he may have considered it superfluous to ritualize his passing. Even if we had held a ceremony, the Catholic tradition I was brought up with puts the focus on faith: that the soul of the departed is everlasting and has been reunited with God – none of which has offered much comfort to an agnostic apostate like me. Conversely, in Judaism, the focus is on actions: to bury the dead promptly and with dignity, and to care for and support the bereaved

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through their grief (Levine, 2015). Not only do I find affinity for this focus, psychologically and spiritually, but I believe much can be learned and adopted from this tradition in supporting grief – both my own and others’.

In short, I study Jewish bereavement rituals specifically because they offer a model I greatly admire and wish to integrate, both as a person and as a counsellor.

### **Summary**

The COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside-down. In this time of upheaval, people grieved losses of various kinds: jobs, dreams, community, safety, etc. For the bereaved, there were even more unique losses surrounding the death of a loved one, which warranted creative stop gaps, if not solutions, while we assessed the extent of the damage the pandemic inflicted on people’s minds, hearts, and bodies. Perhaps, despite all the pain that was felt across the country and around the world, continuing to study the less visible effects of the pandemic will shed light on the fundamental need for mental health support, both to recover from the pandemic and as an ongoing requirement for our well-being.

### **Overview**

In Chapter Two, I discuss some of the extant literature on the processes that help the bereaved recover, how the pandemic disrupted those, what the implications are for the use of technology as a replacement, and how the body is involved in the experience and resolution of grief. In Chapter Three, I lay out my research plan, including: philosophical assumptions; methods of data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination; and the limitations or ethical implications therein. In Chapter Four, I present the resulting themes that emerged, presented as a dramatic script – ethnodrama seeking to bring to life research participants’ voices. Finally, in Chapter Five, I draw conclusions and discuss implications and where future research could go.

## Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

### Introduction

Starting at the beginning of 2020, and for many months following, Canadians saw reports in the news about people dying from COVID-19 practically every day, with the implications from the pandemic ongoing. For many people, the millions who have died continue to represent an incomprehensible number – a tragedy that they have done everything to shield themselves from. But to many others, they were very real colleagues, friends, partners, and family members.

Following the death of a loved one, grief refers to the emotions we feel, whereas mourning refers to the behaviours we take part in, in response to that bereavement (Walter, 1999). Necessary health measures during the pandemic affected both. The upending of people's way of life added to their grief, while the forced transformation or deprivation of mourning customs dramatically altered their bereavement processes. Like so many other aspects of our life, mourning had to go online as well. Virtual ways of mourning, including live streams, websites, and online communities, have been available as alternative or complementary venues to traditional practices for years, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced people to use them as replacements. While this modification may not have been overly disruptive to some, Jewish tradition involves practices that are time-sensitive and require physical presence (Levine, 2015).

In this literature review, I will outline how rituals around death and mourning are psychologically beneficial, if not necessary, and how replacing them with virtual alternatives made pandemic bereavement rare, if not complicated, in part, through the assumption of digital access, literacy, and equivalency. Additionally, I will describe the traditional Jewish practices around death and mourning to illustrate how the pandemic disrupted them.

### **The Significance of Ritual and Symbolization**

According to Aiken (2001), the ability of the bereaved to return to their lives after a death depends on a combination of factors: age; sex; personality; their relationship with the deceased; the manner of the death; the duration of the dying process; and the cultural context in which the death happened, and in which the bereaved must continue to live in. The last factor is of particular concern during the COVID-19 pandemic, prior to which mourning our departed required in-person rituals and social supports, as with funerals and wakes. These practices are more than a public acknowledgement of the death, or a mere repetition of what has traditionally been done before; they help the bereaved understand and make peace with their loss (Aiken, 2001).

When an object of our love becomes absent, the most fundamental requirement for mourning is our capacity to symbolize either the object itself or our relationship to it (Colman, 2010). The symbol involved in this process is sometimes referred to as a transitional object (Winnicott, 1971), as with a person or thing, or an introjection (APA, 2021), as with attitudes or personality traits of the deceased. A therapist himself, Colman (2010) wrote about his experience helping a client symbolize the loss of her father – whom she had been unable to mourn in her adolescence – and find peace through the use of objects and ritual as an adult. Likewise, he spoke of his own process of choosing a family penknife to symbolize his connection to his father, his ancestors, and his cultural history. According to him, the process of mourning in a healthy way requires the bereaved to somehow reconcile two thoughts: (1) that someone that they loved is gone, and (2) that they continue to love that someone despite their absence. In order to move through and eventually “resolve” (Colman, 2010, p.286) their grief, the bereaved must undergo a process of transforming their loss into a “living symbolic presence” (p.286). Though

his word choice may betray the application of a prescriptive, if not pathologizing, lens to certain expressions of mourning, I understand and apply it only in contrast to Complicated Grief as it was defined earlier. Resolution, in this context, does not imply that one's connection with the departed should be abandoned – in fact, quite the contrary; the only thing meant to resolve is one's state of acute sorrow and distress. Colman (2010) proposed that the kind of symbolization he referred to is a product of communication (i.e., speaking about the loss and discovering what is most meaningful about it) and creativity (i.e., finding ways to represent what was lost as a way to keep it alive in a new way).

Both the communication and creativity Coleman (2010) spoke of are facilitated by mourning rituals. For example, a funeral provides an opportunity for the bereaved to, first, make creative choices around how best to honour and remember their departed, and second, to communicate about and make meaning of their loss. Rituals mark transformations and offer ways to symbolize a wide range of events. Sas et al. (2016) interviewed ten psychotherapists who have facilitated, observed, or performed rituals with their respective clients to help them cope with various kinds of losses. They then used those interviews to build a conceptual framework for “letting go”, which they defined as “a complex symbolic practice involving [the] manipulation of objects” (p.3). In this context, objects included personal possessions, such as jewellery, as well as naturally occurring and hand-crafted things, such as stones or letters (Sas et al., 2016). The manipulations included tearing, cutting, melting, burning, burying, planting, or releasing into the air or moving water (Sas et al., 2016). All these rituals varied in three significant ways: force (the physical involvement of the person conducting the ritual), visibility (the degree to which disposal could be observed to completion), and temporality (the time that it took to dispose of the ritual object) (Sas et al., 2016). Their unifying characteristics were that they took place in a sacred



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space and time – removed from the mundane (Sas et al., 2016). Preferred locations were personally significant, permitted access to natural elements, and were largely outdoors, remote, and private (Sas et al., 2016). It was also important to deliberately slow down time, allowing for the disposal to be observed and reflected on, or to delay the ritual itself as a kind of preparation (Sas et al., 2016). Sas et al. (2016) recognized the lack of embodiment that digital disposal has to offer. In the context of their study, digital disposal referred to the deletion of digital artifacts; but deletion is binary, immediate, invisible, intangible, and mundane – in other words, not comparable to the rituals their participants described. Despite their limited sample and the cultural homogeneity of their interviewees, their findings support that, for example, burning a photograph is not the same as deleting it: experientially, psychically, or even spiritually. Of course, the ritual disposal of a symbolic object should not be assumed to be the same as a funerary rite. However, Sas et al.'s (2016) study does raise questions about the limitations of the virtual mourning options that the COVID-19 world has offered.

Grief is never easy, and ideas about so-called healthy or unhealthy grieving have changed throughout history and across cultures (Aiken, 2001; Bennett & Huberman, 2015). In fact, the world may be in the midst of another shift now because of virtual realities (Bennett & Huberman, 2015). In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least six different theories about the stages of grief emerged, each with their own model about how many stages there were and what they involved (Aiken, 2001). Despite their variation, their broad consensus was that grief and mourning start with an initial period of shock or disbelief, lasting days or weeks, followed by a much longer period of sadness, anger, guilt, and related emotions, wherein the bereaved gradually try to accept the reality of the loss, make meaning from it, and reorganize life without the deceased – altogether, lasting approximately a year (Aiken, 2001). Of course, individuals

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grieve in unique ways, and do not necessarily experience the same stages, or in the same order, within a predictable timeline (Aiken, 2001). However, the current desired outcome is generally that bereaved people can recover from their loss and continue to live their lives, often maintaining a continuing bond (APA, 2021) with the deceased. In contrast, Complicated Grief impedes this process (Zachar, 2023).

People who have been bereaved during the pandemic cannot be expected to have a predictable grieving process any more than at any other time. Nevertheless, the isolation and distance felt during the pandemic has, no doubt, abstracted many people's sense of their loss, making it seem surreal. In these times, when the very health protocols that are meant to keep us safe are hindering our ability to symbolize loss through traditional rituals, the work of both Coleman (2010) and Sas et al. (2016) accentuates the relevance of physical objects and tangible rituals to mourning.

### **Traditional Jewish Mourning Practices**

Rituals and mourning traditions vary widely across cultures, and even within Judaism. As a religion that is thousands of years old, its followers are by no means a homogeneous group, given that it has been adapted countless times to a variety of ethnic, political, and geographical contexts (Levine, 2015). Firstly, there exist very broad cultural groups, differing in countries of origin, languages, and traditions (Levine, 2015). Likewise, there exist several denominations of Judaism, each with differing degrees of observance and interpretation of liturgy (Levine, 2015). The intricacies of how these ethnocultural groups and religious denominations differ is beyond the scope of this literature review, or indeed, this thesis. However, it is worth noting that there are many differences among Jews, Canadian or otherwise, both in terms of specific traditions and degrees of observance. Therefore, Jewish mourning rituals in this context should be assumed to

be neither comprehensive nor compulsory. Rather, they are a set of traditions that represent both religious law and cultural custom, or *halakah* and *minhag* (Gerson, 1977). These traditions consist of several graduated periods, allowing mourners to express their grief when it is most intense (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). These are not, however, meant to dictate how or when or how long to grieve, as Jewish tradition also recognizes individual differences in this realm (Levine, 2015).

### ***Aninut***

*Aninut* is the period from the moment a person dies until their burial (Gerson, 1977). Before a person dies, a rabbi helps them recite the *Vidui* (a deathbed prayer) and the *Shema* (a fundamental, faith-affirming, prayer) (Levine, 2015). The dying person should not be left alone, and, in some cases, their children ask for their forgiveness and their final blessing (Levine, 2015). Immediately following their death, traditional practices may include opening windows for the spirit to leave the body of the deceased, moving them so that their feet point towards the door, covering them with a sheet, placing them on the floor, placing a candle near their head, and pouring water outside the home to let others know someone died (Levine, 2015). While these practices may be reserved for the most observant Jews, pandemic restrictions have surely prevented many of them from taking place.

For the whole duration of *Aninut*, the body of the deceased must be guarded by a *shomer* (watcher), who is ideally a friend or family member, to counter any sense of denial over the death (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015): a practice known as *Shemira*. Traditionally, a dedicated burial society, called *Chevra Kadisha* performs a highly detailed ritual, called *Taharah*, during which the body is washed, dressed, and anointed before burial (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Ideally, the body is washed by someone of the same sex and wrapped in *tachlichin* (simple,

linen/cotton/muslin shrouds), which is meant to show humility before G-d<sup>1</sup> as much as other people (Goldstein, n.d.2). This is so important that funerals may be postponed until proper *tachlichin* are available (Goldstein, n.d.2). Earth from Israel is placed in the casket or on an area of the body (Goldstein, n.d.; *Taharah ritual details*, n.d.). If the deceased wore a *tallit* (prayer shawl) in life, they are also wrapped in it, though one of the *tzitzit* (fringes) is cut to render it unusable for prayer (Gerson, 1977; *Taharah ritual details*, n.d.). Other than this, no jewellery or adornments are worn, in an effort to de-emphasize the material (Goldstein, n.d.2).

The body is either placed directly into the ground or sealed in a plain wooden coffin, with no adornments or cushions on the inside, and, in some cases, sealed with wooden nails (Gerson, 1977; Goldstein, n.d.2; Levine, 2015). The body can be neither embalmed nor cremated, and, most often, not viewed either (Goldstein, n.d.1; Levine, 2015). It must be buried as soon as possible after death – ideally within 24 hours, unless it happened on the Sabbath<sup>2</sup> or a major holiday, in which case, burial is delayed by a maximum of two days (Levine, 2015).

From the moment they learn of a loved one's death, immediate family members, except children under thirteen years of age, are referred to as *onen* (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). *Onen* are people who are in a fragile state of shock, numbness, and distress, and are therefore expected not to work, groom, attend social events, have conjugal relations, or bathe or adorn themselves for pleasure (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). They are expected only to make funeral arrangements, while the community is expected to help them coordinate everything else, including preparing food, arranging transportation, and notifying others (Levine, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> It is a sign of respect for the name of the Creator not to be written out (Shurpin, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> Also called *Shabbat* or *Shabbos*, is a weekly day of obligatory rest (Posner, n.d.)

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Like any other Jewish religious ceremony, a funeral requires the presence of a *minyan*, which consists of a minimum of 10 people, or men, depending on the denomination (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Mourners give a *hesped* (eulogy) for the deceased by speaking about their good deeds in life, though these must never be inflated (Alpert, 2010), recite psalms or selections from the Book of Proverbs, and chant the Memorial Prayer (Levine, 2015). The coffin is taken to the hearse, and from there, the procession of mourners follows it to the burial site, making several pauses along the way (Levine, 2015). During *Kevurah* (the burial), a rabbi recites the *Tzidduk Ha'din* prayer before or after the burial (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). After the body is lowered into the ground, mourners take turns shovelling dirt into the grave, never passing the shovel directly to one another (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Once the grave is filled, mourners recite the *Kaddish* (mourner's prayer) and their friends offer them the traditional words of comfort, "may the Almighty / Heaven comfort you among other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem" (Levine, 2015).

Anyone in attendance at the funeral must wash their hands at the cemetery or before entering the home, pouring water first on the right hand and then the left (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). This symbolizes the intention to leave the dead at the cemetery, also reflecting the Jewish valuing of life (Levine, 2015). Friends and family donate money in memory of the deceased, rather than sending flowers to the bereaved, as they are considered symbols of joy (Levine, 2015).

### ***Avelut***

*Avelut* encompasses periods of mourning after the funeral (Gerson, 1977). Either before, during, or immediately after the funeral, mourners will participate in a ritual known as *Keriah*, in which they will either tear an outer/inner garment, which is never to be mended, or wear a black

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torn ribbon over their hearts to express grief and anger over their loss, and to metaphorically expose their broken heart (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). The torn garment is worn for the duration of *Shiva*, which goes on for the first seven days following the funeral (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). *Shiva* is a period for family, friends, and community members to visit and bring food to the house of the immediate family of the deceased (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Since the first three days are considered the most intense, they may be considered a separate mourning period within *Shiva* (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). During this time, mourners are not expected to initiate or return greetings, but starting on the fourth day, mourners are considered better able to receive comfort, return greetings, and speak of their loss (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Throughout *Shiva*, mourners make no effort to host visitors; rather, they set the tone for the visit based on their needs (Levine, 2015). Visitors are expected to be present and sensitive to the mourners' needs, not speaking unless and until mourners do, and not discouraging crying (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Mourners cover the mirrors in the house to de-emphasize vanity and beauty, and light a memorial candle that will continue to burn for the duration of *Shiva* (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). They do not wear leather, and refrain from grooming of any kind, and ideally, from working (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). Everyone sits in either low stools or the floor, in order to acknowledge the departure from everyday life and be with their grief (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015).

At the end of *Shiva*, mourners walk together for a short distance, marking a gradual return to regular life (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015), as well as a transition into the next mourning period, called *Sheloshim*, which spans the first 30 days after the funeral (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). During *Sheloshim*, mourners may return to work, but must continue to refrain from attending weddings, celebrations, or social events, which keeps them from activities they may

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find difficult (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). In addition to this, mourners must recite the Kaddish every day (Alpert, 2010). Among the more religiously observant, music and entertainment are also forbidden (Levine, 2015). Once this period ends, mourners are free to resume their regular lives, unless the deceased was a parent, in which case, mourning and prayer continue for the first eleven months after the funeral (Gerson, 1977; Levine, 2015). After a full year since the funeral, the tombstone is unveiled. On each anniversary of the person's death, a twenty-four-hour candle is lit to commemorate the deceased and remember their teachings (Levine, 2015).

Somber and devoted as these mourning traditions might seem, they are all interrupted for the weekly observance of Shabbat and any major holidays, which may terminate the period of mourning altogether, depending on several factors (Levine, 2015). While this may create its own issues around grieving, Jewish mourning rituals seem to be designed to facilitate the psychological processes and needs of the bereaved (Gerson, 1977; DeSteno, 2021), including a sense of control, community support, space to express feelings and make meaning, and gentle reminders that life goes on.

### **Pandemic Restrictions and the Overall Loss of Traditions**

While there is, no doubt, psychological value to any number of religious and cultural mourning rituals, COVID-19 measures have replaced those traditional practices with restricted and virtual alternatives, putting bereaved people at psychological and physical risk (Albina, 2020; Fernandez & Gonzalez-Gonzales, 2020; Oliveira-Cardoso et al., 2020; Pirnia, 2020).

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In Canada, death care providers<sup>3</sup> were advised – particularly at the peak of viral waves – to consider using virtual technologies to replace in-person gatherings or services, regardless of the cause of death (Government of Canada, 2021). Federal guidelines acknowledged that demand for death care services may interfere, or have interfered, with the wishes of the bereaved, which in turn could complicate grieving (Government of Canada, 2021). Elaborating on the earlier definition of Complicated Grief, Weir (2018) defined it as a persisting, acute state of mourning that prevents people from resuming their lives after at least six months since a person’s death, potentially putting them at risk for suicide, substance abuse, sleep disturbances, and impaired immune function. It can stem from a sudden or violent death, a close relationship with the deceased, social isolation, and other major life stressors, such as financial hardship. It is no surprise, then, that a review by Gesi et al. (2020) outlined a constellation of factors that could create a wave of Complicated Grief equal in numbers to COVID-19 deaths, given that the pandemic combined features of natural disasters, ICU deaths, and social network collapse.

Burrell and Selman (2020) conducted a rapid systematic review on the mental health and bereavement outcomes of funeral practices, including 17 research studies, mostly from the US between 1983 and 2019. They concluded that “the benefit of after-death rituals...depends on the ability of the bereaved to shape those rituals and say goodbye in a way which is meaningful for them, and on whether the funeral demonstrates social support for the bereaved” (p.32). They found a key determinant (to whether or not people found funeral practices and rituals helpful) was a sense of control (Burrell & Selman, 2020): a scarce commodity in the COVID-19 world. It

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<sup>3</sup> “Including funeral homes, cemeteries and crematorium operators, medical examiners, coroners, medical personnel, and any other personnel community members in remote and isolated communities, who will be handling dead bodies of deceased persons confirmed or suspected to have been infected with COVID-19, or in regions with high levels of community transmission” (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 1)



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is important to note that their review did not include any data on the impacts of virtual attendance to funerals, though they themselves acknowledged the difficulty of creating an emotional connection virtually (Burrell & Selman, 2020). Assuming that their findings can be generalized beyond their review, the implication is that individuals' mental health outcomes are contingent on their ability to find meaning in virtual mourning rituals. Given the diversity of worldviews, a virtual funeral may be better than no funeral for many, but a hollow proposition for many others.

In Spain, high numbers of COVID-19 deaths prompted strict lockdown measures; but the country's traditions around death are very important, and not being able to embalm, or view, or even bury loved ones in their preferred clothes proved to be emotionally catastrophic (Fernandez & Gonzalez-Gonzales, 2020). Fernandez and Gonzalez-Gonzales (2020) applied Critical Discourse Analysis to two hundred news items in Spain between mid-March and mid-April 2020, and found these kinds of losses to be shocking to both the bereaved and the funeral staff. Two sisters reported that it was as if the death of their mother had not happened, given that they were not allowed to see her in the hospital or even in the funeral parlour. Likewise, grave diggers spoke of the difficulty of burying people alone, or of being unable to give any comfort to the bereaved, such as allowing them to place items in the casket of their departed.

In a similar study out of Brazil, Oliveira-Cardoso et al. (2020) conducted a thematic analysis of reports and testimonies that were posted on public websites between March 1<sup>st</sup> and April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, by individuals who had lost loved ones and been unable to observe mourning rituals after their death. The researchers' final selection of texts included only twenty-three publications, but their findings echoed those of Fernandez and Gonzales-Gonzales (2020). Oliveira-Cardoso et al. (2020) also stressed the significance of farewell rituals in Brazilian

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culture, and how the suspension of them provoked feelings of disbelief and distress among the bereaved. Like in Spain, funerals were shortened, attendance was limited, coffins were sealed, and burial personnel were required to wear personal protective equipment (Oliveira-Cardoso et al., 2020). Testimonies communicated a lack of closure, and a sense of dehumanization and disturbance from the way that health protocols transformed funeral rituals (Oliveira-Cardoso et al., 2020). Naturally, limitations on social supports only exacerbated those feelings, but even more so because of the added stigma of having been affected by the virus, and being perceived as potentially threatening (Oliveira-Cardoso et al., 2020). Here as well, the researchers pointed to the pandemic creating risk factors for Complicated Grief (Oliveira-Cardoso et al., 2020).

Albina (2020) outlined international guidelines for the dignified management of dead bodies, as well as the corresponding legal mandates in the Philippines, and contrasted these with anecdotal accounts that reflected a very different reality. Among the guidelines was a call for cultural sensitivity, ethics, dignity, and hygiene, as well as the safe viewing of the deceased body and the precautionary limitation of funeral attendance. However, Albina (2020) listed several accounts of people who were not permitted to visit, view, or accompany their departed family members, nor were they able to receive support from other relatives. Albina (2020) stated that morgues, crematoria, and funeral parlours were unable to handle the overwhelming number of COVID-19 fatalities, resulting in the “hasty disposal of...dead bodies through immediate cremation” (p.332) – something he claimed became common in the Philippines during the pandemic. Disturbingly, this may have happened more than we even know, given the underreporting of COVID-19 cases and deaths in many parts of the world, and the waves and variants that many parts of the world continued to face.

Though research is still being conducted about how the loss of traditional mourning rituals impacted people, Pirnia et al. (2020) spoke about this, and the consequent devastation of family members, being among the reasons for the suicide of a young man in Tehran, whose death prompted the suicide of his mother two days later. Parenthetically, a study by Hamdan et al. (2020) not only supported the link between sudden loss, Complicated Grief, and suicide, but also found a negative correlation between suicide risk and religiosity, which they defined as “the frequency of attendance at religious services or different types of participation in religious activities, without referring to spirituality or faith” (p.220). Of course, access to religious gatherings was also limited after lockdown, which raises questions about how their findings applied to the pandemic, given the suicide risk that many were already under.

Clearly, the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic involved more than the respiratory illness it causes. People around the world continued to suffer from its ramifications, and while Canada was relatively privileged in its ability to care for its population, it was by no means exempt.

### **Digital Inequities: Not Everyone Can Go Virtual**

As a wealthy nation, Canada had the infrastructure to allow much of its population to do almost everything online during the pandemic, and it seemed only logical to do the same with mourning. Virtual mourning alternatives include telefunerals, virtual cemeteries, memorials, and support groups, as well as, of course, social media platforms. However, in addition to the limitations imposed as a response to the pandemic, there are others that already existed prior to its occurrence: specifically, access to technology. Virtual mourning options have not been equally available across social locations, including age, sex, and socioeconomic status (Beaunoyer et al., 2020; Carr et al., 2020; Fernandez & Gonzalez-Gonzales, 2020; Gamba, 2018), especially during the pandemic.

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Digital inequities have disproportionately affected people from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, increasing their exposure to COVID-19 and their vulnerability to the many socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, including a lack of access to technology (Beaunoyer et al., 2020). Besides the fact that remote work has not been an option for every person or industry, rural communities in Canada can still have much slower, less reliable Internet (Government of Canada, 2020). Moreover, as ubiquitous and essential as technology is these days, not everyone has access to computers and/or an Internet connection at home; and many people have relied on schools, libraries, and Wi-Fi hotspots for both (Beaunoyer et al., 2020). In the context of the pandemic, all of those alternatives either closed or dramatically reduced access, resulting in many being left without options (Beaunoyer et al., 2020), and few ways to observe the death of loved ones. Similarly, people with disabilities face their own challenges with technological accessibility, for example, if audio description or subtitles are not available for videos. While using the Zoom platform has benefits like automatic audio transcription, it is only in English, and depends on a lack of ambient noise, as well as speakers being clear, sufficiently loud, and sufficiently proficient in the language, among other factors (Zoom, 2021). Given how multicultural Canada is, this is bound to create further limitations for non-native English speakers.

Beyond the issues of technological access and accessibility, another problem is that many people lack digital literacy. Older adults do not necessarily know their way around technology enough to attend a telefuneral, or post to a memorial webpage, or engage in other forms of virtual mourning. With so many older adults being quarantined away from their younger family members, they had to rely on the help and availability of support personnel or the remote support of family (Carr et al., 2020). More importantly, virtual mourning options may have been

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inadequate to their particular needs (Peek et al., 2014, as cited in Carr et al., 2020). People who do not have an e-mail address or a Facebook page – or did not have one to leave behind before they died – may not find these alternatives relevant or meaningful, which, according to Burrell and Selman (2020), would make them unhelpful. Also, the family members on whom these individuals relied may already have been dealing with too many difficulties to be able to support them properly (Carr et al., 2020). Tragically, the vast majority of people who died from COVID-19 were aged seventy and above (Government of Canada, 2020), meaning that thousands of seniors either lost, or left people close to them. Furthermore, given the digital literacy and access gap, they may have had no virtual alternatives to retreat to as places to mourn and pay respects.

In addition to socioeconomic and age-related inequities, Fernandez and Gonzalez-Gonzales (2020) also pointed to possible gender differences in the context of virtual mourning. They suggested that men may be more at risk of social isolation than women, given women's greater capacity and propensity to seek social supports. However, their supporting research is over twenty years old, and even if those findings still held up today, Gesi et al.'s (2020) review highlighted the fact that women are more vulnerable to Complicated Grief, as it relates to bereavement from ICU deaths, natural disasters, and, most likely, COVID-19. Furthermore, certain venues for virtual mourning may themselves lead to Complicated Grief (Pennington, 2017), and if women do, in fact, use these venues more than men, their risk of Complicated Grief relative to men also becomes complicated.

Though there is data comparing the use of technology by age, gender, and socioeconomic status, it would be impossible to adequately address how the myriad of cultural differences in mourning practices intersect with the issues that have been discussed up until this point, or what the implications of virtual mourning would be. However, one can speculate about the potential

clash between technological alternatives and faith or tradition. For example, one may cover mirrors and still be confronted by their own image on Zoom. Among some Jewish communities, using a computer may be regarded as work, which is forbidden during mourning. While these are mere possibilities, they are worth exploring more in depth.

Taking account of the various aspects that might limit a person's use of technology, it is not difficult to see how digital inequities become determinants of health that impact people physically, mentally, and socially (Carr et al., 2020). In these times of virtual education, virtual family events, virtual dates, and virtual funerals, the need for digital access, accessibility, and literacy is not only essential, but a social justice issue.

### **Pre-existing Pitfalls of Mourning in Virtual Realms**

Even when access to technology is unencumbered, virtual mourning is not without its own set of issues. As previously mentioned, virtual mourning encompasses more than just funerals, cemeteries, and support groups; it also includes post-mortem social media profiles and memorial pages. Since death itself is being redefined in the virtual world (Bennet & Huberman, 2015; Dilmac, 2018; Morehouse & Crandall, 2014), these online venues for mourning can actually become counterproductive sources of stigma (Sabra, 2017), and further distress (Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Pennington, 2013).

In their exploration of how death practices and memorialization have changed in the United States from the Victorian era to now, Bennett and Huberman (2015) spoke of how commemorating the dead online has become a democratic process. This democratization has also been called *context collapse*, or the multiple audience problem: the idea that, online, the multiple social contexts that any given individual exists within are collapsed into one (Leary, 1995, as cited in Marwick & Ellison, 2012). The problem is that the absence of a “hierarchy of intimacy”

(Lingel, 2013, p.191) in the online world can be both “disruptive and beneficial” (p.193) to mourning.

First, as Morehouse and Crandall (2014) noted, social networking sites have changed the way some people find out about someone’s death: sometimes by flooding their newsfeed, which can be upsetting for obvious reasons. Far from a conversation with someone who might help you brace yourself for the awful news and commiserate with your feelings, finding out that someone has died from a social networking site is unexpected, unceremonious, and lonely at the very least. Likewise, Dilmac (2018) outlined three ways in which the Internet has changed death. First, instead of death signifying the absolute absence of the deceased, their digital presence remains in cyberspace until (and if) it is purposely removed (Dilmac, 2018). Second, instead of there being a clear distinction between those who are alive and those who are not, the deceased can be kept “alive” online through the active interaction of posters or the management of whoever inherited the account (Dilmac, 2018). These two points speak to the potential of social media making grief “endless” (Morehouse & Crandall, 2014, p.18), while funerals and other such ceremonies were designed to provide closure. Third, instead of death rites involving a single, private event, curated by those closest to the deceased, they may involve an ongoing, public space, open to input by anyone with access to the page or profile (Dilmac, 2018). This last point captures the two sides of context collapse, which may foster a supportive online community, but may also further isolate the bereaved and complicate their mourning process.

As one of the major social networking sites, Facebook offers users the option of assigning a *legacy contact*: someone who will be responsible for requesting that Facebook memorializes their profile once they die, or deletes it altogether (Facebook, 2020). A memorialized Facebook page is distinct from a post-mortem profile because no one can log into

it; it is essentially a crystallized version of the profile the deceased left behind, except that it allows the legacy contact to change the profile and cover photo, accept new *friend* requests, and write a certain kind of post to the page (Facebook, 2020). Then again, if Facebook is never notified of a person's death, and their post-mortem profile is never memorialized, it can be managed like any other profile, if someone has the password. Keeping this in mind, the next two studies relate directly to the use of Facebook as a site for mourning and expressing grief.

According to Sabra (2017), Facebook is the preferred social network for digital death announcements, including cause of death, funerary details, or wake invitations. He administered an online survey to 166 Danish users of the site, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data about their opinions on the sharing of mourning and remembrance on social media (Sabra, 2017). Ironically, despite the site's popularity, the results revealed mostly negative or neutral attitudes, along with apparent rules about the degree, duration, and circumstances under which emotional expression was deemed acceptable (Sabra, 2017). For example, mourning the loss of a close relationship was accepted if it was "unexpected, sudden, tragic, or violent" (p.35); otherwise, mourners were expected to grieve modestly, privately, and preferably, quickly (Sabra, 2017). The closer the mourners were to the deceased, the more their expression of grief and emotion was "tolerated" (p.35) by respondents (Sabra, 2017). At the same time, other mourners who posted too intensely or repeatedly were deemed to be seeking attention, pulling focus away from family and close friends (Sabra, 2017). While this was a small study, and one that may be culturally specific, it exposed how context collapse potentiates the discomfort of observers and the stigmatization of the bereaved. It speaks of a particular kind of netiquette that may be relevant to online support groups, where the "rules" may be different, and if broken, may alienate



the bereaved even more. Furthermore, if, collectively, our spaces of mourning are confined to virtual realms such as these, netiquette collides with our human need for emotional expression.

Similarly, Pennington (2013) conducted 43 in-depth qualitative interviews with students from a “mid-sized, Midwestern” (p.622) university, aged 18-24, asking them about their interaction with Facebook pages of deceased *friends*. Her results revealed another netiquette rule: “you do not de-friend the dead” (p.625). All participants stayed *friends* with the deceased person; and although some struggled with the existence of a post-mortem profile – enough to hide it from their newsfeed, or to refuse to visit it – they all felt obligated to not sever their friendship (Pennington, 2013). This finding implies that, even after death, bereaved individuals maintain a virtual tie with the deceased (Pennington, 2013): something that, in the context of social media, could create an array of emotional triggers. If a post-mortem profile simply became inactive, Facebook birthday reminders, or other anniversaries, would still prompt users to remember their *friend*, and renegotiate their relationship to them at least every year (Pennington, 2013). If, on the other hand, the profile stayed active, a user may see the posts of mutual *friends* to the post-mortem profile in their newsfeed, or worse. In some cases of Pennington’s (2013) study, someone close to the deceased had taken control of their account, logged into chat, or posted status updates or photos – seemingly without consideration for the rest of the network, who was forced to either see it or hide it (Pennington, 2013). It is because social media is so public and widespread that people may have less of a choice about how they grieve – not more. In the same way it can be difficult to avoid the news, given the ubiquity of information, it may become difficult to avoid death online. Moreover, as Pennington (2013) warned, “the coping mechanisms of a few may make things worse for others within the social network” (p.631).

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Going beyond the specific network of a given person, some venues allow for a larger circle of visibility, which can create even more problems. Anyone who has ever read a comment section on the Internet knows that people say horrible things online. Unfortunately, public memorial pages are no exception. Unlike the post-mortem Facebook profiles mentioned earlier, these are visible to anyone. Marwick and Ellison (2012) analyzed 37 of the 62 Facebook memorial pages they found for their study. The average age of the deceased person was 19, most of whom were men, and had died of various causes (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). The researchers found that the visibility of these pages allowed the bereaved to fundraise and raise awareness about issues relating to the cause of death of the deceased (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). For example, if cancer was the cause of death, there may be fundraising efforts to donate to research. COVID-19 deaths may have inspired similar efforts – if not for research, for help. Members of my own distant family created a GoFundMe page to cover funeral costs, which makes sense given how the pandemic has crushed many people financially. As positive as these uses are, public memorial pages also expose the bereaved to grief tourists, who post condolence messages without ever having known the deceased, and – more disturbingly – to trolls, who intentionally post offensive content to provoke outrage (Marwick & Ellison, 2012). Marwick and Ellison (2012) emphasized how important the creators or administrators of the page are: they are responsible for deciding what content stays or gets deleted, managing and maintaining various people’s impression of the deceased, and generally keeping the page from becoming a distressing “free-for-all discussion forum” (p.379).

As practical as it might seem to transform in-person mourning practices into virtual ones, particularly when a virus threatens our health, the safety provided by online venues is not simple.

Given what we know about technology in general, and the Internet specifically, it comes as no surprise that virtual mourning venues also present an array of double-edged swords.

### **Grief in the Body: Pain and Healing**

Even before the pandemic, people had increasingly been learning to live their lives in front of computer screens, inhabiting virtual spaces and gradually becoming disconnected from their bodies. Nevertheless, our experience of the world encompasses the emotional, intellectual, and physiological, as well as contextual. Grief is likewise a fully embodied and contextual part of our lived experience, and should be addressed with that assumption (Brinkmann, 2019; Maddrell, 2016; Pearce & Komaromy, 2020).

Illustrating how grief takes on a physical quality, Maddrell (2016) endeavoured to “map” grief, by developing a conceptual framework through which grief can be understood as an ongoing process, wherein physical spaces take on varying degrees of significance to an individual’s experience of bereavement – both positive and negative, depending on what kind of thoughts and memories they evoke. In other words, depending on cultural, religious, and individual beliefs, any kind of space can become imbued with meaning, which may provide comfort and/or distress, and make those spaces feel either safe or unsafe in the grieving process (Maddrell, 2016). Applying these ideas to the COVID-19 pandemic, the restrictions on our access to physical spaces has also restricted our access to their potential benefits. We may not be able to fly to significant locations, or visit the homes of significant people, which could be healing in itself. We cannot know yet if the virtual spaces I address in this paper could take on a similar kind of significance.

It may seem strange to think of an emotional experience affecting the body, largely because the Western medical model, which dominates North American discourse, segments body

and mind into separate entities (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015). Yet, for thousands of years, Eastern and Indigenous American models of medicine have viewed mind, body, and spirit as one entity (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015; Vukic et al., 2011). In his article, Brinkmann (2019) surveyed literature from both the arts and sciences to argue that grief, like any other emotion, is an embodied process. Though he referenced the sizeable body of research on how grief can impact the body immunologically, hormonally, or otherwise physiologically, he argued that grief also affects the body phenomenologically (Brinkmann, 2019). In simple terms, grief is experienced posturally, kinaesthetically, spatially, socially, and culturally. We may hang our head, roll our shoulders forward, feel heavier, move slower, dress a certain way, withdraw socially, cover mirrors, etc. Grief is enacted by the body as much as it affects the body (Brinkmann, 2019).

Taking this assumption further, Pearce and Komaromy (2020) interviewed nine bereaved people in England to explore how they experienced and managed their grief in embodied ways. In contrast to a modernist lens that pathologizes somatic symptoms as abnormal, their study employed a post-modernist lens that legitimizes embodied meaning-making as part of the grieving process (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Though their sample was small, participants' narratives provided rich accounts of bereavement, and contributed to our limited understanding of the body's role in grief (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Firstly, the researchers remarked on the significance of seeing and, in some cultures, handling the deceased body, as these embodied experiences can be meaningful and helpful to the bereaved (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Though, in most cases, participants relied on "professionals to prepare and dispose of the body" (p.9), one of them did take a small part in a religious preparation practice (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Secondly, the researchers spoke of how grief affected participants' bereaved bodies (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Losing their loved ones altered their routines, the way they

navigated space, and how they interacted with objects at home; “the absence of the body by which [they were] once orientated and constituted left participants uncertain about how to relate to their own environment, bodies, and identities” (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020, p.10). While this study is not culturally diverse, it does suggest, firstly, that millions of bereaved people around the world sacrificed the opportunity to take part in embodied death rites during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of which could be immense, and secondly, that the pandemic’s impact on our routines and access to spaces only compounded our sense of disorientation in grief.

Perhaps the most important finding by Pearce and Komaromy (2020) was that “the body of the bereaved person was central to managing both the absence and presence of the deceased person” (p.14). Many participants found it beneficial, emotionally and mentally, to engage in embodied practices, such as physical, social, and practical activities (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Whether this meant going for walks, doing some shopping, or helping family members with their kids, the *physical* effort required for these practices enabled them to briefly divert their thinking away from thoughts and memories of their departed loved ones, and served as a salve against feelings of isolation, and ultimately, as a kind of recovery (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Of course, most of the world has become familiar with social and physical isolation throughout the pandemic, which we can reasonably assume exacerbates the typical isolation felt in bereavement. If so, embodied practices become more crucial. Also, some participants described taking on traits of the deceased, like a manner of speaking, or a tendency to be the “calm one” (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020, p.13). Referring to Colman’s (2010) symbolization process, or introjection in this case, these participants symbolized their loved ones partly in themselves, literally in-corporating them into their bodies as a way to keep them alive. Some participants also found it helpful to maintain a relationship with the deceased through their “interaction with

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household objects and possessions” (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020, p.13), again echoing the symbolization Coleman (2010) described. Two participants spoke of holding on to objects because they had become representations of the person they had lost, so giving them up meant letting go of the person (Pearce & Komaromy, 2020), which displayed the need for a transitional object. This sentiment alone speaks of the power of tangible things in grief, for better and for worse.

In short, our bodies are involved in bereavement on several levels. So, while virtual alternatives have proven useful and practical in many contexts, virtual funerals, cemeteries, memorials, or even condolence calls simply do not address our embodied grief, which involves geographical spaces and physical supports.

### **Conclusion**

In this literature review, I highlighted some of the ways in which safety restrictions impacted those bereaved during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in their disruption of grief and mourning processes. If nothing else, the issues around digital literacy and accessibility make it clear that virtual mourning is not a substitute for traditional mourning rituals. Furthermore, having not yet found a way to live out our existence virtually, our bodies are still a fundamental component of how we grieve and mourn. While I recognize that most of the research surveyed here comes from WEIRD<sup>4</sup> societies, and therefore cannot account for diverse cultural practices and perspectives, the body is already an inextricable part of mental health in Eastern and Indigenous American models of medicine, while computers are not. So, perhaps what needs further explorations is not so much whether embodied practices are universally relevant for

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<sup>4</sup> Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic

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mourning, but rather, how those practices would need to be adapted to be culturally responsive to people's intersecting identities.

### Chapter 3. Methodology

#### Introduction

Ethnography is a research methodology defined by a several factors. Most importantly, it is about developing a rich and complete description of a group's culture, looking for discernible patterns (or rituals) in the group's beliefs, ideas, language, or activities, and how they benefit the group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a starting point, in ethnography theory, broad explanations about what the researcher hopes to find are used; extensive fieldwork and diverse forms of data collection are involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants' insider perceptions, which are reported verbatim, and filtered through the researcher's outsider perspective are used to develop a cultural interpretation, with the goal of coming to new understandings of how the culture-sharing group functions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

*Ethnodrama* extends from an ethnographic tradition, with the defining feature of presenting findings in the form of a play or theatre script (Mienczakowski, 2019; Saldaña, 2011), which can later be staged as a performance, making it *ethnotheatre* (Saldaña, 2018). One fundamental reason for taking this unconventional approach to research is the desire to make information accessible to a wider audience: ethnodramatists want their research findings to expand beyond the limits of elite academic consumption, and therefore endeavour to make research more accessible in terms of language and visibility (Cavallerio, 2021; Foster, 2012; O'Connell & Lynch, 2020; Răbu et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2018).

Saldaña (2011) highlighted some of the many questions that ethnodramatists have to answer in the process of writing an ethnodrama, including: what questions they need to ask participants to draw out their stories; how to respond to participants' words; how to adapt participants into characters in a story; what to reveal or conceal about them; whether or not and



how much dialogue to invent (and the scholarly, artistic, and ethical implications of that); whether or not the researcher includes themselves in the story and, if so, to what extent; how the play itself is structured; and how to engage an audience.

Regardless of paradigmatic allegiance or other intricacies, ethnodramas strive to be true to the lived experiences and accounts of research participants, and therefore often aim to present their words and stories as accurately as possible (Balabuch, 2021; Coda, 2019; Cranston & Kusanovich, 2020; Foster, 2012; Saldaña, 2011; Sandoval, 2014). Given the range of human experience, however, there is a fair amount of flexibility in how an ethnodrama is realized. First, ethnodramas can be generated from a variety of sources: interview transcripts, nonfiction texts, autoethnodramatic monologue, and improvisation (Saldaña, 2018). Second, there is also a continuum for how researchers write their data into an ethnodrama, ranging from factual reporting to fictionalized interpretations (Rossiter et al., 2008). The challenge for ethnodramatists is, inevitably, deciding how to “balance the authentic with the artistic” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 40).

### **Paradigm: Constructivist**

Ethnodrama’s ontological, epistemological, and axiological underpinnings most often exist within a spectrum of constructivist and transformative paradigms (Balabuch, 2021; Coda, 2019; Foster, 2012). Hence, it seemed most fitting to also ground this study in a Constructivist research paradigm, given the philosophical assumptions of its design, and my objective to explore the individual worldviews, experiences, and realities of participants.

### ***Ontology***

Perhaps the most fundamental guiding assumption of Constructivism is that knowledge and meaning are both socially constructed (Mertens, 2020). Another is that the aim of a researcher is to endeavour to understand participants’ uniquely complex realities and meaning-

making, both of which may be in conflict with others', and may evolve throughout the research process (Mertens, 2020).

Ethnodramas prioritize the subjective realities of participants (Balabuch, 2021; Coda, 2019), and frequently work towards social awareness and change (Coda, 2019; Foster, 2012; Mienczakowski, 2019; Saldaña, 2011). Along this spectrum, Mienczakowski (2019) drew a distinction between noncritical and critical ethnodramas, with the former aiming to hold up a mirror to society, and the latter seeking to create an environment in which marginalized voices can speak. This study would fall closer to the noncritical category, given that the exploration of unique social justice issues surrounding the chosen area of research (i.e., pandemic bereavement) is still emerging. In other words, most of the participants involved did not highlight marginalization as a contributor to their overall experience. However, it may well have been a factor for others. While the socioeconomic reality of funeral costs was mentioned a few times, it was not a significant enough theme to include in the results. At the same time, this study leaned into a more transformative paradigm in its desire to expand research beyond the confines of academic contexts and demographic defaults.

### ***Epistemology***

Another assumption was that findings would be co-constructed through the interaction of both the researcher and the participants. Participants and I interacted with and, inevitably, influenced each other throughout the study, which aligns with constructivism (Mertens, 2020), because we started our work together from the starting point of a shared experience: having lost a loved one during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection, therefore, was personal, interactive, and rooted in tangible people and contexts – not suppositions (Mertens, 2020). Findings can be easily traced back to their sources, and interpretations made from them were explicitly indicated

as part of the narrative (Mertens, 2020). I included time stamps from the original transcripts, as well as symbols that reference themes, and brackets to indicate slight paraphrases or clarify gaps that were obvious only in the context of the original interview.

Ethnodramatists must be able to show how they went about data gathering for their play, how they have ensured the maintenance of high standards in their understanding and portrayal of their subjects, and how their own perspective affected their telling of their story (Goldstein, 2017). In the case of this study, much of this information was made transparent through journaling. The research journal can become part of the playwright's notes of the published script, or the program of its performance; or it may be written into the play itself, in the form of a researcher character or narrator (Goldstein, 2017). In this study, the contents of the journal were found to distract from participants' experiences, though the researcher is a minor character for the purposes of contextualizing her involvement, and bookending participants' stories.

### *Axiology*

Yet another guiding assumption was that the most important concepts of the study would emerge as participants constructed and identified them (Mertens, 2020), and therefore, many answers would need to be determined in the field. Finally, the product of research was assumed to be inextricable from the combination of my own values – as a researcher, as a bereaved person, and as a fellow human – and those of the participants (Mertens, 2020). Therefore, I conducted in-person interviews with participants, and collaboratively crafted a theatrical framework so that their verbatim transcripts would tell their stories. In other words, I situated myself closer to participants' words, thereby offering them a platform to present and share their truths, knowing that the final product would inevitably be infused with my own set of values, given the choices I made around what to include or exclude.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study was imagined as a cycle that rotates in both directions. Beginning with death: it was its ubiquity that drove pandemic restrictions in the first place. The specific restrictions on social gatherings and religious services disrupted rituals and created a sense of physical isolation, which in turn impacted people's sense of emotional isolation or connection. These circumstances led to the rise of virtual alternatives for almost every activity, including funerals, memorials, and last goodbyes. However, these alternatives were not a panacea, given that access to technology and digital literacy remain limited. These factors, along with the potential for context collapse online, undoubtedly affected a variety of grief processes, including people's sense of control and ability to symbolize the absence of the deceased. Finally, depending on these grief processes, people's ongoing narratives about their loss could be framed as a lasting trauma or as an example of resilience in the face of extraordinary challenges. Going in the opposite direction, death also prompted different grief processes that may or may not have been supported by virtual alternatives. This, in turn, impacted their sense of isolation, and their ability and willingness to gather. By extension, these circumstances affected their narratives around the loss itself.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Data were analyzed using a hermeneutic phenomenology grounding for meaning-making, and reported using documentary or verbatim theatre as a guiding objective to write the dramatic script.

#### ***Analysis through Meaning-making: Hermeneutic Phenomenology***

Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to understand a phenomenon from the subject's lived experience, following Heidegger's perspective that human understanding and existence always

involve interpretation (Suddick et al, 2020). In the case of this study, bereavement under particular circumstances is the lived phenomenon being examined and interpreted. To do this, I needed to observe hermeneutic circles and adopt a “phenomenological attitude” (Suddick et al., 2020, p.4).

The hermeneutic circle refers to the idea that the processes of interpretation and understanding are part of a constant and circular movement between wholes and their parts (Suddick et al, 2020). In other words, the whole needs to be understood in reference to its parts, and vice versa. For example, study participants and I exist within and are inseparable from multiple respective contexts. Therefore, I endeavoured to understand and interpret data within those contexts, which themselves influenced how I understood and interpreted the data. There are a few major contexts to consider. First, participants and I share the context of having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, and having lost loved ones during that time. Second, participants exist within their own context, as Jewish Canadians of different cultural groups, denominations, practices, and families. Third, I exist within my own context of culture, family, personal beliefs, and practices. Finally, our respective worldviews and the way we process experiences are not static, so timing was an additional context that overarched the whole study. As much as I may have tried, then, it is impossible to know if I could have ever achieved complete understanding.

However, I at least approached understanding by adopting a phenomenological attitude, which refers to an attitude of openness, attentive curiosity, and constant self-reflection and awareness (Suddick et al., 2020). By using interviews to gather thick descriptions, I was able to delve into the meaning-making and experience of participants, while also tracking my own meaning-making and experience of conducting interviews, listening to their recordings, and

trying to extract what was most important from them (Suddick et al., 2020). In the interest of a holistic approach, Suddick et al. (2020) even noted the importance of using and listening to bodily sensations to approach embodied knowing, which I incorporated into my analysis.

In short, doing a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis was “a rigorous back and forth intentional, reflective movement” (Suddick et al., 2020, p.10) between what emerged and how it emerged, in order to unfold meaning. It meant working in a cyclical way to understand the people I interviewed, and by extension, understand more about myself in the process, and bereavement itself. The goal behind this is to shift from a state of not knowing to embodied understanding (Suddick et al., 2020).

### ***Reporting through Theatre-making: Documentary/Verbatim Theatre***

For the confines of this thesis, the extent of theatre-making was limited to an early draft of a dramatic script. However, to guide the writing of said script, I looked towards documentary or verbatim theatre as a possible post-thesis end point. While these labels seem to be used differently by different people, documentary theatre generally refers to theatre that uses varying amounts of factual source materials for the script, and tells stories that are in conversation with the present reality (Parenteau, 2017). Conversely, verbatim theatre often relies exclusively on verbatim text from real interviews, but theatre artists may still engage in creative editing and re-telling (Parenteau, 2017). Liehr et al. (2013) made a further distinction between verbatim theatre and research-based drama. The former involves exclusive reliance on verbatim text, which is organized to create plot, and a desire to educate and to have an active dialogue with an audience on subjects that may be misunderstood or marginalized. The latter involves verbatim text, as well as related contextual information and interpretations, in the interest of producing an entertaining

or educational introduction to a thought-provoking subject. Audiences may or may not be directly engaged in research-based drama.

In this study, the dramatic script is intended to exist in a space in-between Liehr et al.'s (2013) two definitions. While I relied heavily on verbatim text, the resulting script is not strictly verbatim theatre, given the extensive amount of interpretation and reflection described in the previous section. By creating a piece of theatre from real stories, my intent was to privilege subjectivity over universality, to explore the line between reality and representation of reality, and to educate and entertain in equal amounts. As Liehr et al. (2013) articulated, theatre has the potential to provoke, inspire, and open people's hearts to promote cultural awareness and understanding. Specifically, verbatim theatre considers the audience a vital player, and aims to unravel misunderstanding by encouraging active participation and conducting open public discussions (Liehr et al., 2013). Death and bereavement are subjects that most people would rather not discuss or even think about. Also, given the relative size of the Jewish population in Canada, Jewish perspectives are generally overlooked. I wanted the resulting script of this study to shine a light on both subjects. If it were ever staged, audiences would be invited into discussion, in the interest of demystifying and destigmatizing any preconceived notions they arrived with. However, and again, the eventuality of staging the script exists only as a hypothetical for the time being.

### **Rationale**

My rationale for choosing ethnodrama as a methodology is multifaceted, relating to my own interests, personal identity, and development, as much as my hopes for doing something useful and positive in response to some of the problems I see in the world. In a self-serving way, I chose ethnodrama as my medium because, as a former theatre artist, it feels familiar to me, and

conducting research while working in a medium that I love is my way of infusing the process with joy, which I think only ever brings out people's best work. Thinking more collectively, two central goals of this study were to foster empathy and raise awareness. Ethnodrama facilitates and enhances both by exploiting a tool that humans have used to connect and teach since time immemorial: storytelling. As a resolutely human methodology, it seemed most appropriate in the handling of an inevitable, and at times insurmountable, aspect of life.

Furthermore, the study's results were written in a highly accessible, if not engaging, format, and could hopefully be useful to laypeople, not just academics. Ideally, readers can identify with the characters/participants, or at the very least, because of the format, readers cannot lose sight of the fact that the data presented is based on living, breathing, human beings. While other research methodologies might be interested in and even prioritize the human experience, they most often present it in a theoretical, academic, and, at times, clinical way. Ethnodrama, on the other hand, does its best to replicate, for a reader, being face to face with the people being discussed. Ironically, despite – or, at best, because of – the artistic elements, the information can become more tangible, practical, and experiential in its presentation.

### **Sampling Protocol: Homogeneous**

#### ***Criteria***

The inclusion criteria for participants of the proposed study was the following: (1) that they self-identified as Jewish Canadians, (2) that they had lost a loved one during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) that they believed government-imposed restrictions on social gatherings and/or religious services impacted their traditional mourning rituals (including having to observe rituals online, postpone them, or omit them altogether), and (4) that this, by extension, impacted their experience of bereavement.



As I moved forward with recruitment, I kept in mind two things. First, as Mertens (2020) highlighted, sampling based on race or ethnicity should be attentive to within-group variations and contextual influences. I thought the same should apply to sampling based on culture or religious affiliation. Secondly, the intended sample may differ from the obtained sample (Mertens, 2020). Though I, at one point, anticipated that most respondents would identify as progressive Jews – simply because the rabbis I was first in touch with were, – I strove to obtain responses from a range of denominations. In the end, I did obtain a diverse sample in terms of observance, and to some extent, ethnicity. However, all participants were from large English-speaking cities in Canada, which cannot be representative of all Jewish Canadians.

### ***Rationale***

Consistent with the constructivist paradigm, and its preference for information-rich cases (Mertens, 2020), my sampling was purposeful and small. Specifically, I used homogeneous sampling, given that it involved identifying and describing the experiences of subgroups who share certain characteristics (Mertens, 2020). The homogeneity, in this case, consisted of the combination of cultural/religious affiliation, the experience of bereavement under specified circumstances, and the individual perceptions thereof. Given the relatively short timeline and limited scope and of this study, homogeneous sampling allowed me to keep the sample to nine participants, which reduced variation, facilitated a focus on similarities, and simplified analysis.

In terms of finding participants, there were several factors to consider. First, being true to ethnographic practice, I thought it crucial to interact more with the Jewish community, and, hopefully, be invited in to some extent, so that I was not perceived as (nor felt like) a complete outsider. Likewise, I have continued to educate myself about Judaism and Jewish spirituality, both through books and online lectures. Secondly, I thought it important to speak about my

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research intent to several rabbis, as community and spiritual leaders, and, in this case, as culture brokers (Michie, 2014). It was my hope that this would guide me in proceeding with recruitment delicately, given that they would be acting as bridges to potential participants. Ideally, this recruitment strategy also strengthened my ability to be of service to their community. Speaking with rabbis was a worthwhile way to reach potential participants in a respectful way and become connected with other resources, which has enriched my own relationship to Judaism in ways I did not foresee.

The decision to focus on Jewish practices began with a personal curiosity about how mourning rituals were being disrupted by the pandemic, particularly knowing how important in-person activities and community are for Judaism. When I myself had to deal with the death of a loved one during the pandemic, this curiosity about Jewish mourning practices became more relevant to my own processing of bereavement. Since I have historically had no guidance or opportunity to mourn in a meaningful way, and because I have found very little comfort in the faith I grew up with, looking to Jewish practices has given me more insight into what I have needed when I have encountered death in the past, and what I can carry forward with me. A hermeneutical process allowed the experience to be shared, which I know has been healing for myself as the researcher and, hopefully, for participants as well. Moreover, I believe Judaism's guidance around mourning is rich with psychological applications because it is action-based, not faith-based. Of course, a question emerges about whether those actions have meaning for a given individual, but the point is that those actions can be drawn from and adapted in a way that *is* meaningful to said individual, which I continue to attempt to do in my own life.

### **Data Handling**

#### ***Collection***

My chosen method of data collection was the personal interview, for several reasons. Personal interviews provide thick descriptions and rich content (Mertens, 2020), as well as enhance participants' sense of privacy and anonymity, and bears similarity to counselling practice, with which I am now familiar. The transcripts from the interviews would transition smoothly into a script, the form that the reporting would take. I was hopeful that personal interviews would happen in person, because being able to see participants in person seemed especially important to their sense of safety and support, as well as my ability to understand their full, embodied stories. Unfortunately, given geographical distances, only two of the nine interviews were able to happen in person in Vancouver, while the rest happened online, as the other seven participants lived in the greater Toronto area. Despite this, seeing most participants in my virtual counselling office was neither disruptive nor diminishing, though the irony of speaking about telefunerals and Zoom Shivas, while using a similar medium was not lost on me. Technology did become a barrier once, when a poor internet connection required switching to a phone call, causing me to lose the ability to read a participant's face. At the same time, it illustrated the very challenges I was studying.

**Preparation.** In order to prepare for these interviews, I followed Mertens (2020) guidelines and did the following: (1) set up an introductory meeting to assess the appropriateness of each person's inclusion, explain the study's purpose and structure, discuss confidentiality, and confirm their consent to participate; (2) schedule an official interview, (3) create an interview schedule, to ensure I have enough time for each participant; (4) create an interview guide for myself, to ensure I cover certain bases; and finally, (5) pre-test interview procedures with others.

**Interview.** Following Mertens (2020) recommendations, I: (1) reviewed my credentials, the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the information participants share, their consent, and their ability to withdraw before data analysis; (2) allowed them to ask any clarifying questions; (3) asked them open-ended questions, sequencing from general to specific, clarifying/expanding as needed; (4) ensured their comfort and willingness to continue as appropriate; (5) concluded by summarizing what I heard and provided them an opportunity for correction/addition; (6) explained to them what the next step would be; and, most importantly, (7) thanked them.

### ***Storage***

To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of everything participants shared with me, several security measures were put in place. Interviews were audio recorded onto a digital recording device with no internet connection. The files were then transferred onto an external hard drive (EHD) that was kept in a locked cabinet. These recordings were then transcribed into a digital text file, which was encrypted and stored on the EHD. Participants' names were be changed to an alias, which they were be given the opportunity to choose. The legend for this information change was also encrypted, stored on the EHD, and shared with no one. Any other identifying pieces of information contained within the interview was removed or changed. The data, including audio files, transcripts, and any related documents, will be stored for a minimum of a year after the completion of my Master of Counselling degree, at which point everything will be permanently deleted. This is in accordance with common academic practice in Canada.

### ***Analysis***

To analyze my collected data, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis to organize the data into themes, which involved several stages. First, I transcribed the recorded

interviews, for which I used the online transcription service, Rev. This was deemed the best option based on reviews from fellow academics, as well as financial cost compared to competitors. Though the transcripts were not 100% accurate, on account of being computer generated, I reviewed and corrected them as needed, considering speakers' rhythm of speech and non-verbal cues, in addition to word accuracy.

Second, I developed a working thematic framework (or "map"), based on my initial impression of what participants had spoken about (Appendix E). This helped to orient me as I reviewed the data subsequent times, and allowed me to narrow, expand, or reorganize my codes as I did so. As I read through the printed transcripts again, I made note of words and phrases that stood out to me with colour-coded highlighters. This gave me a quick visual method to locate themes and areas of thematic overlap, as well as to get a sense of which themes were most prominent for each participant. The colour-coding corresponded to a spreadsheet (Appendix F), with participant aliases on the X axis, thematic codes on the Y axis, and at their intersection, the time code of when in the recorded interview that code emerged for each participant. This format allowed me to easily see the recurrence of codes across participant accounts. As I filled out the spreadsheet, I bolded certain intersections to, again, be able to quickly locate some of the statements I wanted to include in the eventual script. For this same purpose, I also typed out in parentheses key words to remind myself what the time code was referencing.

Third, I refined my thematic framework in consultation with my supervisor. In the end, most codes fell into four large categories: relationship, Judaism, pandemic disruption, and coping. However, a few codes overlapped across categories. For example, the codes "value of community support", "benefits of ritual", and "purposeful grieving" often fell into some combination of Judaism, coping, and relationship. Likewise, the code "distance" fell into both a

pandemic disruption and coping, as distance was attributed to making coping either easier or harder, depending on the participant. Prior to refining the thematic framework, it tracked the mention of specific emotions, the expense of funeral planning, and participants' hopes for the research. These categories were deemed outliers and were excluded from the dramatic script because they did not repeat significantly across participant accounts.

Fourth, through a process of incubation, I developed a working narrative structure for the dramatic script. This was intended to create somewhat of a chronology to participants' collective stories, as well as the research process itself, and allow myself as the researcher/observer to acknowledge my status as both insider and outsider in a way that was not distracting from participant accounts. Finally, I consulted with participants by sharing the draft script with them, to ensure that it resonated with them, and that the essence of their experience was present. Those who responded confirmed that they did feel represented in the script.

### ***Reporting***

Reporting for this study, as with any ethnography, is presented in the form of a dramatic script, or play. However, while the following script follows theatre conventions, such as capitalizing character names and italicizing stage directions, it is unlike a regular play in that it includes certain features to help orient the reader of this research. Firstly, character names are aliases for real individuals, and everything that they say is verbatim text from their interview. Square brackets were used to make explicit any necessary paraphrasing, verb tense changes, and context giving. Secondly, scenes are organized to some extent by themes, though thematic overlap was unavoidable in the attempt to make the text flow naturally, if not creatively. For a closer inspection of where themes are located, the reader will find symbols within the text itself that refer to the specific themes a character's statements highlight. In a few places, these symbols

are within parentheses to indicate that the theme is markedly absent. Thirdly, time codes from the computer-generated transcripts were kept, in order to be transparent about how much a character's statements reflect the original interview versus the playwright's influence, interpretation, and artistic choice to combine and reorder text for dramatic effect. Finally, as stated previously, due to the logistical constraints of this thesis, the following play is only a draft that, should this study be carried forward into further research, may be further developed later.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before addressing basic ethical concerns around confidentiality and consent, I had to be sensitive to the fact that I would be asking participants to share something private and painful with me. Saldaña (2011) advised that, when asking tough questions, one should prepare for tough answers – to not open a door one cannot close. Luckily, I am an insider in that regard. I, too, have been bereaved: a fact that I think grants me the ability to truly walk with participants and open those doors together. As a safeguard, though, I kept journaling and introspecting so that the process did not become overwhelming for me.

Conversely, as much as my own sensibilities and belief system find resonance and beauty in Jewish culture and tradition, and as much as I have not adopted much of it, I cannot fully relate to the lived experience of being Jewish because I was not brought up as such. Therefore, as an outsider in that regard, I have maintained a respectful interpretive distance in my curiosity. Moreover, as part of my commitment to cultural humility (Waters & Asbill, 2013), I have stayed mindful of my relative privilege<sup>5</sup> as a non-Jewish person. Like Sandoval (2014), I was very concerned not to contribute to silencing or marginalizing the very voices I wanted to amplify and

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<sup>5</sup> I have never had to worry about being the object or victim of anti-Semitism.

centre, which I wanted to be as faithful to as possible. Therefore, to counter the problematic implications of writing subjective accounts based on my preferences and opinions as an outsider, I followed a contemporary conception of ethnography (and ethnodrama), which tasks the researcher with explaining or developing cultural meaning from the *insider's* perspective (Mienczakowski, 2019).

Beyond navigating my insider/outsider status, confidentiality was one of the most important ethical issues I needed to be aware of. Because my intention was to use verbatim text, I needed to ensure that no one individual is identifiable. This meant, at the very least, removing identifying features, or allowing one character to speak for several, being careful not to dilute anything unique. Interweaving multiple data sources accomplishes a few things: offering triangulation, highlighting any disconfirming evidence through juxtaposition, exhibiting collective story creation through multiple perspectives, and/or condensing “real-time” data for dramatic economy (Saldaña, 2003).

Finally, regarding consent, in addition to continually seeking it, Saldaña (2011) advised informing participants about performance goals, and, as part of the interview phase, addressing several questions with them surrounding their concerns, priorities, hopes, ideas, and anticipated conflicts. While I am of the mind that plays are meant to be seen, not just read, I also continue to be keenly aware of the logistical intricacies of staging a play. Therefore, as much as I would like to know in advance that the ethnodrama of this study will be presented to an audience, and as much as I would love to be a part of that process, that is something that is still beyond my ability to foresee or prepare for, with the exception of having mentioned the possibility of performance in the informed consent I obtained from participants. Though Saldaña's (2011) questions may



seem premature, given that they would only become relevant if the ethnodrama were staged, they inform what could become possible in the future.

### **Risks**

As with any study, there were both individual and community level risks to participating in this research. On an individual level, discussing a topic as sensitive as the death of a loved one, and one's personal processing of it, may be upsetting or triggering for participants. In anticipation of this possibility, I verified that participants were comfortable and willing to continue throughout the interviews. For further support, I also offered to provide participants with local counselling resources. At a community level, I ran the risk that community members – particularly ones outside of the study – may feel misrepresented. To mitigate this possibility, I have continued to consult with community members throughout the study. Furthermore, it is possible that a larger version of this study could be taken up later, which would likely help diversify perspectives and become more inclusive.

### **Benefits**

There were also benefits to this study, in both the short term at an individual level and the long term at a community level. About the former, this study provided participants with a cathartic opportunity to tell their stories, and possibly even gain a sense of control over their respective narratives, via collaboration and creativity. About the latter, the dissemination of this research provides a snapshot in time, and the script itself serves as a piece of art that could facilitate a sense of shared experience, thereby encouraging empathy.

### **Rigour**

Obvious as it may seem, an ethnodrama is both ethnography and drama, so rigour also involves both academic and artistic streams (Cranston & Kusanovich, 2020; Saldaña, 2003).

### *Academic*

From an academic standpoint, developing rigour involved a four-pronged approach: verbatim text, member checks, triangulation, and journaling. According to Saldaña (2011), what defines an ethnodrama is consisting of 90% verbatim extracts: a requirement I have met. Using participants' exact words as much as possible prioritized their own voices and centred their experiences. I also followed Saldaña's (2011) recommendation for researchers to collaborate with participants on any number of questions, including how they can best be represented, rather than "navel gaze" (p. 39) themselves into an indecision paralysis. In other words, once I began adapting participants' words into a theatrical framework, I conducted a member check by presenting a draft script back to participants, inviting them into the writing process. The purpose of this was to verify that it resonated with them and that I adequately captured the essence of their experiences. In this way, participants functioned as dramaturgs, giving feedback about my degree of accuracy and about how they would prefer to be represented (Saldaña, 2011). This not only aided me in developing rigour in my research, but also in truly taking a socially just approach (Balabuch, 2020; Cavallerio et al., 2021; Gillen & Bhattacharya, 2013; O'Connell & Lynch, 2020; Răbu et al., 2020). Given that constructivist paradigm aims for confirmability (Mertens, 2020), I have done what I could to verify meaning and reduce the power dynamic in our relationship. By integrating participants' different stories, I triangulated data. This process involved an exploration of alternate voices and narratives, and lead to multiple determinations about where the data converged or deviated. Furthermore, triangulation continued to take place after participants had an opportunity to respond to the script. Whatever new information or responses they had was re-integrated into the draft included in this thesis. In short, triangulating helped me gain a wider range of perspectives, or even an evolution of perspectives, all of which

enriched dimensions of the story told through the script (Saldaña, 2011). I kept a reflexive journal for my thoughts, ideas, and questions around my research, in the interest of making my decision-making process traceable and transparent.

### *Artistic*

From an artistic standpoint, despite my diverse set of experiences in theatre, my training is not specific to playwrighting. Therefore, in wanting to write an ethnodrama that is not just an unconventional piece of research, but also an entertaining piece of theatre (Saldaña, 2011), it seemed of equal importance to familiarize myself with techniques and structures to utilize and exploit as a playwright. While I am confident in my own creativity, it would be irresponsible of me not to educate myself on this subject as well. Furthermore, given that theatre is, by its very nature, collaborative, my intention was to consult professionals for creative input on this project as well. Cavallerio et al. (2021) sought the input of co-authors to help her see her work from different vantage points, and with a more critical eye. Similarly, I contacted Jewish colleagues in the theatre community, in the hopes that they might be interested in and able to have a reflexive dialogue with me, as professional artists, and especially, as members of the same community I want to study and portray faithfully. However, at this time, given the scope of this thesis, I decided that the artistry of the script is something that can be revisited later. Ideally, the play could be workshopped, involving actors or other theatre artists, as well as test audiences, but budgetary and logistical constraints will not permit such experimentation at this time.

These measures, I hope, have contributed to making the end product something that is accessible, engaging, and resonant with readers, though, more importantly, true to participants' narratives. I always envisioned that balancing both the academic and artistic elements would be

challenging, and present difficult decisions, but my priority was to respect and honour participants.

### **Intended Outcomes**

The intended outcomes of this study encompass my professional future as both a counsellor and as a researcher.

### ***Counselling Practice***

As a counselling practitioner, this study provided me with an opportunity to integrate ethos and praxis, given my interests in holistic approaches to health, creativity in counselling, and existentialism as a therapeutic starting point. It has also helped me deepen my knowledge about disrupted life events in general, and about grief and bereavement in the specific – something that may be a future specialization for me. Furthermore, it has helped me gain experience that has personal and professional significance to me. On a personal level, working with the Canadian Jewish population has been profoundly meaningful to me. On a professional level, integrating theatre and psychology is something I want to take into my counselling practice, whether through psychodrama, drama therapy, or movement-based interventions. Finally, this study has reinforced my interest, and may yet inform possible future work, in death café facilitation, death doula training, and advocacy around MAID<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Research Practice***

As a researcher, my main intended outcome was that, by working with Canadian Jewish people, I would centre voices that have not been heard as much in the body of research on grief and pandemic bereavement. Also, by employing ethnodrama, I intended to show that human

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<sup>6</sup> Medical Assistance in Dying

experiences can be presented as theatre. Moreover, I intended to at least create the possibility of presenting research in an entertaining and more palatable way, the way a theatrical performance would. Ultimately, by conducting research in this way, I wanted to encourage more open dialogue about death and mourning, and perhaps even demystify Jewish practices for those who find them foreign.

### **Limitations**

I expected to have three kinds of limitations in this study, outlined below.

#### ***Sampling***

One of the biggest limitations of this study was the sample size, as it is not representative in any way: neither of the defined homogeneous sample itself, nor any segment of the Jewish Canadian community, nor bereaved Canadians at large. As an extension of that limitation, it was possible, and even likely, that the degree of religious observance, and adherence to traditional mourning rituals, would be inconsistent or insignificant within the obtained sample. Also, going through community leaders for recruitment may have added a limitation, given that potential participants were likely be missed. Two other crucial sampling limitations had to do with time. The first was the timing of the interview relative to when the participant's loved one died. The second was the timing of the death relative to the pandemic restrictions that were in place. There were so many moving pieces in exploring pandemic bereavement that I expected no two stories to resemble each other much. However, unique and individual experiences are the very thing that I aimed to explore through this study.

#### ***Instrument***

The chosen instrument brought its own limitations. Personal interviews assume that people are willing to speak in depth about a topic, and pandemic bereavement is one that was

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sensitive for several reasons. For a start, the grief may have still been too intense and/or recent for some people to want to share it. Also, discussing death and grief required people to be highly vulnerable, which may have been painful. In addition to the fragility of the topic, it was possible that being a cultural outsider may have limited me as a researcher, whether it was in the form of questions I did not think to ask, or answers participants were not willing to give. However, participants' degree of openness would have been in question and, to some extent, beyond my control, regardless of the kind of study I conducted.

### ***Methodology***

The biggest methodological limitation of this study is the fact that a Master's Thesis, and its one-year timeline, cannot allow for the resulting ethnodramatic script to be either developed, polished, or staged to its full potential. Therefore, the study and the script itself may be expanded as part of later research.

### **Summary**

Though the value of mourning rituals is understood to be about offering some sense of control (Burrell & Selman, 2020), the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on bereavement may still be unknown. Given that Jewish tradition so prioritizes ritual, the focus of my research was how bereaved Jewish Canadians made meaning of it during the pandemic. I chose ethnodrama as a research methodology because, in blending ethnography and theatre, it provided an opportunity to study a culture I continue to be interested in, as well as an avenue for connection, expression, and emancipation. If the script were ever staged for audiences, it would also provide an embodied experience that could temporarily free us from the digital realms we now exist in more than ever before, and perhaps, a cathartic and ritualistic offering of the words, moments, and supports the pandemic stole from us.

## Chapter 4. Results

### Draft Script

[Untitled Play About Jewish Bereavement in the COVID-19 Pandemic]

#### THEMATIC LEGEND

Relationships #  
Judaism &  
Coping ^  
Pandemic Disruption %

#### CHARACTERS

The Searcher

The Sharers:

Anna  
David  
Eliza  
Hadassah  
Mendy

Rayanne  
Ruben  
Sarah  
Veronica

#### SET

Bare stage. Stools. Can be performed in any stage configuration. The Sharers are mostly unaware of each other's presence, but may always interact with The Searcher, who serves as a bridge between the world on stage and the world of the audience.

#### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue  
Scene 1: Memories  
Scene 2: Jewish Identity  
Scene 3: Loss and Turmoil (Aninut)  
Scene 4: Survival and Coping (Avelut)  
Scene 5: Continuing Bonds (Lifeafter)  
Epilogue

**Prologue**

*Lights up on THE SEARCHER, alone on stage, looking at an urn (real or imagined). THE SHARERS can be onstage but unseen, or offstage.*

THE SEARCHER:

Is this it? Is this what remains of a person? This is what remains after the body has been heated up to however many degrees? *(Pause)*. This is the day we just pick up the ashes – of a man whose life impacted so many. He was a doctor for 30-something years, a teacher for 15+ years; he touched so many people’s lives – directly as a doctor himself and indirectly as a mentor of new generations of doctors that are now out there helping people. But beyond that, he was a father who adored his daughter, a husband who adored his wife, a brother, a brother-in-law, an uncle, a grandfather. And all we’re doing is picking up his ashes and taking him home? No goodbye? No acknowledgement? No “thank you”? Thank you for touching our lives the way you did. It shouldn’t matter that he was an atheist. Funerals are not about the dead, they’re about the living. And how can we carry on if we’re not even acknowledging this tremendous loss? This hole in our lives. This person-shaped hole in our hearts that will never heal. This isn’t right. And the pandemic is just an excuse. *(Sigh)*. This isn’t right. He deserved more. We need more. We shouldn’t have to do this by ourselves, in our minds, alone in the dark. We should be together. We should find the light together. *(Pause)*. THE SHARERS enter or approach, carrying the stool they will sit in for the rest of the show. As they do so, THE SEARCHER takes a big breath, and becomes the unseen person on stage, perhaps moving among the audience throughout or between scenes, but not in a way that draws attention away from the SHARERS.

*Lighting change.*

Scene 1: Memories

VERONICA #^

(00:45:17): My dad and I were super close. (00:46:26): We used to argue and stuff. Any family does. And my dad was my biggest fan. My dad was my biggest supporter. My dad was like, everything. We had an amazing relationship. Was he perfect? No, he was very strict when I was young. But as I got older, we developed a different kind of relationship because we go through phases and stuff, and I understand why he was strict. I would've been too, probably, moving to a new country. You have a 15-year-old daughter...you do want to keep her locked up. Right? But my dad was a phenomenal man in my life who made me feel safe and protected. (00:59:43): No man can compare to [him]. No partner, no husband has ever lived up to that high standard that my father left with me. That legacy of how one takes care of a family the way my dad did. I don't know. # I'm very lucky with the parents I have. #^

RAYANNE #&

(00:37:44): Some people might be as close to their dads as I was, but not more. That's the kind of relationship I had. (00:01:45): My father happens to have been a force to deal with, he was a major community member. (00:49:06): My dad was the guy who— he was going to live to a hundred. He had a goal, he wanted to be at his grand— great grandson's Bar mitzvah. I mean, he



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had an absolute goal. He said, if I don't live till a hundred, I'll be mad at myself. You know? (00:01:45) He helped so many people that he probably deserved the order of Canada. # But because so much of it was done quietly...which is in Jewish law. To go up to someone on the street and hand them the money, that's the lowest form of charity. The highest level of charity is twofold: one is to do it anonymously, and then higher than that is to give them a livelihood. & And my dad did all of that. A lot of that. (00:05:49): He did give where people knew he was giving, but a lot of it was always hidden, cause he never did it for the reasons of being congratulated. #

RUBEN #

(02:41): My father and I were basically business partners for 20 years. (04:12): In fact, when he retired, he started an at-home business selling stuff on the internet, and he continued to do that from his apartment in his assisted living building. (09:20): He got great care at the facility, but I was his primary caregiver. And to be honest, I never begrudged any of that. (10:54): I just sort of always viewed it as my turn to pay back. (07:09): He had developed aphasia, so he was no longer able to communicate. And this was a person who had the gift of the gab. For someone who couldn't speak and had mobility issues, you would've expected him to be depressed most of the time. But quite the contrary, he still had a pretty positive attitude. People in the building loved him. My father had real chemistry with people. I witnessed myself how someone could be having a very bad day and have a frown on their face. And within a few seconds, my father could say something to that person that changed the frown to a smile. (12:02): Anyway, he was able to do that even without speaking. #

DAVID #^

(00:16:04): My dad...he was my best friend. He was just a great— not only did he have this sort of meteoric career in medicine, and I think he had something like 800 published papers. I mean, I don't often gloat about him, but this is the moment. So, it was a massive loss for the medical community. But he also was the kind of guy that was just fun and happy and soft, silver linings and everything. And just so supportive to the point of, when I was a teenager, like, “dad, please, I'm trying to just relax”, you know, he'd come home from work, just a ball of energy and want to do a million things, have fun and be with us. # I mean, I'm so lucky. It's just mind blowing. ^

MENDY #^

(00:24:24): [My dad] always would say, “you're the one I always worry about. You keep me up, because you don't—” I also have ADHD, dyslexia. So I didn't— university wasn't my thing. People were my thing. And that was difficult for him to comprehend. He also was 86 when he passed. So he also comes from a generation of 1930s. (00:25:08): He grew up in New York at a time when being a Jew wasn't something that was good. (00:25:50): And so, he named all his kids very American names, and he openly said, “I did it because I don't want people to think you're Jewish.” (00:23:44): He was very much about, “you need to be a millionaire, da da da da”. And I'm like, no, I don't. I need to make a difference. (00:21:17) He also wanted me to run for politics, but that's not happening #...yet! I'm kidding. I'm kidding. ^ And so that was something that we were contentious and disagreed on, and it caused some rifts, and he just couldn't see it through my eyes. (00:27:06): I always felt this need to win his approval. (00:23:04) There was a period of time where I didn't speak with him for a year. But as he got older, he started respecting...he started to realise and understand it. (00:22:55): Towards the end, (00:21:17): I

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talked to him every other day. #

ANNA: #^

(08:46) My mother is from New York City...big, big, big American. And when I moved to Canada after I graduated from university, she was very upset. So, when I had my son, she said to my father, “we're moving”. (09:15): He said, “well, if you can sell the house, if you can sell the house, we'll go”. Anyway, she sold the house in two days, and I had just had to get her papers and everything. # She was a very valuable part of my life. (34:41): She was such a good mother because she didn't have good mothering, and other people wouldn't have been. #^ She never went for psychological training, but she— like the advice, “You can't change people. All you can do is change the way they affect you.” – she had all kinds of little snippets like that. She used mantras that she used to say to herself when she'd feel like she was being vulnerable or whatever. And she used that for me because I was born very afraid of everything. And she made me strong just with her...how she coped. I mean, I used to get sick every time I went to school. And she said, “me too. I used to get sick when I went to school too”. And she used to give me ways of coping, breathing and stuff like that. She made it easy to love her. #

SARAH #

(45:57): [My mother and I] had been living far apart from each other for a long time, since I was 17. (00:25): I'm originally from the States. I've been living here for over 40 years. (46:10): So, we weren't the kind of mother and daughter that were on the phone all the time and everything. I loved her. I wanted to see her, and we would talk, but that was just our relationship. She loved watching the news. She'd have it on all the time, and she'd always talk back to the television about what she thought about whatever it was that was happening. (48:09): Definitely opinionated. #

ELIZA #

(00:08:14): [My husband] was a very clever person. (00:09:14): Very, very knowledgeable and very talented. (00:13:41): I went to Israel for a work and study programme. (00:14:54): I think I was about 18. (00:13:50): And it was actually a very large group, 60 of us, and 30 of us went to a kibbutz and 30 went to another kibbutz. And I actually was supposed to go to the Canadian kibbutz. And I chose to go to one that was predominantly Israeli. And he was a good-looking guy on the tractor. (*Beat*). (00:14:21): It really is that. It really is that. (00:14:21) In his last few weeks, he said that the day I left – because I had left and the plan was for him to come, which he did to come a half a year later – he said that the day I left was the hardest day in his life. (00:12:57): I mean, he was a beautiful man. (00:12:11): He would sort of protect me. I'm claustrophobic. So that if we were anywhere, he would sit next to me to be my barrier and he would make sure or arrange if I didn't have the aisle seat. (00:12:57): And he was a very quiet person and very shy, sort of shy. I was supposedly the more outgoing, so, whatever. (00:10:09) And we were married for 60– I guess it was 64 years. And so, you know what they say...your soulmate. #

HADASSAH #

(05:40): I was married before; I'm divorced. And when I came to Canada, there was a few family that kind of took me under their wing. So, I become a goddaughter– adopted daughter to a few family. So, one of this lady, by then, she was in the hospital for a year. I would go to see her

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every day. During that time, my husband's [then] wife was in a coma for a long time, and she was in the same hospital. So, I would see him [there]. But then my [god]mom died in January, and then I didn't go back to the hospital, and his wife died [in] May or June that year. So, one day I was at a strip mall picking up something, and he was there dropping off something. And then I run into him. He remembered me, but I did not remember him. So, we start talking and was, and I said, how you doing? How is life? (07:12): And we were talking, and then he invited me out to go for tea, coffee or something. And that's how it got started. (07:21): Then we got married later on, and we were together for eight years. #

### Scene 2: Jewish Identity

SARAH &#

(05:28): I wasn't brought up to be very religious. My family was not very— we did the holidays; we went to services for holidays. So, we were very focused on holidays, particular holidays, but we didn't observe Shabbat or anything like that. My parents didn't keep kosher. (06:05): We belonged to a conservative synagogue, or congregation, but it was pretty liberal. And our family was...it was kind of divided. & My mother was not really interested in being observant at all. &# My father was more interested in being observant. &# But we sort of had this compromise where we would go— definitely do holidays, and we had what we called Hebrew school where he'd go to classes every week and after school and on Sundays. So, we had a very – to me – a very Jewish upbringing, but it wasn't very observant. And we've kind of continued that. I'm a member of the synagogue, and so I participate in some things like yahrzeits and holidays. On the odd occasion, I'll go for Shabbat services, parties, events, and things like that. Taking advantage of the community. I enjoy the community feeling, but I wouldn't call myself observant. &

RAYANNE &^

(00:13:21): Mm...I'm a traditionalist, but, um, I drive to shul. I'm not shomer shabbos. I'm not strictly kosher, so... But, I'm a knowledgeable Jew. & And I value and treasure what— the gifts that I've been given. &^

ANNA &

(17:30): We were brought up – we said “conservative”. But when I came here, I found that I wasn't even conservative. I wasn't even, you know, I was beyond that. I didn't know I was kind of betwixt and between. But we sent our kids to conservative because this way at least they had a background so they could decide what they wanted. I always felt I was cheated because I didn't have the opportunity. I wanted to be— know more about being Jewish and stuff. And I enjoyed youth groups and stuff, but I felt I started too late because I didn't know the Hebrew. I didn't know, you know, all the ins and outs, and I didn't want my children to have that experience. I would've liked to have had more of a choice, umm, because it does make me feel good to hear it and see people practising it. I like it. I wish I was more knowledgeable than that. &

HADASSAH &

(04:49): I did not grow up Jewish. I...well...I kind of grew up with no set faith. There were so many things my grandparents do that was different from what the churches do. But she would still go to church, go church on Sunday, and she would still observe the Sabbath. So that was quite the mixing. So, I never consider myself Jewish, but I also never consider myself Christian.

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(05:19): I was kind of half and half. And then, eventually, you know, I start exploring and decide Judaism is where I belong. That's my faith. I would say, maybe, 60% observant? I consider myself more conservative. I believe in doing my daily prayers, and, you know, observing lot of the Halakhah, a lot of the ritual. I observe most of...I observe most of them; I cannot say I observe all of them. For example, I won't mix dairy with meat, but I don't use two set of dishes. I put my dishes in dishwasher, and I think putting them in dishwasher is good enough! &

ELIZA &

(00:48:07): Definitely Conservative. My parents were Or– I can't think of them as Orthodox, but there was Orthodox, you know. It was that tradition. Women and men sat separately and...well, of course a kosher home. And I have lessened now. I still have separate dishes, but I uh...do I have to go into stuff like that? &

RUBEN &#^

(24:44): I also am not orthodox, but I am fairly observant. (38:26): And one of the reasons I became– I wasn't always observant. & One of the reasons I became more observant is I wanted to set an example for my grandchildren. &# (37:49): I'm very fortunate that I have all these grandchildren who call me Zeidee. #^ I was very fortunate to be very close to my grandfathers. My wife's parents were survivors, so she never knew her grandparents. # So being grandparents is very important to both of us. #^

VERONICA &

(00:51:01): I grew up in an atheist environment. My mom is more Christian, so she does her thing. (00:58:00): I like the bits and pieces that I know about Jewish religion and culture. I do. (00:59:02): I just...when you don't grow up with it...would I like to know more about it? Yes. Do I have the time and capacity? No. &

DAVID &#

(00:03:39) So actually, mom is not Jewish. Dad is Jewish. Grandparents on dad's side were Orthodox and then had a bit of a falling out. And then dad, as a result, raised us very atheist in a way. Jatheist? I have very fond memories as a kid of Seders and Rosh Hashanas and Yom Kippurs and with my grandparents and aunts and uncles. &# So, there's something about that – and Shabbats and stuff. So, would a yeshiva kid in the streets who wants to put tefillin on me consider me Jewish? Probably not, but I don't really care. &

MENDY &

(00:07:33): I was, at one point in time, in school to be an Orthodox rabbi. (00:08:16): With a beard and everything. & (00:08:18): And you know, at every time of your life, you're probably going to have things that happen that cause you to do different things or go in different directions. &^ (00:04:58): I used to be very [observant]. Now I'm not as much. And this had nothing to do with the loss of my dad. &# Covid changed a lot of things for a lot of people. As Covid kind of started happening and progressing, and it became really evident that, you know, only live once. &% My kids– I have a son who's autistic. The iPad is something that is a desperate tool for him. And so, Shabbat, he needs it and he needs that downtime. &# And so we started to, I don't want to say drift away, but we're more...flexible. But always with an appreciation and understanding for those who are more religious. If we go to synagogue, we go

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to the Orthodox synagogue. We don't have a strict kosher house anymore, but we don't eat pork and we don't mix milk and meat. We do a lot of those things. And so, I like to think that I'm kind of just an independent thinker who does his own thing. # (00:07:26): And supermodel. ^

### Scene 3: Loss and Turmoil (Aninut)

DAVID &^

(00:24:53): I could hardly sleep...or was in a weird sort of middle world between sleep and wake. But I was listening to the Tibetan book of Living and dying as an audiobook, and it just helped tremendously. It talks in great depth about the preparation of the body in Tibetan Buddhism and what's done, but also how you as a living person relate to the dying person and in the lead up to their death, how you can make it be as much of a peaceful time. So it sort of – it just resonated, just really resonated. And in some ways, I'm more Buddhist than Jewish, right? (00:43:45): Because I also didn't have the depth of Hebrew school education, for example, or I don't know if that's maybe something that's taught, maybe it's not, I'm assuming, but I didn't have that...education of what you were supposed to do – guidance – as a Jew. When a family member was dying, I didn't know what to do, and how to feel, or all any of that. So, I think that the Tibetan Buddhism thing really gave me a path or a sort of...gave me the strength and the awareness to understand what was happening and be okay with it. I mean, there's so much in our culture, Judaism, and North American western culture that is so scared of death and it's not right. I dunno. I lived in southern Mexico for a couple years. There's a beautiful way in Mexican culture that death is surrounding you all the time and not vilified or not hidden. &^

### *Death*

SARAH %#^

(16:36): She died of Covid. (16:39): I mean, she wasn't in good health anyway, so it wasn't a huge shock. I mean, she wasn't in imminent– fortunately, I saw her a couple– a few months before, but she was doing okay. She wasn't doing that badly. And she still had her mind. And then covid hit and they locked down the whole place, but they still could move around a little bit. She was in assisted living, and she was being pushed in her wheelchair and the wheelchair tipped over and my mother fell out. And so, they had to take her to the hospital to see if she'd broken anything. So, they took her there to see, just to get x-rays. Of course, at that point being April, they tested her for Covid. They found out she had covid (18:23): And that was it. She died in like 48 hours after that. (18:31): So, we heard that– that she had it and she was in the hospital. She was on a ventilator, and there was nothing we could do about it. % (21:36): The hardest part was not being there when my mother was in the hospital. %# And I still have problems with that, % even though I know there was nothing we could have done differently. Absolutely nothing. No way we could get into that hospital. ^ It still makes me feel bad to this day that she had to die by herself. %# It's pretty awful. (22:14): I wouldn't want to have that happen to anybody. And I know it happened to a lot of people; she wasn't the only one. But it was pretty horrible. %

VERONICA %#

(00:05:55): I was scared to go visit my parents. I was so worried about being the carrier and causing death to my father. Because he was high risk. My father was on dialysis for the last maybe seven years of his life. And so of course I didn't go visit because everybody was so

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scared. I wasn't scared about myself or whatever. I was scared about him because of all the information we were given. %# And then he died anyways. And the whole thing, how he died, I wouldn't have been able to see him in the hospital anyways because he had some kind of infection. (00:06:45): He went to the emergency hospital. They took him in the ambulance in the morning. % I called him on the cell and I said, "what's going on? How are you doing?" And he was really weak and tired. And I said, "daddy, I love you. You're going to be okay. Right?" He says, "yeah, I love you too. I'll be okay. Call your mama. I'm tired. I'll be doing tests and things like that." So that was my last conversation. %# My mom went to pick him up in the evening because they were releasing him. The drive from the hospital to their condo's 20 minutes. She got into the underground parking, she let him out by the elevator, she parked the car, she came back, and he was down by the wall, and basically, he died. %

MENDY %#^

(00:09:49): He didn't pass away from Covid. He passed away from congestive heart failure, but it deteriorated drastically during Covid. When he was in hospital, they weren't even taking visitors. No one was able to visit him. (00:10:22): So, he learned how to do FaceTime, which was interesting. % I saw a lot of his ear hair ^ because he would just put the phone to his ear. %#

HADASSAH %

(13:57): Because of the pandemic, he start having confusion and they say, oh, it could be dementia, but because everything was so shut down for him to get the MRI, or CAT scan (14:21): So, by the time we do get CAT scan MRI, he was like stage four brain tumour, and it was at a place that they could not operate either. If it was earlier, they could have done maybe some radiation or something. But by then, one was a rapid growing one, and his condition just start getting more rapid and more rapid. He go from not knowing what a toothbrush is from a razor, not where the toilet is. The confusion was very bad. (15:20): There was time when I was frustrated, of course, and there was time when I was angry, and there was time when I was sad. It was difficult. (16:40): Getting help was also difficult because they fire a lot of people who were not vaccinated and help was limited. (16:53): And sleeping was difficult because he didn't sleep well. %

RUBEN %#

(13:49): They did arrange for me to sit with him outside of the assisted living building. They brought him out in his wheelchair, and we sat on a bench, and we chatted. And I have a picture from that moment. That was the last time I really physically was with him until I saw him in the morgue in hospital. %# (17:12): I wasn't allowed in the building, and he wasn't allowed to leave his apartment. For all intents and purposes, he was a prisoner. And then I started to get calls about his not wanting to eat, not wanting to take his meds. (18:14): That's why I [say] that he didn't die from Covid; he died because of Covid. He basically had had enough. And so, the day he passed, I got a call late afternoon from the assisted living building that he wasn't doing too well, so that they were going to call 911. So, I got in my car, and I actually pulled into his parking lot the same time the ambulance pulled in. Anyway, they wheeled him down. One of the paramedics told me that he was in pretty bad shape, but they were going to give him something en route to the hospital that might perk him up for a bit. % (20:07): He was basically, I don't know if he was unconscious or semi-conscious, but I did have an opportunity to tell him I loved

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him. %# I came home, and it wasn't maybe 20 minutes or 15 minutes after I got home, I got a phone call from the paramedic that I spoke with that he had passed in the ambulance. %

ELIZA %#

(00:01:29): It was very, very traumatic. He slipped and had to go to the hospital. And those two days were horrible in the hospital. (00:06:37): And that night the nurse was very open to me, saying that he may not survive the night. So, I slept. They provided a kind of bed where I slept and, in the morning, he slowly lost...he died. He was already not conscious when we came there. And he was in emergency, he was beginning to have difficulties. % And that whole evening I was in hospital and finally I said, I won't leave unless you tell me to go. And he repeated after me – he was speaking only Hebrew at that stage – and he said, “go home, Rachael”. He called me Rachael. And that was really the last words I ever heard. %#

ANNA %#^

(04:53): I was very lucky because I lived two minutes from my mom. I'd come every day, and they allowed me to come to her facilities and be with her every day. Even though it was on lockdown, I was treated like a caregiver that– necessity or whatever. %# So, I was very lucky that I was with her. %#^ But the funny thing is that the day that she died, I actually took her out. We went downtown, and if I would've known that was the last day, I would've made more of it. But you know...she wasn't feeling that great. We'd walk around and then have lunch and do things like that. So, I was hoping that day that we would be able to do that, because it was the first time that we were able to get out, and we were wearing a mask and everything, but it just– it wasn't the same. %# But...It was a beautiful August day, you know. ^ But, on that sad note, there was so many good times that I had, whether that... You can't focus on that. (07:19): I was very lucky. I was very lucky. Just looking at the relationship between my mother and myself and I, there was no break. #^

DAVID #^%

(00:18:08): I talked to him every day on the phone. And then I remember the day. We hung up the phone and all was normal, and we were goofing around and whatever. # And then an hour or so later, I got a call from my mom that the paramedics were in the cottage. They managed to start his heart, brought him to the hospital, kept him alive. (00:20:14) They took him to the hospital that he actually was born in and worked at for 40 years. So, he was very much loved and everything, but he never woke up. We got a chance to go into the room while he was in the coma and sort of say what we needed to say, which was strange because of the pandemic. Cause you're wearing the whole thing. % (00:21:39): I went in with my brother and they called the respirologist to take the ventilator out, % and I played guitar...played guitar until he left...took a couple hours...was in the middle of the night. I'd never been in the room when someone died. I know I'm crying now, but there was something that was so special and beautiful about it to be there. I felt his soul flying. It was beautiful. I never believed in the afterlife so much. I felt and saw his soul float above his body and then go out the window, take a journey. It's beautiful. Just a gift to be there. It's a gift to be there. I dunno if he heard me or felt me or whatever, it doesn't matter. #^ But I'm so grateful to have had that chance. ^ (00:24:53) My dad and I shared music a lot, so that's why playing the guitar thing was just very special. #^

RUBEN &%^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(28:28): There's something that Jewish people are told to say before they pass. It's kind of asking forgiveness. And when I had mentioned it to one of the clergy at my synagogue some weeks before, when [my father's] health was failing, I was given this prayer and he, –and I explained that my father can't speak– and he said –or he wasn't able to do this prayer– he said, “someone else can do it on his behalf”. %& After I saw the ambulance, I came home and I did the prayer. It was seconds after I finished the prayer that I got the phone call. (*Pause*). (29:51): That's why I have faith. ^

### *Burial*

RUBEN %#

(20:07): At that time, the restrictions on funerals were you only were able to have 10 people, including the rabbi at the service. (22:20): So, my wife and I is two, my three children – but not their spouses – came, that's five, plus the rabbi was six, so four of his siblings would be able to come. He actually had, at that time, six living siblings. So one was out of town anyway, but I had to call one sister to tell her, unfortunately, she could not attend. And my sister basically had to watch her father's funeral live streamed.

VERONICA %#

(00:20:42): I don't understand the part where they limit people at funerals when you're outside. Seriously. And they were there watching us to make sure we're all standing apart. And I'm just like, we're family.

ANNA %#

(20:08): I think, with any funerals – Gentile, Jewish – you want to honour the person. And I just don't feel, because of Covid, I don't feel that we honoured her enough. (21:04): Many people say nice things and stuff, but it's just, she didn't have her...her spotlight.

RUBEN %

(24:15): I felt we got robbed. (46:22): Normally, someone of my father's character would've– there would've been some fanfare associated. In recognition associated and appreciation publicly acknowledged at his passing. (46:59): When I said “robbed”, I kind of meant on his behalf. It wasn't really about me. (47:18): My sister got robbed of not being able to attend her father's funeral. That's big.

RAYANNE #^

(01:20:18): I think a part of mourning is the actual person who dies, and how is that person reflected within the morning process? Everybody's left with these wonderful memories or not so wonderful memories or painful memories, or exciting memories of the person that you're leaving. # And I think that's the part that we hold onto. And I think a burial is a celebration, albeit can be very painful, of all the memories that person collected in their journey of life. And I think part of mourning is learning how to decide how to elongate that memory. (01:21:36): How can I contribute to people knowing that this was a wonderful human being and can contribute? #^

SARAH #&%



## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(13:08): My mother wanted to be interred in this particular mausoleum, so she was going to go into there. So we knew all that. That was all arranged, but somebody had to be there. % One of my sisters is very religious. She's Lubavitch. (19:16): She had a really hard time because it's not kosher. You're supposed to be buried in the ground. & And my mother was adamant that she would not do that. And so, unfortunately, because she was the one who was dealing with it...there was some question whether she would...and it was all arranged, so it is like, what are you going to do now? So she kind of had to give up on that. She did do it, but... #&

### Scene 4: Survival and Coping (Avelut)

RAYANNE &^

(00:00:47): It takes so much energy to lose somebody. Because you're trying to hold all the pieces together. But I think the blessing of the Jewish rituals is that you know what you're supposed to do.

MENDY &^

(00:03:16): There's reason for everything.

RAYANNE &^

(01:10:35): The hard stuff is already decided for you.

MENDY &^

(00:03:20): And you just put your faith in, for lack of a better word, the system. I mean, I had never lost a parent, right? I mean, you only have two. (00:03:52): And so, I saw the, for lack of better word, the benefit of the Shiva process.

RAYANNE &^

(00:32:52): The way we have the structure of Shiva, Sheloshim, unveiling...it's a constant reminder that it's okay to grieve.

MENDY &^

(00:04:11): I mean, it is a forced grieving. It forces you to have to go through those stages of grieving that people go through naturally. (00:04:27): But it's also putting an end on it. It's saying you're doing it for this period of time, and now that you've done it for this period of time – yes, you still say Kaddish–

RAYANNE &^

(00:32:52): But even Kaddish, it's actually about a celebration of life. It's not about someone dying or we should be sad. It's about celebrating life and the gratitude that we have for living.

MENDY &^

(00:04:30): And yes, you still, every year, have your Yahrzeit. You never forget. But then, you start going into having to continue living your life and figuring that out.

RAYANNE &^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(00:33:24): Life always needs to go on. And it's pushing you all the time, gently, and figuratively, to get there. So I think it's a very healthy process that the ancient ancestries figured out. And I'm very gratified because it's also, even when I'm not the immediate mourner, we know how to help the people who are mourning. And you're not doing a faux pas. They even tell you what to say. (00:33:53): The rabbi will say...I always forget how to say it in Hebrew but...we comfort you in the house of Zion. And so, in other words, the whole Jewish people are covering you.

### *Isolation*

HADASSAH %&(#)

(17:47): Before the pandemic, we would have a, of course, a meal for everyone to go back to after. (17:55): We couldn't do that. %& (18:04): We would do the Shiva homes open. People come and go. Some people set certain hours, some people just, you just come and go. & I have to do it over the...Zoom. (18:25): It was okay doing Zoom, but to see that support feeling of closeness is not the same. %(#) (18:34): But we did not do our, we do the zoom meeting...think it was two days just, yeah. I did certainly seven day, but do it alone. %(#)

MENDY %&^

(00:14:43): It's very difficult to explain to the kids. They don't get it. # (00:16:33): For them, Shiva is an empty house. It's an empty house and a computer, and then, click, all those 200-some people are gone now and you're back in the empty house. You know what I mean? (00:28:23): The silence is...it's the saying, the silence is deafening. Right? I mean, it was like— I compared it to a black hole. %& That being said, we are very lucky to live in a time where we have technology where I can have a zoom, or I can receive phone calls or FaceTime from people all over the world. And that to me is something that is a bit of a silver lining. I mean, it's an award for fifth place, but it is something that at least made it somewhat palatable that you're not alone. ^ But I can guarantee you that— would I have loved to have been by the grave and do the traditions of putting the dirt in? I would be lying to say I don't feel like I missed out. %&

ELIZA %&#

(00:26:35): The initial first year, there was constant fear. And I knew nothing. I knew nothing financially. % And my husband tried to start showing me, and I almost purposely acted stupid because I thought the longer I don't know, the longer he'll last. # (00:40:24): It's firsts that are painful - the first time you do certain things. (00:33:00): It was hard. It was hard. The nights were no different from the days. So I'd wander around, I couldn't talk to my children. And they were upset too. So that I was stifled. I dunno what to say. I had a lot of anger at times. I think later, not at the beginning. A lot of the beginning just devastated. Just crying, crying, putting head on the pillow, crying. [What was most difficult was] (00:34:29): the isolation. (#) Even though everybody was isolated. (00:39:17): The other hardest thing was, once I started to go out, the horrible thing was opening the door and coming into the condo. (00:39:46): Silence. You know in the movie Shirley Valentine, where she walks in and says "Hello, wall. Hello, floor. Hello, door." Well, the silence...yeah, the silence sometimes has a sound. %

SARAH %&#^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(29:41): Yeah, I think that would've been really, really difficult if I was living by myself, if I was single. I don't know. That would've, I think that would've been really, really difficult. % (30:03): At least I had my family at home. (30:07): My daughter, I guess she was still, she hadn't started university yet. So she was home all the time. And my husband is retired, so he is home all the time. So I had that companionship all the time. #^

ANNA #%(#)

(24:50): I would go out every day and see my mom. # And I think that was the hardest thing, because after she died, you know, they locked down again, you know, at the end of that year. And so I didn't have any place. It was a real void that I had no place to go to see her, you know. And it just made it twice as hard. I was locked up and I had no place to go. I had no reason to go, you know, where there's people, what do they call it? People that, necessity workers, whatever you call it. The ones that have to be at work. Essential! I wasn't essential anymore. Yeah. So that was, that was... That was a void. Yeah. %(#)

HADASSAH #%(#)

(10:54): We're very social people. We get together with friends at the synagogue, in people's home, and people visit us. We get together in groups. We do things...together. If there's a funeral or somebody sick, people come and they bring food, they can hug each other. Hugging is very important to me. Hug, hold hands. # And then, during the pandemic, all that...no. No holding hands, no hugging, no kissing. (11:32): Nobody visiting. (11:34): Then when they do say someone could visit, then they have to be vaccinated. (11:39): So, the restriction make it, make life very, very difficult. %(#)

### *Community*

MENDY %^&

(00:16:33): It was very, very difficult. % It was also, I'm not going to lie, also quite relieving. ^ (00:18:15): Because also, like anyone else, I had anxiety regarding covid and big crowds and that sort of stuff. And it was the fact that I was able to just be with myself, not have to worry about my house being overrun by hundreds of people, not have to worry about even just thanking people. %^&

SARAH %&^#

(24:08): I think I had friends who knew what they were doing, and we set up this time every night, and we just sent out an email saying, "hey, I'm having this zoom Shiva, and it's every night at seven, and here's the link, and you can come in – I don't remember how long it was – and just come in, not come in". %& All my sisters were on it as well. # And we just chatted, and one night, the rabbi brought a few people from our synagogue to come into the Zoom and say the prayers, which is great. (25:21): It was really quite nice actually. I didn't know– like, I wasn't friends with them, but I knew them, and I knew who they were, and I had said hello to them and things like that in different events and whatnot. (26:11): So, it was a really nice feeling, and– but, it was almost better than a regular Shiva in a way, you know, even though we weren't together for a whole number of days, all day. Having that allowed people to come in. You know how everybody's all over the place now. We have friends that are in Europe and in the States, here or there, everywhere. And anybody could come, people we hadn't seen for a while, and it was

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

really, really nice. &%^ And a lot of them had met my mother, so we talked about my mother and my sisters had friends of theirs or people they knew come in as well. #^ And it was pretty awesome that way. It was good. ^ I mean, it was a real community thing and I think it was a good alternative and it really helped in those first few days. %&#^

VERONICA #^

(00:42:23): I have a really good circle of friends here that I've known – some of them – for 23 years or so. They've helped, they've raised money when my dad died. (00:43:15): They made a bunch of meals for me and the kids and just being there and listening and that kind of thing.

RAYANNE #&^

(00:12:12): We had 30 days of food. Endless, like– we finally stopped at Sheloshim. &^ I mean, it was just this outpouring of love. And support. And that's comforting to know. There's someone beside you. #^ Different people choose different amounts of days for Shiva, and we did the full week, and I don't want to use the word rewarding, because that's the wrong word. & (Pause)  
(00:34:55): Almost shocking. Because there's enough time for everybody to come and people come that you don't expect to come. And I think it reminds us about the power of living, about how much one person made a difference in the world. #^ And I think that's what Shiva is about, is giving you a chance to realise it's not just about you, and yet it's all about you. And people come to be respectful and to be themselves mourning, to acknowledge. When someone sends you a meal, that's a big hug. That they cared enough. That's what the strength of community is. &#^

MENDY &#

(00:18:15): It's very customary. Jews. We like to drink and give food. That's what we do.

HADASSAH &#^

(29:10): It's just part of what we should do. &# And so many people have been so good to me too. ^ So it was part of what our life is about, to be there for each other. &#

ELIZA &#%^

(00:26:35): The rabbi from my synagogue came to visit me outside, under a tree. Yeah, that was lovely. And these women brought in a lunch, and we sat by a waterfall. I will never forget that. And my friends who– we picnicked outside. &#^ But you know what, it was just horrible. But it was horrible, even if I had family sitting around. %&#

### *Sacred Time & Space*

RUBEN &^

(31:08): When my mother passed away, with work and everything, it was not always possible or convenient to go to the synagogue twice a day to say Kaddish. But in my father's case, I did say Kaddish for 11 months, twice a day, and I probably can count on my hands the number of times that I, for whatever reason, had to miss it. & And I found that very, very helpful. ^ (32:11): I think one thing Jewish people do very well is support, and have protocols and mechanisms in place psychologically, to support people mourning. (32:38): Not that everyone takes advantage or follows those protocols, but in my particular case, I found it very helpful in dealing with the situation. &^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

RAYANNE &#^

(01:21:36): For me, that's my— part of *my* healing, I think is, celebrating the lives that I've lost... #^ Without staying in a dark place, I think mourning is a place to help you find the light – or at least the Jewish way. & And when, I mean part of the death is also the part of getting there. And to remember that there's all these precious moments before, during, and after. And I think, as hard as all of the pain can be, that there's so much beauty in it, whether it's the support of your family, the support of the community. #^ Whether it's standing up and saying Kaddish and remembering. You can stop every time you say it. Every day, you're allowed to stop and say that prayer. &^ The beauty of knowing that I'm allowed to be sad, there's a beauty to that. &#^

MENDY %&^

(00:19:21): I went to the dyke. I walked a lot because, like I said, there's no, you're not going for a minyan. %& The first time I said mourner's Kaddish for my dad was almost a year later. & (00:20:16): It was something that I (00:20:28): had never had to say before. &# And it already – because of the time difference, because Covid had restricted so much stuff – it was so far removed from the actual event that I was like...I mean, should I? Is it still relevant? That sort of thing. &% And so, then I said it and it was very surreal, and it brought back a lot of the emotions that I had had during that time. &^

VERONICA ^(&)

(00:51:01): I actually went on a trip to Thailand and Malaysia and I visited a lot of temples. And this guy— I had a driver. (00:51:58): And he's like, I'm going to take you to my favourite temple. He took me everywhere. I didn't plan anything. I just followed him. I was just a little lost puppy. (00:52:49): And the one temple he took me, and I look up and it was like the ceiling was full of stars. It was dark paint with bright— and it would look like stars. And I just started bawling out of nowhere. It just hit me. I just sat down and I was like, whew. And I don't think it's necessarily the temple itself. (00:53:47): I didn't care. There was like a bazillion strangers. I'm like, I don't care if they see me. I was just like, whew. It just hit me. I don't even know how long, I just— I wasn't like bawling, but I just had tears. I couldn't stop them. And then I felt so good. Like, I felt like...like a catharsis of some kind. ^(&)

### *Getting It Out*

ELIZA ^

(00:00:10): When I'm full of sadness or things just are so much, I have to let it out. It's very hard in a way now, when you're on your own and your partner was the one that you let it all out to. And I don't like to do it to a friend and I don't do it to my children. So, I have a lot of things, short things, more or less shorter things that I write – actually, one or two funny things – but I have to let it out. ^

ANNA #^

(30:48): I think probably my sister was the biggest [help]. We talked about our shared memories and yeah. Yeah. It's hard, it's hard to remember because you kind of push that bad negative stuff, you know? But I think that probably was part of the healing, was those talks, you know?

HADASSAH #&^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(50:18): It's good to talk it out. (50:11): I talk it out, pray it out. This is bother me, but I don't want that to control me. I don't want something to control me. I should control what the issue is. That issue should not control me.

SARAH ^

(43:03): I think it's always important to remember things, whether your past, whether they're bad or good, because if you try to hide them or bury them, they'll just come out in other ways. (44:48): You just have to let it come up and then let it go. (48:32): I think [it's] good to reminisce, and even if it is painful, there are painful memories. I think [it's] good to have the opportunity to go over those feelings again in a way. (49:26): I think that's very useful too, just to put it all together in a story. Just to get a narrative out of it.

RAYANNE &^

(00:46:26): But don't do it alone, because that's dangerous. (00:47:29): If you sit at home and say, poor me, life is sad. Where does that person go? They become immobilised, if not anything more negative. (01:22:49): It's hard. But yet, to have the right to be able to do that is healing and acknowledgement of your pain. And to remember you should have pain because we can all get very busy. And then you're, when you're...high functioning. You think you have to get back up there ^ and, you know, going to say Kaddish makes you have to stop. You have to stop. And you have to say— stop and think. Some people don't want to stop and think. It's a good thing to stop and think. Even when you don't want to. And sometimes you stop and think, and you smile. Sometimes you stop and think, and you cry. And I think that's the beauty of Kaddish, or going to minyan in the morning or at night, whatever works for you. &^ (01:24:01): Everybody finds their own journey. I want to look for the light. I think the mourning process is to take your pain and to turn it into light. ^

VERONICA ^

(00:55:30): I mean, obviously, I don't think we ever get over these kind of situations. I think it's you just learn to cope and you learn to— it's almost like having some kind of limb taken off, but you have that phantom pain...that lives with you, kind of thing.

### *Honouring*

ELIZA &#^

(00:28:40): I waited two years to do the unveiling because I refused to do it myself. Everybody has a picture. Eliza sitting at the grave site. There were 20 people, counting the rabbi. And there I was, alone. & Everybody was wearing masks. % And I survived it, but with the help of this friend, this rabbi. And I had asked one of our good friends who would sing a...if I could have my memory...what the Lord of my shepherd, David. King David. And it's a beautiful melody. And the Hebrew words. &^ And the reason being, it was something between me and [my husband], nobody really knew. (00:31:13): So this was something that I would hang on to him. # And it was so meaningful. ^ So she sang it. And I had asked different people to bring me stones from Israel. And it was just lovely to have this ritual of putting these special stones on. &^

RAYANNE &^

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

(01:05:03): We take a stone that's not going to die, and it's solid and it's grounded. And we put it on there as a representation that we were there, and to let someone know that you were there. I like that. I mean flowers are beautiful, but stones are forever.

DAVID #^

(00:34:07): I guess it would've been almost six months later, we did a celebration of life. Now, he was the doctor to a Jewish philanthropist, businessman, and this guy actually owns [a basketball team]. So he said, yeah, we would love to donate the space if the family would like to use the basketball court and have a celebration of people. So that's what we ended up doing. And it was so beautiful and special. There was, essentially, it was a two-hour thing. I'd say maybe 500 people turned up on any given point. And we did some speeches for the first bit. And then we had a basketball game. ^ He was a big basketball guy. He would go to all my games and stuff. # (00:36:11): So, we had a shoot around and there were kids on the court and running around. ^ So I feel like it honoured, and echoed, and I use that— I use “echo” intentionally, very intentionally. But it echoed his joy that he had, just seeing the last half hour of that event where there was, I don't know, 40 people shooting threes, it was awesome. It was really, really cool. (00:36:48): It was very meaningful. #^

RAYANNE &(^)

(00:44:29): We say a prayer called Yizkor, and Yizkor is to remember. And traditionally, you don't stay for Yizkor until you have lost somebody. So I always left. And it'll be much more profound when I have to sit and say Yizkor. & (00:45:39): The privilege of not having to say Yizkor was very light. It'll be much heavier having to say it. (^)

### Scene 5: Continuing Bonds (Lifeafter)

SARAH (#)

(39:07): We're all feeling guilty in different ways. And then, it took us months to actually get together again. Actually, years in a way, because we didn't really get together for a year and a half after that in person. And even that was really fraught with emotion, bad emotions and guilty feelings and recrimination. So, it had, not all my sisters, but it's definitely had an effect on the relationships between the four of us. I'm still close with a couple of my sisters in a way that I was before, but the dynamic was sort of...we'll never get together again. I mean, we could tell you that right now. That will never be the four of us again. (#)

ANNA #^

(21:19): You know how you have the feed on your laptop or whatever, and they bring up pictures. You know? They bring up pictures daily, right? The day after my dog died, on my feed, out of nowhere, came a picture of my dog with my mother. And, you know, and I said, okay, is this a sign? Is this her way of communicating that they're together and everything's okay? Cause they're both sitting there, and they're both happy and content. It's a really nice picture. And I never would've even gone to look for it. It just— it just came up on the screen for that day, you know? So, you say, okay, well, maybe she's still with me, you know? And I feel her. (45:56): I hear her voice. (29:24): My mother said to me maybe five, six years ago, “my only wish is that you could be close with my sister”. And I said, “mom (*with amusement and disbelief*), you know her, we're— it's never going to happen. I mean, I'd love to do that work, but I can't promise that”.

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

And I think about that all the time, because it's almost like it was like divine intervention or whatever, but it's— I mean, I talk to my sister once a week. We talk for an hour and a half on Zoom. I went to see her. She sees me. She comes here all the time. It's an amazing relationship that I never thought we would have, and it's because of my mom. (28:29) If anything, this whole thing, my sister and I are very close now, closer now than we ever ever were. #^

VERONICA #^

(00:56:27): That's something we talked about – with my therapist – because I said something along the lines like, “I had my dad”. she's like, “you still have him. He's not physically present, but you still have a dad”. And so that does resonate with me because I often can hear him in my head. I sometimes– as weird as it sounds, there's different decision points in my life where I'm like, “what do you think?” And then I hear an answer, or I see numbers, or I see something else that... (00:57:06): that's meaningful to me. I don't know if it's a coincidence, call it whatever, but it works for me. I've accepted that part of my life. Maybe he's somewhere around. I've even justified things to my mom, who's like, she would get really upset. She's like, “I didn't get to go to the dad's cemetery. He's probably going to be upset that I didn't visit him”. I'm like, “come on, he's beside you all the time. He doesn't care if you go there. You're always talking to him. You're always seeing him.” #^

ELIZA #^

(00:41:46): I hear him, I can almost feel him sometimes when I'm, I don't do it often, but sometimes, when I'm resting on the bed...when it's quiet, I can almost hear the chair moving in the kitchen. I almost feel him coming to check on me. But I'll, let me tell you this. It's so touching. You know what a sabra is? My husband is a sabra. And my cleaning girl– I had lovely cleaning girl. And a few weeks after [he] died, she walked in and she was holding a cactus (00:43:04): So, I started crying, and then I explained to her. Then she said, “I went to the flowers. I looked at the flowers, and for some reason I thought this would be nicer.” Isn't that beautiful? (00:43:31): Now I have the cactus sitting there, with the stones in the kitchen. (00:40:24) And I'm going back to trying to do things that I loved doing with my husband. (00:35:32): In a way, helping myself, keeping busy and actually pushing myself. I couldn't believe it. I drove. I'm 87 years old and I have gone back to folk dancing. (00:46:15): I'm doing things that have meaning to me, or had meanings to us, and it gives me pleasure doing them. #^

HADASSAH #^

(08:07): I know that when I see him again, and there'll be no more sickness, he wouldn't be sad. There'll be all joy and happiness. That's what I believe. I don't know if that's funny thing, but that's what I believe. (08:33): I think, wherever he is, he resting, and I need to carry on life here, and he need to carry on life there. So, until we meet again, no conversation. (08:53) We're in different country. He's in the afterworld, and I'm still in this world. (21:45): I still miss him, but it is not like a loss. He's on a journey and the journey for all of us. And he gone ahead before me, and I will join him someday. #^

DAVID &#^

(00:54:14): I'm actually, oddly enough, re-exploring Judaism now that my dad passed and just trying to– we have a daughter and a son on the way, and it's something about wanting to pass down. It's like the tradition doesn't stop at my father. The tradition came generations before him,



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right? So, it's something that was passed on and on and on until it got to my grandparents. So, do I let my dad's, essentially, intellect, in a way, – and politics and whatever, disdain for whatever it was that turned him off of the more religious aspects – do I let that break the chain? &#^

RUBEN &#^

(39:02): Two of my grandchildren are having bat mitzvahs next year. &# (39:08): One of them was born two weeks after my mother passed away. If there's any mystical aspect to that. (39:30): And the youngest boy was born in the midst of Covid. (40:12): My father got to meet six of his great-grandchildren. So, there's something positive about that too. Not everyone has the luxury of that. #^

RAYANNE #^

(00:52:00): I made a point in the last two, three years of my death's life that I tried to videotape a lot. Because you keep on saying, oh, we should write down your story. We should tell your story. And then people just get busy. And your cell phone's easy. (00:53:59): Thank God for– you don't have to pull out the big camera, and so you just start making these little treasures. (00:55:56): Because you can't go back. But you can hold onto what you have. You can't go back. So, I think that's an important lesson to always remember, is to be present, and to enjoy what we have in front of us. And to not take it for granted. ^ (00:55:07): My son was over there; I think like the day before he passed away. And he sent a picture with him trying to play with the kids. That kid will have– will *know* that he had a connection. #^

MENDY &#^

(00:55:21): One of the things we do as a family is on the Yahrzeit, we light the candle, and we sit down with [the kids] for about half an hour and we tell stories and show videos. &#^ (01:13:15): I mean, listen, one of the hardest things that a human body has to deal with is shock. Right? When it's past the point of shock, then you're dealing with just sadness and emotions. So those things have had major shock already. Now, okay. So maybe tonight I'm sad. Who gives a shit? That's life. You have to be sad sometimes. You have to be happy. You won't know happiness unless you're ever sad. So, I don't want to say that it was easy...but I'm not, like, going to go home and cry the rest of the day. I got work to do. ^ (*Laughs*).

*Lighting change.*

### Epilogue

THE SEARCHER:

*(To the audience)* It's all life is, isn't it: getting things and losing them, loving people and losing them...a relentless ocean of gifts and pain. *THE SEARCHER turns to look at THE SHARERS.* But for every wave that takes something away, another one brings something else. *(To THE SHARERS)* Your stories have been so precious to me...your heartbreak, your humour, your struggle, your resilience...your beauty. Thank you. I'm honoured to have been invited in, and to be in your company.

RAYANNE ^

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(01:02:55): If I could contribute, help somebody, I'm happy to help somebody. ^

VERONICA ^

(01:03:09): I think if it leads to something that's going to make a difference in the world, I'm happy to participate. ^

*THE SHARERS each take turns placing a stone on the stool they were sitting on and exit. THE SEARCHER plants a tree (real or imagined) and places the stones around it, adding her own.*

*Blackout.*

### **Discussion**

The research question of this study was, “what is the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians, having been restricted from traditional observance by the pandemic?” In answer to this question, as one can see in the previous script, the essence of participants’ experiences of bereavement during the COVID-19 pandemic is one that highlights the importance of past and ongoing relationships to lost loved ones, the past and future relevance of Judaism in their lives, the disruption and added anguish that the pandemic created, and, perhaps most importantly, the coping and resilience demonstrated in spite of it all. As bookends to participants’ experiences, the Prologue and Epilogue were intended to capture a number of ideas: the personal relevance of the topic to myself as the researcher, as someone who also lost a loved one during the pandemic, but existed without guidance or ritual in mourning (as stated previously); the humility and gratitude I have for participants sharing such intimate and painful memories with me; and the mutually therapeutic outcome of having shared the time and space to talk about these unique experiences.

### **Triangulation**

A fundamental part of the recruitment process for this study was not simply asking religious leaders for their help, but also conversing with them about the research topic. Somewhat unexpectedly, several of them offered their own experiences and second-hand

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accounts that supported some of the existing literature cited earlier, as well as participants' own accounts.

In support of the existing literature, several rabbis confirmed that people's expectations of all kinds were "erased," and that many were dying alone in hospitals, which had an "unimaginable" impact on their families. To this point, I spoke with a hospital chaplain and rabbi, who told me harrowing stories about people being prevented from caring for their loved ones in hospital, or from bringing them necessary health equipment, or even being thrown out and banned, not knowing if their family member was dead or alive. He spoke of COVID agents being extremely strict about checking visitors' IDs, and rejecting anyone without one, even if agents saw them regularly and knew their faces. He also spoke of the acute stress and burnout that he saw hospital staff experiencing, and the lack of compassion and at times neglect that this created for patients, despite many others doing heroic work. Ultimately, he said, patients and staff lost a sense of trust in the system and faith in each other, and it became his job to liaise between them to try to restore some of what was lost. As far as technology use, rabbis confirmed that using Zoom was complex. For some people, it was foreign and inaccessible, or proved a barrier to understanding and accepting what was happening miles away. For others, it was a lifeline, a newfound way of participating in their community, and even a tool to keep a close watch on the kind of care their loved one was receiving. The rabbis validated that the necessary modifications to funerals made many people feel "cheated," a sense of injustice, an added loss from not honouring their departed loved one, and ultimately, an incomplete sense of closure. In short, these rabbis were witnesses and supports for the anger, confusion, and trauma of family members being prevented from being there for their loved ones, whether in hospitals or cemeteries.

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Supporting participant accounts, two different rabbis commented on the impact that fears over the virus had on congregants' willingness to go to synagogue and participate in rituals. More specifically, one spoke about how the strictness of his own synagogue regarding masking and vaccines made most people feel safer to go back, while another spoke about how his congregants' differing beliefs about the virus or vaccines made some question the worth of observing rituals at all. This echoes what Mendy spoke about, referencing his own changed relationship to his community and Judaism in general. One rabbi also spoke about sanitation procedures at the cemetery (E.g., wiping down the shovel, sanitizing hands, maintaining a distance of six feet) and weather conditions (E.g., having to stand outside in the pouring rain or freezing snow) diminished the benefit and purpose of the ritual by having people focus on the virus, rather than their shared loss. Again, this is reminiscent of Victoria's chronicle of her father's funeral. At the same time, one rabbi spoke of silver linings, like the fact that some of his congregants found that they preferred having an online Shiva, and having the time to reflect on their own. He himself reflected on how the pandemic made it easier to focus on the "essentials" of the rituals, particularly those around life cycle events. This disposition and sentiment were also reflected in several participant accounts, including Mendy's, David's, and Sarah's. Finally, despite their initial sense of impotence, several rabbis spoke about their own revitalized faith and awe for the "beauty" and "power" of Jewish ritual, as well as the profound gratitude and meaning they found in being able to help others. Once again, these were points that all participants touched on in their own way.

In short, speaking to rabbis resulted in an unintended but welcome source of triangulation in support of both the reviewed literature and the subjective accounts. Simultaneously, their

perspectives alluded to the psychological suffering of countless other people that this study could not account for, highlighting its sampling limitations.

### **Implications**

While this study happened on a very small scale, and is not intended to offer generalization, it does offer resonance. As a contribution to research on grief in general, and pandemic bereavement in particular, this study is intended to illustrate the individual experiences that sometimes get lost in numbers and statistics, by casting a magnifying glass on a handful of those numbers. Furthermore, this study offers a snapshot in a time and place for any future researchers who do not have first-hand experience with this phenomenon.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusion**

As someone who has lived her life largely without meaningful rituals, particularly as a response to a death, I expected participant accounts to focus on the added difficulty of not having those rituals during the pandemic. I expected to find a kind of clinging to the safety they used to offer, and a consequent sense of severe disorientation. Much to my surprise, I discovered that rituals are highly adaptable, as are many of the people who observe them. One of the rabbis I spoke to summed it up quite elegantly when he said that Jewish law commands to protect life first and foremost, so practicing Judaism during a pandemic was, in a way, fairly straightforward. He said that Judaism has a built-in resilience, because it has already accumulated a wealth of accommodations for virtually every possible circumstance of living with uncertainty, including pandemics. So, navigating COVID-19, with its lockdowns and mandates, was about “focusing on the process” to arrive at answers to questions like “what is done if x, or in the case of y?” or “what can be kept in and what can be left out?” This degree of wisdom and adaptability simply reinforced and enriched my appreciation for Judaism, as well as individuals’ extraordinary resilience, regardless of faith and culture.

I discovered that perhaps the single most impactful aspect of the pandemic on coping was a sense of community. Yes, touch and physical presence were important to people, as I expected and as I experienced. But in the absence of those, participants demonstrated that, when everything gets turned upside down, what truly matters are the bonds we have, and having the opportunity to feel held by people who love us, even if they are several time zones away. At the same time, it is evident from the various interviews in this study that grief is personal and unique, and there is no one way of understanding or observing the same beliefs and practices.

### **Future Research**

Naturally, given that this study is an ethnodrama, the most logical next step for further research would be the continued development of the dramatic script, in further consultation with theatre artists, leading to staged readings, workshops, and eventually, productions. This would allow the further dissemination of and access to the research, which is part of the *raison d'être* of ethnodrama, also offering audience members opportunities to reflect, and perhaps see themselves reflected. Given that this kind of development requires significant logistical efforts and financial support, as part of the data gathering process, I asked participants what their desired takeaway would be for anyone who reads their contribution to the study. These fell into different categories: several statements centred around ways to cope, others focused on how to live in anticipation of a death, how to honour the departed, and the possibility of making a difference in the world.

One participant asserted that “people are very resilient if they have positive alternatives to offset the loss”. To this point, two participants emphasized the critical value of having community, or finding a group, amongst whom one can “share [one’s] thoughts and feelings, and talk about the loss”. This, of course, aligns with my own interests (I.e., demystifying conversations about death) and future professional goals (I.e., working with the dying and bereaved). One speculated that perhaps congregations ought to reach out to offer that sense of community to those who are without family or otherwise isolated. Several others emphasized accepting and fully experiencing whatever feelings come up, but also not “stay[ing] there” and building a life again. One affirmed her perspective to put one’s trust in G-d and know that we will be seeing our loved ones again. Others highlighted the value of putting one’s trust in traditions and ancient wisdom, particularly in such extraordinary times.

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One participant advocated the need to destigmatize death, and how enriching it can be to face it head on, if not invite it to pull up a chair. Another urged that people should keep in touch with their parents, whether by calling or visiting, because one never knows what might happen. “Don’t wait”, she said, “and don’t feel guilty about things afterwards”, “don’t hold on to stuff. Forgive.” She was especially emphatic about people who might be approaching death to give their forgiveness to their children and anyone else they are leaving behind. On the other side of death, another participant called attention to the importance of how the departed is reflected in the mourning process, and the choices we make about how to “elongate” their memory.

Finally, one participant wished that, if someone had any ability to make a difference, that they would fight to protect people’s ability to grieve and observe rituals the way they need to in parts of the world where freedom and peace are less of a given.

Perhaps, future follow up research could address people who are more isolated, and in no way connected to a religious leader or community, as they may be less likely to experience positive outcomes in bereavement, which may have ramifications for their quality of life and participation in society. Further research could also study people’s attitudes about death in general, and their willingness and ability to speak about it openly in a safe space. On a larger scale, it could also study the geography of religious observance, in the context of various political climates, and what impact that has on bereavement outcomes.



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## Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Jewish Bereavement Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

[Date]

**Principal Investigator (Researcher):**  
Diana Magallon [dmagallon1@athabasca.edu](mailto:dmagallon1@athabasca.edu)

**Supervisor:**  
Dr. Paul Jerry [paulj@athabascau.ca](mailto:paulj@athabascau.ca)

My name is Diana Magallón, and I am a Master of Counselling student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about how pandemic restrictions have impacted the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians – under the supervision of Dr. Paul Jerry, Registered Psychologist.

#### ELIGIBILITY

I invite you to participate in this project if you: (1) identify as Jewish, (2) have lost a loved one during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) feel that your traditional mourning rituals were impacted by restrictions on social gatherings and religious services (e.g., having to observe them online, postpone them, or omit them altogether), and (4) that this, by extension, affected your experience of bereavement

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this research project is to examine the effect that the pandemic has had on people's processing of bereavement-related grief, as well as the meaning that people have made of the circumstances. The hope of this research is to draw attention to the need for bereaved people to conduct in-person rituals and receive in-person support, as well as to highlight their resilience in spite of extraordinary circumstances.

#### PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project would involve taking part in an audio recorded interview, either in-person or online. I expect that the interview will take approximately an hour, and can be arranged to happen on the day, time, and location you find most convenient. Following my transcription of our interview, I will adapt our conversation into the form of a written play. While I will use your words, I will omit any identifiable information to protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality. I will then give you an opportunity to read through my first draft and verify that you feel your voice and experience are accurately represented.

#### INFORMATION HANDLING

## JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

All information you provide during the study will be coded and anonymized by removing any identifiable characteristics you reveal. Recordings and transcripts will be stored in encrypted files, in password-protected folders on an external hard drive, which I will store in a locked cabinet. These will be kept only until the completion of my degree, in the Spring of 2023.

### BENEFIT

The research should benefit you, first and foremost, by providing you an opportunity to share your experiences with an empathetic listener who has been through a similar situation. Secondly, it should benefit others, whether they identify with your story and feel represented, or simply feel prompted to empathize and bear witness to our shared humanity. Lastly, it should benefit the field of psychology, by expanding the accessibility of academic research, as well as our knowledge about grief and resilience in the face of a once-in-a-lifetime global crisis.

### RISK

Although you are free to withdraw your participation at any time during data collection (i.e., up until I begin writing/adapting the interview transcription), there is a risk that, as a result of participating in this research, you may experience or re-experience some psychological distress. If that is the case, I will provide you with counselling resources for you to use as needed.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by e-mail at [dmagallon1@learn.athabascau.ca](mailto:dmagallon1@learn.athabascau.ca) or by phone at 438-921-1557 or my supervisor at [paulj@athabascau.ca](mailto:paulj@athabascau.ca).

Thank you.

Diana Magallón

**This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about your treatment as a participant, the research, or ethical review processes, please contact the Research Ethics Officer by e-mail at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) or by telephone at 780.213.2033.**

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Jewish Bereavement Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Principal Investigator (Researcher):**  
Diana Magallón [dmagallon1@athabasca.edu](mailto:dmagallon1@athabasca.edu)

**Supervisor:**  
Dr. Paul Jerry [paulj@athabascau.ca](mailto:paulj@athabascau.ca)

#### INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research study about how pandemic restrictions have impacted the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians. I am conducting this study as a requirement to complete my Master of Counselling at Athabasca University, under the supervision of Dr. Paul Jerry, Registered Psychologist.

#### METHOD

As a participant, you are asked to take part in an audio recorded interview, either in-person or online, about how pandemic-related restrictions on social gatherings and religious services have impacted your experience of bereavement. Participation will take approximately one hour of your time.

**Benefit:** First and foremost, the research process should benefit you, by providing you an opportunity to share your experiences with an empathetic listener who has been in the same situation. Secondly, it should benefit others, whether they identify with your story and feel represented, or simply feel prompted to empathize and bear witness to our shared humanity. Lastly, it should benefit the field of psychology, by expanding the accessibility of academic research, as well as our knowledge about grief and resilience in the face of a global crisis.

**Risk:** Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions or share information that you are not comfortable sharing. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection period by informing the principal investigator, at which point the data collected from you will be permanently deleted. In spite of this, there is a risk that, as a result of participating in this research, you may experience or re-experience some psychological distress. If that is the case, you will be provided with counselling resources for you to use.

**Ongoing Consent:** Following my transcription of our interview, I will adapt our conversation into the form of a written play. While I will rely heavily on your own words, I will omit any identifiable information to protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality. I will then give you an opportunity to read through my first draft and verify that you feel your voice and experience are accurately represented. The draft will be provided to you in the medium you prefer (i.e., digital or hard copy).

## PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Any recordings and interview transcripts will be stored in encrypted files, in password-protected folders on an external hard drive, which I will store in a locked cabinet. These will be kept only until the completion of my degree, in the Spring of 2023. Your name will be protected by a pseudonym, which only my supervisor and I will be able to trace back to you. All information you provide during the study will be coded and anonymized by removing any identifiable characteristics you reveal. Only after your identity has been removed from the data will it be shared with anyone else.

## RESULTS

Results of this study will be shared with participants prior to publishing, as they will first be invited to ensure that the content resonates for them. Once completed, the full study will be made available to any interested participants.

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Diana Magallón or Dr. Paul Jerry using the contact information above.

**This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about your treatment as a participant, the research, or ethical review processes, please contact the Research Ethics Officer by e-mail at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) or by telephone at 780.213.2033.**

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

**CONSENT:**

I have read the Letter of Information regarding this research study, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will keep a copy of this letter for my records.

My signature below confirms that:

- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences;
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, research supervisor, or the Research Ethics Officer if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures or ethical approval processes;
- I understand that the data I provide will be anonymized and that data set (or sets) from this project will be deposited in the researcher's personal computer, stored in encrypted and password-protected files, and permanently deleted at the end of the study.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

By initialing the statement(s) below,

- \_\_\_\_\_ I grant permission for the researcher to use a video and/or audio recorder.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I acknowledge that the researcher may use specific quotations of mine, without identifying me.  
\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to receive a copy of the results of this research study by

e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

or

mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

If you are willing to have the researcher contact you at a later time by e-mail or telephone for a brief conversation to confirm that I have accurately understood your comments in the interview, please indicate so below. You will not be contacted more than six months after your interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would be willing to be contacted.



### **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

#### **General**

- What had your experience with bereavement been before the pandemic?
- What specific bereavement rituals have you observed prior to the pandemic?
- How important is ritual to you?
- What are your thoughts on physical versus digital interactions and gatherings?
- What are your thoughts on getting closure after a person dies? (Is it possible? How?)
- What feels most important to discuss about your experience of pandemic bereavement?

#### **Struggles**

- How would you describe your experience of bereavement during the pandemic?
- To what extent have restrictions on social gatherings and religious services affected your ability to grieve / get support? How?
- To what extent has the pandemic changed the rituals that you would have expected to observe for your loved one otherwise? How?
- What are your thoughts/feelings around having had to make those changes (if any)?
- What aspect(s) of the pandemic has(ve) been most disruptive to your life?

#### **Resources:**

- What has been most important to you in processing your grief?
- What supports have you had in your grief?
- What has been a source of comfort for you during the pandemic?
- As you continue to process your loss, have you found any silver linings?
- How do you feel you have coped with your loss during the pandemic?

**Appendix D: Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Core**





# JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

## Appendix F: Recurrence of Themes and Codes

|                              | Anna   | David   | Eliza                     | Hadassah  | Mendy  | Rayanne   | Ruben  | Sarah   | Veronica  |
|------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Relationships</b>         |  |   |                           |   |  |   |  |   | 6:45-9:25 (last conversation, decisions on the spot), 34:43-36:55, 45:17-49:35 (losing teammate, someone's kid), 59:43 (phenomenal man) |
| <b>Memory</b>                | 4:53, 5:57, 8:48-10:10, 29:24, 32:55-35:28, 37:58-41:17, 48:03-48:45 | 0:28, 7:32, 35:28                                 | 6:37-19:21                | 0:00-3:21, 5:40, 15:20, 21:45, 22:52-23:38, 40:50 | 13:20, 16:33, 21:17-25:08, 25:50-28:01, 32:34-33:37, 35:40-43:19 | 1:45-6:45, 49:06, 1:15:09-1:17:41               | 0:48-13:49, 5:36 (seeing a parent cry), 25:13  | 8:01, 45:57-48:09                             | 56:27-57:06 (hear him in my head)   |
| <b>Continuing Bonds</b>      | 21:19, 40:51-41:17, 46:56  | 7:32  | 41:46-46:15, 56:18        | 7:42-10:17  | 44:30  | 50:19-50:45, 53:26                              | 39:08 (mystical aspect), 50:42-51:02   | 47:06 (talking to the tv)                     | 49:35 (caring for mother)   |
| <b>Changes to Family</b>     | 29:24  |   | 22:22 (surviving suicide) |   | 31:25-33:37  |   |  | 39:07-41:42                                   | 31:18 (kids' coping)  |
| <b>Next Generations</b>      | 45:56 (kids say I'm the voice in their head)                         | 53:55-56:17                                       |                           |   |  |   |  |   |   |
| <b>Judaism</b>               |  |   |                           |   |  |   | 22:20-24:44 (fairly observant), 28:28-30:00 (forgiveness/prayer/faith), 30:00  |   |   |
| <b>Cleavance</b>             | 1:20-2:42, 16:34-20:44, 31:23-32:55, 44:00-45:18                     | 3:39-6:13, 28:36-29:59, 32:08, 38:15, 42:21-45:09 | 24:11, 28:40, 47:37-48:07 | 4:33-5:19, 46:13                                  | 18:04, 18:34, 24:49-26:06, 35:29-36:24, 37:54-38:44              | 19:55-21:11, 59:13-01                           | 0:47, 5:14, 13:21, 23:51-28:15, 32:52, 34:34, 42:11-44:29, 1:05:13-1:06:47 (stones are forever), 1:09:22, 1:09:45, 1:10:35 | 47:18-48:47, 52:38-53:01 (overall beneficial) | 2:17, 5:29-6:05, 24:08, 35:08 (bits/pieces/ub(r)ringing)  |
| <b>Post Bereavement</b>      | 31:55  | 8:29-13:51  | 16:35                     |   |  | 49:37-50:26 (no choice)                         | 19:34-23:07, 36:54, 37:18, 1:12:36   | 8:01-11:29 (really special time)              | 4:10  |
| <b>Adaptability</b>          | 32:55 "probably best"  |   |                           |   |  | 49:37-50:26 (no choice)                         | 19:34-23:07, 36:54, 37:18, 1:12:36   | 26:11   |   |
| <b>Changes Gonna Forward</b> |  | 53:55-56:17                                       |                           | 32:28-32:44                                       |  | 04:58-5:16, 19:21-20:28* (1st Kaddish), 1:01:01 | 37:49-38:26 (setting an example)   | 37:49 (strengthened)                          |   |

|                                    | Anna   | David  | Eliza                             | Hadassah                                     | Mendy  | Rayanne   | Ruben   | Sarah  | Veronica   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Benefits of Ritual</b>          | 20:29  | 12:36-13:51, 36:46 (playing music)                 | 28:40, 31:13                      | 21:45, 26:31, 29:10, 46:13                   | 2:59-4:30, 14:43, 18:15, 20:28*, 55:21, 1:16:34        | 0:47, 1:45, 3:24, 9:31, 12:12, 32:52-33:24, 34:55-37:00, 44:29-47:27, 56:22, 1:05:13, 1:09:22, 1:10:35, 1:20:18 | 28:28 (praying/call), 31:08 (not missing Kaddish), 32:00 (Jewish protocols), 47:18-48:47 (faith helped me endure), 53:01-54:09 (overall beneficial) | 11:29 (really really helpful), 24:08-28:10 (really helped), 31:05 (big help) | 51:58-53:47 (temple), 58:00 (sacred)   |
| <b>Purposeful Grieving</b>         | 2:42, 20:46-22:17                            | 24:53-27:01, 27:26-28:22, 34:07-40:12, 41:49-47:16 |                                   | 32:44  | 20:28*, 44:14  | 0:47  |   | 20:46, 34:48 (not burying), 43:03, 44:48, 45:37 (comes back)                 | 31:18 (need to release), 37:31 (good cry), 51:58-53:47 (temple), 59:14 (delay) |
| <b>Value of Community</b>          | 4:44, 30:48                                  | 35:28-37:09  | 24:11, 27:48, 32:39, 49:06, 54:56 | 3:51, 4:33, 21:45-22:48, 27:27, 37:27, 42:43 | 19:21, 28:23   | 3:14, 12:20, 34:55-37:00, 40:69-44:29*  | 24:44 (normal circumstances)  | 25:21-28:10 (really helped), 37:49 (meant a lot)                             | 42:23-43:15 (friend circle), 44:14   |
| <b>Coping</b>                      |  |  |                                   |  |  | 52:00-52:44, 53:24, 53:59-54:11   |   |  |  |
| <b>Preparing</b>                   | 0:42, 22:48                                  | 24:53, 41:49-42:21                                 | 1:29, 6:37, 26:35                 |  |  | 14:12, 16:33, 18:15, 19:21, 46:49-49:37, 57:15-58:54 (catalyst for diagnosis), 31:53                            |   | 24:08, 25:21-28:10 (anyone could come), 29:41-30:07 (having family at home)  | 4:10   |
| <b>Silver Linings</b>              | 2:42, 28:08, 32:55, 43:36-43:51, 45:32-47:23 | 34:07  |                                   | 27:27-28:04, 30:08-30:22, 31:53              |  | 11:18, 32:52-33:24, 37:44, 12:36  | 39:02-40:12 (not everyone has the luxury)   |  |  |
| <b>Gratitude / Bittersweetness</b> | 5:57, 8:24                                   | 21:39-24:53, 56:58-57:23                           |                                   |  | 1:07:48-1:11:35, 1:13:15-1:14:20                       | 8:31, 38:51, 49:06, 51:33-51:48, 55:40*, 1:14:20  | 0:07, 37:49 (Zeidee), 48:47 (missing the positives), 51:20-52:15 (tears reflecting love)  | 43:36-44:04 (ambivalence of letting go), 54:06 (beautiful sunshine)          | 59:43 (no man can compare)   |
| <b>Living Life</b>                 |  |  | 34:29, 35:32, 40:24, 46:15        | 3:51-4:33                                    | 1:02:35-1:03:03, 27:34, 28:06, 33:48*, 1:03:03-1:03:48 | 55:52-56:22   | 33:10 (covid baby), 38:02-40:12 (bat mitzvahs)  |  | 55:30 (missing limb)   |
| <b>Humour</b>                      | 34:34  | 48:35-53:52  |                                   |  |  | 54:29   |   |  |  |
| <b>Helping Others</b>              |  | 59:21-59:25  | 25:46                             | 3:07   |  | 1:02:55, 1:03:37, "are you breathing yet?"  |   | 48:32 (helpful to the study)   | 29:37-31:18, 37:31-39:12, 1:03:59 (making a difference)                        |

# JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

|                                       | Anna                    | David                           | Eliza   | Hadassah   | Mendy   | Ryanne   | Ruben  | Sarah   | Veronica  |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Storytelling                          |                         | 58:09                           | 0:10, 8:14, 44:19 (part of the conversation), 50:13, 52:30, 54:58 | 47:20 express feelings, 50:18 talk it out  | 43:31 (not about numbing)   | 8:21, 11:18, 12:12, 51:42, 1:02:55 (my journey), 1:17:41, 1:18:44 (power of story) | * catharsis  | 20:46, 34:48 (not burying), 46:32 (remiscing), 49:26 (putting it into a story)                      | 1:03:09   |
| Therapy                               |                         | 58:09?                          | 22:22, 54:08 (seek therapy)                                       | 50:39  | 43:31 (not about numbing), 1:05:23-1:06:09 (would have been great)        |  | 45:01-45:26 (taboo vs norm)  |   | 27:34, 40:36, 44:14, 1:04:56, 1:11:54, 1:14:12  |
| <b>Pandemic Disruption</b>            |                         |                                 |   |  |   |  |  |   |   |
| Distance                              | 2:42, 7:49, 27:45       | 0:28, 15:19, 18:08, 23:24       | 33:00   | 19:35, 20:25, 33:00-33:45  | 9:49-10:22, 14:12, 46:05-46:22  |  |  | 11:29, 12:43  | 28:33-29:37 & 31:18 (being slower to move on)   |
| Border Closures & Distance            | 27:37                   |                                 |   | 29:59 (lingering pandemic effects), 31:53 (nothing was going to be the same), 34:15 (changes to living arrangements) | 30:15-32:16 (compounded losses), 56:16-57:19 & 1:01:59 (lasting changes)* | 0:00 (multiple impacts)  | 12:02-13:49  | 13:08 & 35:39 (immunocompromised), 33:36 (really hard time), 41:53 (changes - inevitable but worse) |   |
| Compounded Losses / Lingering Changes |                         |                                 |   |  | 46:22 (hard for brother)  | 1:17:15  | 47:18, 48:47   | 19:16 (not kosher), 31:05 (took it hard)  | 1:06:18   |
| Siblings' (or others') experience     | 27:45                   |                                 |   |  |   |  |  |   | 15:16-18:20, 19:49-21:38, 20:42 (insensitive cemetery policies), 35:22  |
| Funeral / Ritual Itself               | 2:42, 7:49, 20:46-21:04 | 9:38, 20:14, 33:19-34:07, 38:15 | 26:35, 28:40-31:13  | 16:53, 18:40-20:25   | 9:14-11:34, 13:39-20:28*, 46:45-49:37                                     | 1:45, 9:31-11:18, 1:12:36, 1:14:53-1:16:43   | 20:07-22:20, 24:15 (we got robbed - ref 46:22), 25:13                | 11:29, 19:16  |   |
| Isolation / Touch                     | 7:19                    |                                 | 24:11, 33:00-34:29, 39:17-39:46 (silence)                         | 10:54 - touch, 13:40, 17:40  | 28:23*  |  | 13:49-20:07* (not from but because of), 24:44 (normal circumstances) | 16:39   | 7:45 (well enough), 16:47-19:49, 23:35 (no one cancelled death), 28:29-27:34, 1:01:27-1:02:30 (conveyor belt) |
| Overburdened Healthcare System        |                         |                                 | 1:29?, 6:37?  | 13:57-14:21, 16:40, 36:40-37:15  |   |  | 13:49-20:07* (not from but because of)                               | 16:39-18:23   |   |

|                           | Anna        | David                    | Eliza                            | Hadassah                               | Mendy                      | Ryanne            | Ruben              | Sarah  | Veronica                   |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Lack of Choice/Meaning    | 20:46       |                          |                                  |  | 5:16, 49:37                |                   |                    | 13:08-15:18 (nothing I could do), 18:31 (nothing we could do), 21:36-22:14 (awful, horrible) | 21:38-22:51, 23:22         |
| Vaccines                  |             |                          |                                  | 11:39, 16:40                           | 50:55-53:01, 59:57-1:00:26 |                   |                    |  |                            |
| <b>Emotions</b>           |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  |                            |
| Fear                      |             |                          | 26:35                            |  | 18:15                      |                   |                    | 34:19, 35:39 (worried about catching it)   | 5:55                       |
| Emptiness                 | 24:50-26:11 |                          | 39:17, 40:24 (frats are painful) |  |                            |                   | 48:47?             |  | 48:40                      |
| Loneliness                |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  | 37:31, 48:40, 55:30        |
| Anger                     |             |                          | 33:00-33:46                      | 15:20                                  |                            |                   |                    |  | 28:29, 27:34, 33:02, 31:18 |
| Guilt                     |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    | 22:58-23:19, 39:07   | 4:49                       |
| Regret                    |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  | 24:03                      |
| Relief                    | 47:10       |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  |                            |
| Gratitude                 | 45:32-48:03 | 13:51, 23:24             |                                  |  |                            | 5:49, 8:00, 38:51 | 37:49, 40:12       |  |                            |
| Luck                      | 7:19        | 0:28, 8:17, 16:04, 17:11 |                                  |  | 58:54                      |                   |                    | 50:46  | 59:43                      |
| Pride                     |             |                          |                                  |  |                            | 6:35              |                    |  |                            |
| Faith                     | 43:36-43:51 | 21:39-23:24              |                                  | 8:07, 21:45, 39:07, 39:44-39:49, 50:11 | 1:18:34                    |                   | 29:51*, 48:47*     |  |                            |
| <b>Expense of Dying</b>   |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  |                            |
|                           |             | 48:35-50:30              |                                  |  |                            | 1:09:07, 1:10:35  |                    |  | 10:45-13:56                |
| <b>Hopes for Research</b> |             |                          |                                  |  |                            |                   |                    |  |                            |
|                           |             | 57:38                    | 53:35-55:47                      | 48:25-49:46                            | 1:18:34, 1:20:39           | 1:20:18-1:24:31   | 55:54 (resilience) | 50:46  | 1:05:36-1:09:25            |

## Appendix G: Reflexive Research Journal

### GCAP 693 (Advanced Qualitative Research)

#### What is the Purpose of this Journal? (Rationale)

Inspired by Ortlipp (2008), this journal is intended to help me:

- Track my emerging understanding of research methodologies
- Reflect on different views about gathering (or generating) data
- Ask, explore, and answer ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions about what I could know, my relationship to what could be known, and how I might come to know it
- Identify the theoretical lens most appropriate
- Work through the implications of the chosen framework
- Consider who would benefit from the approach I take
- Reflect on and address concerns about how participants may perceive my interpretations
- Reflect on and clarify my own “baggage”
- Make my thoughts, feelings, and desires open
- Map my growing and changing understanding of my role as researcher, interviewer, and interpreter of the data generated via interviews
- Record decisions made and the theoretical justification(s) for those decisions

#### How to Read this Journal? (Set up)

I have structured this journal in a Question & Answer format, though the sequence is in no predetermined order. Rather, some questions emerge and are formulated as I move through the process of refining my ideas; other questions are direct prompts from the GCAP 693 learning processes as I complete them - provided I had not already responded organically. Though every question is bolded to differentiate it from the rest of the text, the latter kind are inside quotation marks to create a further distinction between my own questions and the course's. Likewise, dates are bolded and italicised in order to make them easier to find and differentiate at a quick glance. Later on, I will likely create a table of contents, which will facilitate referencing individual questions within page numbers. For now, I do not see the need.

#### Why this Format? (Influence)

Early on in this course, we learned that graduate students have a difficult time structuring and/or appreciating the usefulness of reflexive journaling, and I can see why. Given that I have never conducted research before, I was also at a loss as to how to make sure this journal would prove helpful to me. Initially, I debated colour-coding discussions around ontology versus epistemology versus methodology, and so on. However, I decided that this kind of structuring would be too restrictive to allow my naturally emerging thoughts and connections to flow from one to the next. Attempting to organise my thoughts as they emerge seemed to stifle the whole process. I also looked up tips on how to structure this kind of journal, until I realised that, given the oft cited messiness of qualitative research, and given the intrinsically personal characteristics of qualitative research, it seemed to make the most sense to use a structure that would work *for me*, in *this* moment of my academic life, for *this* research endeavour. In that sense, Saldaña's (2018) highly personal, if not informal, tone/approach was a huge source of inspiration and liberation. In the end, I went with a format that gave me what I might someday need to reference:

some kind of chronological sequence (dates), some kind of struggle, based on confusion, indecision, or new information (questions), and my processing within those parameters (answers). This decision was solidified upon consultation with and affirmation from a trusted colleague and friend. Given how intellectually messy, complex, and at times challenging, the research process is proving to be - and will likely continue to be - it made the most sense to me to keep the form of this journal flexible, simple, and familiar.

***May 8th, 2021***

**"What does it mean to be a qualitative researcher?"**

Without ever having conducted research - with the exception of the GCAP 691 team project - I cannot give as passionate an answer to this question as the one Saldaña (2018) wrote. It is also difficult to answer because I have hardly formulated my research question! However, I guess, at this point, being a qualitative researcher means being more interested in the individual experience, in stories, in the intangible, unmeasurable aspects of being human, in the abstract, the emotional, the unpredictable, the ephemeral. As I list these aspects of research that are interesting to me, I realise just how much this all related to both my background in theatre *and* - though perhaps less so - massage therapy. Saldaña's (2018) mention of presenting research as a performance got me very excited. I've already written a short play in my GCAP career, so this made me very curious about what will become possible (and appropriate) for my thesis.

***May 17th, 2021***

**Where am I at, in terms of initial framework/methodology inclinations?**

I have struggled to answer any questions because, as soon as I answer one, I eliminate many other answers down the line. I was advised by my supervisor, Paul, today to start by figuring out what interests me the most within the preliminary research I've already done, and then figure out the methodology and framework later. This makes a lot more sense to me because I'm prioritising figuring out what it is I actually want to know, not *how* I'm choosing to study or understand it, which does feel like putting the cart before the horse to my mind.

Having said that, I'm coming to realise that my disinterest in conceptual frameworks, and what I perceive as a series of boxes and/or labels, positions me as a pragmatist almost by default. I *am* more interested in doing what will work, rather than adhering to any given ontological or epistemological framework. Of course, I'm also interested in the subjective experience, which is presumably a given in any qualitative inquiry.

As for where I am with my actual question...I just know that I am interested in talking to people who have been unable to observe bereavement rituals because of the pandemic. More specifically - and this is a personal curiosity - I am interested in speaking with the Jewish community, either in Vancouver (because I am living here) or Montreal (because I am trying to live there, and the community is much bigger). Why the Jewish community? At this point, personal affinity, and curiosity, given their particular religious observance of funeral rites. Of course, I see potential issues with narrowing my focus to such an extent without a better justification than "I'm interested", but I also feel that they are a community that is easy to overlook. I imagine that secular people and the Christian majority don't give quite as much weight to funeral rites, but maybe that's a false assumption on my part.

In any case, that's where I'm at right now!

***May 20th, 2021***

### **Why the interest in ritual/bereavement/death?**

I watched a TV show recently, in which one character talked about having to stuff everything down to survive, and this resonated with me. Over the past year or so, I have felt that I have been unintentionally, and almost automatically, bottling up grief about various kinds of losses - to survive, to keep functioning, because the world (or *my* world) doesn't feel safe enough to allow/afford any kind of collapse. Of course, this got me introspecting a lot.

I asked myself "when was the first time you felt that you had to distance yourself from your own experience for the sake of survival?" I don't know whether or not this answer is true, but what came to mind was my grandfather's death, when I was 7 years old. I don't remember many specifics, but what I do recall is the sense that something bad had happened, my mum was very sad, my dad was very sad, and no one (as far as I can remember) had the time or emotional bandwidth to ask me how *I* was feeling. My grandfather was the first human I ever knew to have died at that point, and all I remember is being told that he had passed away, and trying to "keep it together" until I got back to my room, where I cried alone for a long time. I don't know why I felt I needed to hold my feelings in, but I can only assume I got the sense that other people's grief took precedence. The next thing I recall is attending the funeral, during which all I saw was an urn, and the crypt it was placed in after the ceremony. I never saw my grandfather, and I don't know when I last saw him. He was just gone. I couldn't ask about it for many many years because I knew it would make my mother sad again.

I've realised that this has, unfortunately, been a theme in my life: not being around when someone has died, not being able to say goodbye, not having a ritual (at least one that I connected to), feeling that being told about it was an afterthought, not feeling that I was granted the space to grieve, and somehow having to live with the fact that someone important to me was just - poof - gone. The most traumatic of these was the cat I had from age 7-21. For two thirds of my life, he was my best friend, and he was put down without my knowledge - and, somehow, it seemed that everyone was (and was right in being) sadder than me. Most recently, during the pandemic, my uncle also went "poof": I wasn't told early enough to try to go to the hospital (not that I would've been allowed anyway, I imagine), I never saw a body - just an urn, a few days later. Immediately, I was a witness to my parents' grief, a carer for my aunt, a source of strength for others. No funeral, no family gathering, no celebration of life, no burial, nothing. His ashes are in a room next to mine until my aunt comes back from visiting her family in the US.

So, going back to my research interest, I realise now that the reason ritual is so interesting to me is because I have hardly ever had it, when death was involved. I am interested in what happens to a person when they are deprived of it, and perhaps, how it can become therapeutic, even if the moment for it seems to have passed. Another theme I hear in my own writing is the idea of a grief hierarchy, and I wonder what effect ritual has on it: does it equalise it by giving everyone an opportunity to acknowledge their feelings, does it expose and entrench that hierarchy, or does it depend?

### **What methodology am I leaning towards?**

Having just read an article about various qualitative research methods, I find myself gravitating immediately to phenomenological research. I *am* interested in searching for meaning, and, given what I have just described above about my own experiences with bereavement, I think I *have* to be part of the process. To attempt to set my own ideas aside, as with grounded theory, would be detrimental - not only because it would simply be next to impossible to do so, but also because it would recreate a situation in which my own experience is less important or legitimate.



I think it irresponsible *not* to make my own bias explicit from the beginning. I also recognize that meaning-making when it comes to mortality can happen in an infinite number of ways, and I am not that interested in narrowing any of it down to a theory about a specific population (so, grounded theory is out). Finally, given my fine arts background, I am interested in the possibility of including photographs, videos, drawings, or other written texts, in support of the interview data. Why? Because a picture is worth a thousand words? Because those elements are part of how we tell our stories to ourselves and to others. Because language, especially in the face of mortality, is often inadequate.

***May 22, 2021***

**“What do I personally bring to the research process?”**

I think I bring a high degree of eclecticism of experience, and a fair amount of creativity. I bring a genuine interest in people and how they make sense of their existence. In a way, my inexperience with research gives me the advantage of thinking, I think, more outside the box. My time spent in different worlds allows me to see different connections in phenomena than someone who has, say, always been in the field of psychology. Besides my interests and background, I bring curiosity, perseverance, a high degree of responsibility, integrity, and quality of work. I can say, very immodestly, that I am confident in my ability to write clearly and at times elegantly - though it does not always seem in line with what is expected in academia. Still, I think I have a distinct voice, and a meticulous attention to language, including word choice and subtle changes in punctuation - all of which, I think, amounts to a more accessible read. Finally, and arguably most importantly, I think I bring a critical mind and a compassionate heart, as well as a degree of humanism and humility that I imagine will only ever help me in this field.

**“What insights, if any, have I ‘happened upon’ during these first two weeks of study?”**

Firstly, reference the May 20th entry, titled *Why the interest in ritual/bereavement/death?* Furthermore, this may seem to have no relation to research, but something else that has been on my mind A LOT lately, which may be considered “happened upon” insight, is around the latest Israel-Palestine conflict that broke out. I’ve just read several news reports from various sources that anti-Semitic attacks are being reported in the US since the ceasefire. I cannot seem to stop thinking about this. I have seen some of my own friends on social media become polarised, simplifying an issue that spans decades into a concise story. This alone has been quite destabilising because I find myself having to re-evaluate how I see people I thought I knew, and even questioning whether or not our relationships are more important than what I perceive to be either unintelligence or unacknowledged prejudice.

So, how does any of this relate to my research? I guess all of this polarisation and hatred in the world is strengthening my conviction to seek out the voices I want to hear from. In other words, everything happening in the world is so upsetting to me that I want to channel that energy towards countering that hatred somehow. As I said in another entry, I am interested in the Jewish community in particular (not that it’s a homogenous culture), and I want to be an ally to them. Is that self-serving? I suppose it could be perceived that way. Does this interest in helping a particular group give me a transformative slant? Maybe? Once again, though, I continue to be tentative about the ethical questions around seeking out one particular group - particularly one determined by culture/ethnicity. I mean, why? If it’s not *my* culture, am I fetishizing? I don’t think so. Is my focus exploitative? I certainly hope not! But maybe it can be seen that way if I’m not mindful. I want to be extremely careful not to cause any unintentional harm, which my ignorance/naivete and foreignness might very well inflict if I don’t give this careful

consideration. I mean, I realise that bereavement in the time of covid has no (at least apparent) connection to the conflict in the Middle East. All I am trying to say is that I care deeply about the wellbeing of Jewish people, and I continue to study, and be curious about, and enjoy Judaism. My partner is Jewish; I have felt a strong connection to Jewish identity since I was a child; and I continue to consider converting to Judaism as an adult. So, is there a way I can justify narrowing the focus of my research to include just the Jewish community? Or is that contrived? Then again, it doesn't make much sense (to me) to be completely random about who I speak to either. Clearly, this is a conversation to have with Paul.

*May 25th, 2021*

**“How might you begin to incorporate some of [the design issues you’ve studied] into your own research? What considerations do you need to begin incorporating in order to develop a quality research proposal?”**

As far as methodology goes, I have already written about why phenomenology resonates the most with me and seems most appropriate in examining the impact of the pandemic on bereavement rituals, and by extension, mourning and grief (see May 20th entry).

One area of questioning that stuck with me this week is around ethics. If my intention is to speak with people about their experience of bereavement, it can - understandably - be quite upsetting and emotionally charged, which will require a great degree of sensitivity, tact, grace, etc. on my part, as well as a thorough informed consent process that addresses the potential harm of participating in this research. I need to construct my questions very thoughtfully so that they are open enough for the interview to be somewhat participant-led, for me to not come in with too much of an agenda and/or force the interview into a direction a participant is not comfortable with. What makes the most sense, of course, is to conduct semi-structured interviews, to give the study some kind of shape. Then again, maybe, given that the pandemic is not even over yet, and the process of grieving may still be in the very early stages, the pain may still be very acute. So, maybe that is an argument for using an unstructured interview, so as not to be insensitive...but that seems like the focus could be lost very quickly. Is that okay?

A concurrent question to all of this is: who might be willing to talk to me about their experience? This brings me to what I see as my biggest challenge right now: determining sampling. I see some issues with simply doing convenience sampling, because I cannot know if the voices I hear from are the most appropriate. For example, if my core interest in all of this is “what is the significance of ritual (or in this case, the lack thereof) on mourning and the experience of grief?” then, it makes sense to me to speak to people for whom ritual has some significance. Then again, maybe not. I may discover that people who assess themselves not to find ritual particularly important have found bereavement during the pandemic to be terribly difficult. Maybe people for whom ritual is highly important found ways to modify their pre-pandemic rituals, and the loss of them has not been the most affecting element in their bereavement. Still, if I'm only going to speak to 10 people or less, it seems to me that I ought to be somewhat mindful, if not purposeful, about how I choose those 10 people. What if 50 people want to talk to me? Do I go with the first 10? Do I talk to people of a certain age? People who have lost loved ones before, and might have an experience to compare their pandemic loss to? People who have specific cultural rituals - leading to an examination of within-group differences? Do I just open the “door” to speak to anyone who has lost a loved one during the pandemic? What is the inclusion criteria beyond having lost a loved one during the pandemic?

This leads to another major set of questions. What do I even mean by ritual? Do I mean burial? Do I mean a religious leader's blessing of the deceased? Do I mean having been able to see the deceased before they were buried/cremated/etc? It makes the most sense to allow participants to define ritual - what it is and what it means to them - and go from there, but that still does not address sampling.

To close this entry, I think what I am getting at is: I think I need to go back to the drawing board a little, and do more preliminary research. Yes, I did a literature review last winter, but I am sure more research has been published in the last 5 months. Hopefully that will illuminate some answers to these questions because it seems that the more I dig, the more lost I get. On the bright side, at least I'm asking these questions.

*May 30th, 2021*

**A draft of my main question:** What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rituals around death, and how have the bereaved made meaning of it?

*June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021*

**What have I discovered from going back to the research?**

I have revisited articles that I had already read, concerning ritual. Likewise, I have now downloaded many more articles that I have mostly only gotten a chance to skim. At this moment in time, three major things have stood out:

1) There appears to be little to no (recent) research establishing a causal connection between ritual and bereavement outcomes. This, of course, calls into question my own assumption that disrupting death rituals would have any effect on the experience of bereavement. Having said that, this point seems inconclusive. The studies I have read so far were conducted with largely wealthy, Western, Christian and/secular participants, which may not be representative of minority or non-dominant communities. Furthermore, what does "bereavement outcome" really mean? Is anything less than a diagnosis of Complicated Grief considered healthy/normal/the same? Because there is still room for a significant qualitative difference between having and not having ritual (assuming significance to the mourner).

2) One frequently mentioned study points out that what makes ritual helpful in a time of bereavement is how it gives people a sense of control. This makes sense, of course, but it does make me wonder how this would manifest / has manifested during a time when so many of us have lost a sense of control in a much greater sense. People have lost jobs, routines, access to hobbies, and – going to the most basic level – a sense of safety and normalcy. So, within this context, is ritual made all the more important and impactful? Does this mean that losing access to (or at least being forced to alter) death rituals has made people more adaptable, or less?

3) A couple of texts I have found – one a textbook on religious perspectives on death, one a paper written by a clergyman – have highlighted a distinction between Jewish and Christian mourning. Jewish tradition focuses on mourning the dead and supporting the bereaved; it emphasises actions and the things that happen in this life. In contrast, Christian tradition focuses on death, resurrection, and prayer to help the departed soul get to heaven; it emphasises faith and what happens to the soul in the next life. Of course, there can be overlap, but I thought this was an interesting distinction in what gets emphasised when a person dies. Going back to my interest in ritual, it seems to me that action-oriented observance is a much better context within which to study the experience and value of ritual, as it is a concrete, observable practice. As an aside, perhaps it is fair game to note that the former tradition seems much more like-minded to me than

the latter. Even without having faith, I see the psychological value of performing rituals (e.g. covering mirrors, lighting candles, reciting Aramaic, avoiding entertainment) because it gives a mourner some sense of what to do, while also allowing them to feel what they're feeling, and to observe (and start getting used to) the absence of a loved one. On the other hand, putting all of the attention on the soul of the departed – where they go, who they're with, etc. – might console those who have faith, but for those who don't, this emphasis seems, at best, unhelpful, at worst, alienating and delusional. Besides, where is there an opportunity to acknowledge the pain of those left behind? This approach seems to skip that and go right to “don't worry; they're better now”. What about me? What about what *I* feel about them being gone?! I am reminded of why I made the decision, as a tween, not to do my confirmation.

As I read this back, I start to see some potential justifications for a focus on the Jewish community...more later.

***June 2nd, 2021***

### **Documenting Less Formal Sources of Information**

Someone suggested, and really, reminded me that I should be documenting all of the less conventional research I am doing. I know that that is the express purpose of this journal, but so much of it has been casual browsing that I hadn't considered it to be important research. In any case, the chain of events is this:

First, I found a story from Alberta Jewish News, called *The Heartbreaking Loneliness of Mourning During a Pandemic*, by Jordana Horn. Next to the author's name, it said that the story had originally appeared in another publication, called *Kveller*. I went there, and discovered that it is somehow connected to another website, called *MyJewishLearning.com*, which I have visited before to learn about Judaism - unrelated to ritual or mourning research. In any case, I think I did some more googling, and found a short documentary, called *My Jewish Death*, in which the documentarian goes through the process of taharah (a ritual cleansing of the deceased body), as though he is going to be buried. This, then, taught me the term chevra kadisha (the volunteer associations who perform the cleansing), which sent me down a new googling vortex. Somehow, I ended up back at *MyJewishLearning.com*, on a page that offered a specific kind of newsletter for people who have recently lost loved ones and wanted to become informed about Jewish mourning rituals. I signed up (yesterday), and received my first email today. Within this email, a private Facebook group was mentioned, called *Jewish Discussions About Grief and Mourning*. Naturally, I requested to become a member - still pending approval. This, then, gave me the idea of connecting with or at least following/liking other pages having to do with the Jewish community in my area as well as Canada in general. I am now following the *Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver*, *Burquest Jewish Community*, *Alberta Jewish News*, *Chesed Shel Emes Winnipeg*, *Schara Tzedek Cemetery Board*, and *Jewish in Montreal*. Today, I found a podcast episode, called *COMING BACK: CONVERSATIONS ON LIFE AFTER LOSS E69: Allowing Grief to Be Holy with Rabbi Anne Brenner*. It's really starting to look like this is the direction I want to head in... I just hope it'll be possible. I am meeting with Paul this Friday. More later...

***June 3rd, 2021***

### **Rabbi Anne Brenner: “there is no denial of death in Judaism”**

I listened to the podcast episode I mentioned in the previous entry, and while there were many beautifully put statements about death, grief, and growth, the words that I was compelled to write down were: “there is no denial of death in Judaism”. There is no denial of death. This is

congruent with not just my own beliefs, and my own interest in the death positivity movement, but also with existentialism. It occurs to me at this moment that, while I have long identified as “more Buddhist than anything else”, there is a fundamental aspect of this philosophy that has never fully felt comfortable: reincarnation. Yes, it makes sense to me from a physical, conservation of energy standpoint; Nirvana can just be a way of referring to all the energy of the cosmos. But...does consciousness live on? I have no idea - no one does. So, why are we so frequently offered a way to avoid our own mortality? I don't think we should live our lives with the expectation that there *will* be anything else for us to experience once we die, because we will (most likely) live our lives differently if we take nothing for granted. I am reminded of hearing a committed atheist I once knew tell me - in a very condescending way - “I understand why you need to believe in something”. My response was: “no, you don't”. I don't *need* to believe in something. Sometimes, a concrete end to everything is *more* comforting than the idea of eternity, which boggles the mind, and quite frankly, makes me feel tired. All of this to say: I have tremendous respect for the fact that Judaism doesn't try to sugar-coat or avoid anything unpleasant. Death is a natural fact of life - not a consequence of original sin, as the religion I was brought up with would tell me.

I will have to listen to the podcast episode again, but in the meantime, I ordered Rabbi Brenner's book, *Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing*. I don't know if it'll be useful for my research, but it may become an important part of my own processing at the very least.

**June 4th, 2021**

**An updated draft of my main question:** How have bereaved members of the Canadian Jewish community made meaning of rituals around death during the pandemic?

This question came about at about 2am this morning, at which point I typed out the following: Maybe the question is more about how ritual provided a kind of sanctuary, and gave a semblance of control to the bereaved in an out-of-control situation (the pandemic). So, what is the relationship between rituals around death and the pandemic? Did rituals attenuate the experience of bereavement by giving people a sense of control? Did the forced modification/exclusion of rituals during the pandemic worsen the experience of bereavement?

**Finally, a sense of where I'm going!**

I spoke with Paul today, and managed to sort out 1) that a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology makes the most sense for my purposes, given that I cannot (and probably shouldn't try to) separate myself from bereaved participants, given that I myself am bereaved, and 2) that a focus on the Jewish community is actually doable, given the rationale that I am, in a sense, searching for a framework around bereavement (provided by ritual), that I have never had. At this point, it seems like my conceptual framework is constructivist; my methodology is hermeneutic phenomenology; my interest is in how bereaved individuals from the Canadian Jewish community have made meaning of mourning rituals during the pandemic. Knowing that I have a way to justify all of this feels like a huge step forward. Though I still feel that this whole design is mostly structured around *my* interests and needs, my conversation with Paul today helped me feel that there's nothing wrong with that. This all finally feels like it “fits”, and I'm very excited about the process. I still have questions around recruiting, sampling, and specific methods, but those seem like relatively much smaller concerns. Hooray! Now, the goal is to have a very rough draft of a proposal by the end of the month, before Paul goes “off grid” for the month of July.

*June 5th, 2021*

**To include or not to include participants in interpretation**

I had an exchange with a colleague about how hermeneutic phenomenology, as a methodology, makes me feel like the whole study is ultimately about me and *my* interpretations, which is uncomfortably indulgent. Anyway, she suggested that, perhaps, a way to mitigate that is to involve participants in the whole writing process, so that we can make sure that our interpretations are as close to *their* truth as possible. I said that, as much as that feels more collaborative, and in a way, more comfortable, it seems to defeat the purpose of a hermeneutic approach - in fact, it seems to stop being hermeneutic by definition. However, it does seem important to ask participants - at the very beginning of the process - what they hope to gain from their participation in the study. Because, honestly, it's presumptuous to assume they want to have any input in the writing, or that they're interested in collaboration. Maybe they're participating for completely different reasons, and don't require or even want to have to be involved beyond the interview. Of course, the obvious reply to this is: just give them the option then. But...once you open the door, where does it stop? I don't know. I need to think some more about this.

*June 8th, 2021*

**Learning more about Jewish Spirituality**

I'm not sure when I bought myself a book about Kabbalah, but it's something I've been wanting to explore with my partner. We're just reading it little by little, but I've just today also signed up for a 10-week Kabbalah seminar through the Kabbalah Centre. I'm not sure if this will be useful for research, but it will be enriching nonetheless. It starts on June 30th and goes until September 1st.

*June 15, 2021*

**“What insights have you had this week about the research methodology? Are you gravitating towards any one approach yet? What is influencing your thoughts about this?”**

Well, I thought I'd made up my mind about hermeneutic phenomenology, but looking into arts-based research kind of threw a wrench in that. Here is part of what I wrote in a discussion forum posts:

“One of the videos [I referenced in my previous post] is an interview with Dr. Patricia Leavy, who has written novels as part of her research process. While I don't see myself writing novels (at least not yet), I did get very excited about the idea of writing a play (they talk about that a bit too). I often feel overwhelming nostalgia for the interdisciplinary collaboration that my theatre work involved, and I miss the creative process terribly. So, the idea of marrying the two worlds, potentially involving participants in the process, potentially producing something that an audience can interact with and be moved/impacted by, potentially having a work that can be produced and reproduced and continue being alive...would be nothing short of magical to me. I've contacted my supervisor to ask more about how ABR is perceived within the field of psychology. I hate the idea of my work being dismissed for not being serious enough, and/or limiting my potential to go into a doctorate program. I also don't know how this could work in a thesis because I can well imagine it taking years to put together. Having said that, it's something to aim for at least at some point in my life!”

As of this journal entry, I've had a brief phone call with Paul, and discussed the possibility of turning the interviews I conduct into a kind of story or series of monologues, à la *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* - letting participants know ahead of time that that will be the aim. He is meant to send me someone else's thesis, who used a dialogue format to present her interviews, which sounds like a useful model to follow. The value in this, as far as we see both see it, is that 1) the text would become much more readable (and fun for me to write) than a more theoretical, interpretive paper, and 2) it would be as true/accurate to participants' words as it can get, given that I would pretty much be using their words verbatim, within the larger structure of a story. This makes me wonder if I'm not drifting into a narrative methodology, and everything is starting to blend a bit.

In any case, I am excited about the prospect of writing a play of sorts. Admittedly, I am a bit disappointed that the thesis itself would only go as far as producing a text (not any kind of performance), but that's not to say that I can't adapt it somehow or find another way to stage it down the line. This discussion about how to present/format my thesis, and whether it makes more sense to use hermeneutic phenomenology or arts-based methodologies, also makes me think about how seriously I'd be taken by PhD programs down the line. While I may be seeming to get ahead of myself, it does seem like something I should keep in mind.

*June 24th, 2021*

**How can I get in touch with the Jewish community in a way that doesn't feel contrived or forced?**

I've been thinking that I'll need to find a way to access members of the Jewish community without being a complete outsider. As much as I may have a longstanding affinity for and resonance with Judaism, why should anyone in the Jewish community take my word for it, let alone trust me because of said claim? It seems to me that I should try to establish contacts now, so that I am less of a foreign entity down the line.

In the interest of that, I have been speaking with a very close friend of mine about all of this, and he suggested that I start by contacting a rabbi, and just having a conversation about what I want to do - if nothing else, to get insight into whether or not the community might be receptive to my poking around in the first place. He offered to put me in touch with a rabbi he knows, who converted to Judaism in her 20s. Here is her website: <https://rabbi-mercy.com/home/>

My friend will draft up an email to make the introduction, and hopefully, I will start a chain of contacts from this meeting, but we'll see. It seems like as good a starting place as any.

*July 1, 2021*

**“In your reflexive journal, note some of the ways that reflexivity might be important in the data collection process for your own research, and why. Based on your readings and the two videos you watched in this unit, what did you learn about field notes? How and why will you use them in your own research?”**

Something that really stood out to me this week was moving interviews. I love the idea of “using our bodies” and taking in “multiple sensory forms of data”. It occurred to me that I may need to consider that as a possibility for my own research, if the subject matter is too upsetting for my participants. However, even if we are not moving, I have always envisioned talking to participants in their own home. I just assumed that it would be most appropriate for their own convenience, but this week's readings/videos also make me think that it would also be for their

comfort - along with enriching my own data collection. As an example, I would not need to ask about a participants' level of ritual observance if I saw that they have a mezuzah on their door frame, or shabbat candle holders in plain sight; I could assume that they have some connection to ritual and start there. Also, I might not need to prompt photo elicitation if I situate myself within a space where photos and artefacts related to the deceased already exist.

As for reflexivity in data collection, I asked my group about some of my questions regarding recording interviews but did not receive a response. So, I am nowhere near an answer, except to assume that collection will depend on what the participants are comfortable with (e.g. video vs voice recording). I maintain that video would provide the most complete form of data collection, but I would not want to negatively influence participants' degree of openness or comfort. On the other hand, I would prefer not to rely only on my memory, for fear I might miss something, or worse, distract the participant by taking the time to make a note, and break the flow of the conversation. I suppose, like counselling, maybe I can simply tell them ahead of time that I will be writing some notes, but to try not to let it distract them. I mean, I *must* tell them anyway, but I hope that would be enough for my note-taking not to interfere. Clearly, reflexivity is important because our way of collecting data impacts the data that is there to be collected in the first place. Being reflexive just helps us choose the best way to balance data collection with the Hawthorne effect.

### **Decided on a methodology!**

Over the last few days, I have read Saldana's (2003) article, which my prof sent me, about dramatizing data, and my mind was blown by not only what is possible, but how much an artsy methodology can be presented in a serious, academic way. I have had a phone call with Michaela and Paul, and they both seem to think that using arts-based methods is fairly cutting edge, and in fact, something that institutions are looking for more and more. Paul mentioned the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies talking about dissertations in the 21st Century, and how what I am wanting to do falls into that quite well, which is thrilling. So, with that in mind, I will be using Saldana's writing as a starting point for my methodology, and researching to see if there have been other interpretations of the same idea since.

Paul told me that he now has our other committee member, Jananee Rasiah, and that they both might need an RA down the line, if they can secure some funding, which is very exciting! Meanwhile, Michaela gave me a lot of fantastic names of people to contact, who may be great resources for me, but also, potentially, an external for the thesis. I sent Paul the list so that he can decide on the best/most appropriate one. Paul also said that I will be presenting at the grad student conference in the Autumn, to talk about my methodology. I barely know what that is, let alone what I will say, but that's also in the works. Paul envisions that the thesis will be, as is standard, 5 chapters and about 100 pages long, including references: 50 pages of an academic paper, and an appendix that will essentially be a theatre script with annotations that explicitly adapts the piece for academics.

*July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021*

### **Conversation with Rebecca**

I had posted the following in our Week 8 discussion forum some internal dialogue questioning about being an outsider to the community I want to study, and how, despite my supervisor's reassurance, I had some major doubts about my right to even conduct this research, and almost paralyzing questions about how to even start.



The following week, my colleague, Rebecca, replied to my post, reassuring me that it likely wouldn't be a big deal to contact people, especially rabbis, by saying such and such. She even offered to connect me with her own rabbi, in case she was willing to speak with me. After reading this, I messaged Rebecca privately for a couple of reasons. First of all, we had moved on as a class to Week 9, and I did not want to clutter the forum with irrelevant posts. Secondly, I was very touched by her openness, encouragement, and generosity, and a private message seemed a more appropriate and personal way to respond. We ended up having a very pleasant exchange about Judaism and our lives in general, but the point is that she gave me the encouragement I needed, and some reassurance that I don't need to tiptoe so much, as long as I am being transparent and (obviously) respectful.

***July 10th, 2021***

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 1**

Not much to report yet, except for the fact that I have looked into what kind of conversion/information courses are offered by different Vancouver synagogues (Conservative, Reform, and Renewal). I opted to reach out to the Renewal rabbi because I found it a little more welcoming to people not necessarily interested in converting. I may still look into the other ones, but this is a comfortable first step for now. I need to schedule a meeting with that rabbi before I am allowed to sign up for the course, so I sent her a message to inquire about it all.

***July 11th, 2021***

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 1**

I received a reply from Rabbi Hannah, reiterating that I would need to meet with her before I can sign up for the course, so we're setting that up.

### **Learning more about Judaism**

Also, today, I signed up for a class through the Jewish Community Centre, called *The Jews of Spain*, happening online on July 28th at 11am, both out of personal interest, given my Spanish ancestry, and also as part of my ongoing efforts to immerse myself in Jewish tradition and culture.

***July 13, 2021***

### **What is my research paradigm?**

For the past week or so, as I have been reading numerous articles by researchers who employed ethnodrama as their methodology, I've noticed that many have emphasised the potentially emancipatory effects of this approach. Several researchers have highlighted how ethnodrama can help marginalised communities voice their stories, and also facilitate a broader societal empathy to their unique experiences. For example, one study was drawn from someone's real story as someone who had been sexually trafficked. It's one thing to read about sex trafficking; it's another to, through an artistic retelling, meet someone who experienced it first-hand. The latter gives the issue another level of reality, as well as forcing an audience to try to relate - or at the very least humanise - someone who would otherwise remain an abstract concept. I have mentioned in this journal before that I am deeply concerned about what is *not* being done in the face of rising anti-Semitism in the world. So, I do wonder if my focus and approach can - even in some small way - help to erode the misconceptions and prejudices that exist out there, by making a culture that might seem foreign not just relatable but beautiful. That's obviously a lofty

goal, but I do feel that this effort shouldn't be just about me and my agenda. I'd like to initiate ripples.

**“As this unit ends, based on your work in this unit, record the top three to five strategies that you will plan to use in your own research processes. Note any key ideas, readings, websites, etc. that you will want to go back to when you come to analysing your data”**

My top strategies, based on what I have read so far, and at this point in time are (in no particular order): (1) writing margin notes as I read the interview transcripts and counting the frequency of codes (Huberman & Miles, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018), (2) doing emotional coding, using Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), taking inspiration from Cranston and Kusanovich (2020), (3) ensuring that dialogue within the play is 90% verbatim text from interviews (not counting stage directions), as per Saldaña (2011), (4) creating a point of view for scenes/audience/readers and a graph or visual representation of the framework (Madison, 2005, 2011, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As far as key readings go, there are a few. I will definitely consult the Creswell and Poth (2018) textbook as I go through the entire thesis process. I also quite liked Saldana's (2012) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Denzin and Lincoln's (2017) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, and Miles et al.'s (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis A Methods Sourcebook*. In addition to these books on qualitative research, I'll also be consulting Saldaña's (2005) *Ethnodrama - An Anthology of Reality Theatre* and his (2011) *Ethnotheatre Research from Page to Stage* - both of which are excellent ethnodrama resources.

**July 20th, 2021**

**What didn't make it into my methodology paper?**

I just submitted my methodology paper for 693 (Assignment 3), but had to cut out a chunk to meet page limits, so I include it here (even though I've already addressed this point here before):

One question I have not resolved, and possibly will not resolve until I have recruited participants, is how to go about data storage. In the interest of obtaining as much information as I can, I lean toward video recording our entire interview, so that I can be thorough in taking note of any pauses, tonal shifts, body language, and reactions – in participants as much as myself. However, I fear that the awareness of a camera in the room might detract from the potential intimacy and authenticity of simply being in the moment with participants. I also realise that my confidentiality agreement will have to include something in it about other playwrights having access to the unfinished script, as I will also need to seek artistic consultation.

**“Take a few minutes and create a checklist in your reflexive research journal that you will be able to find easily when you come back to looking at Writing Up Qualitative Research. You might use the following format, with one column for the ethical issue, and one for how you will address each issue and when you've done so. You can also choose another format that works for you. When you begin writing up your research, you may want to refer to these questions, and use a similar table to track your activities and responses to these ethical considerations for writing.”**

I anticipate I will continue growing this list, but this is a start:

|   |
|---|
| <b>Ethical Considerations for Writing Up Qualitative Research</b> |
|---|

JEWISH BEREAVEMENT DURING COVID-19

| Ethical Issue  | Completed/Notations |
|--|---------------------|
| Consent:   |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regarding sensitive / triggering subject matter</li> </ul>  |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regarding interviews being recorded/stored</li> </ul>   |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regarding artistic interpretation into / collaboration on a script</li> </ul>                     |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regarding potential staging of the script</li> </ul>  |                     |
| Confidentiality:   |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing transcripts with artistic collaborators</li> </ul>  |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing identifiable features from writeup</li> </ul>  |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combining two or more characters / stories</li> </ul>   |                     |
| Political / Social Justice:  |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing outsider status (entering the community by invitation only, staying humble)</li> </ul> |                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allyship (centering participant experiences, equalising status)</li> </ul>                        |                     |
| Participant-initiated:   |                     |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns</li> <li>• Priorities</li> <li>• Hopes</li> <li>• Ideas</li> <li>• Anticipated conflicts</li> </ul> |  |
|---|--|

**July 22nd, 2021**

**Fighting Anti-Semitism**

I signed up for a talk, hosted by Beth Ora in Montreal, called *The Day I Stopped Hating Israel*. It's led by someone named Kasim Hafeez, who is apparently a British Muslim with Pakistani heritage, who was brought up hating Israel, and, long story short, did his research, went to Israel, and saw how mistaken he was in his views. He is now a self-proclaimed Zionist, and activist. I don't know that this talk will have any relevance to my own research, but in the interest of tracking everything I am doing relating to Jewish Canadians, including fighting Anti-Semitism, I thought I would include it here.

**July 23rd, 2021**

**Reaching out to rabbis - Part 1**

I finally set up a meeting with Rabbi Hannah, to talk about possibly taking their course. Admittedly, I am a bit nervous, but then again, she has been pretty friendly so far, and for all I know, much of this introductory class covers a lot of material I have already studied. Stay tuned.

**July 30th, 2021**

**Reaching out to rabbis - Part 1**

I had a Zoom meeting with Rabbi Hannah earlier this morning, so I thought I should write something about it. She was very nice, and explained the courses that Or Shalom offers, including the one I inquired about, which is now called *Living a Jewish Year*, two Hebrew classes, and another one about prayer. She, of course, asked me about my interest in Judaism, to which I responded with both personal and academic reasons. When I mentioned my personal experience with bereavement, and the lack of rituals, she recommended a book by Simcha Raphael. I looked him up and his interests seem to be right up my alley, so I will have to come back to him and his books. Anyway, the course consists of 10 classes, and costs something like \$500+, which seems a bit much, but...it seems worth the learning and the people I will meet.

Understandably, she asked about the depth or seriousness of my interest, which prompted me to go into more personal story-telling, including my falling out with Catholicism, my exploration of other faiths, and the home I found in Buddhism. She asked if I would feel the loss of any ties to Jesus, to which I said no and explained why (I don't think of him as a God, but as another Buddha; besides, I have nothing good to say about Catholicism), but I said that I do hesitate to even consider conversion because it does feel like I would be giving up Buddhism. She replied that I would be renouncing Catholicism, not Buddhism. She also asked about my family constellation - specifically, who I live with. I'm not sure why, but I assume it has to do with the fact that part of taking the class involves pastoral visits from her, if I understood correctly.

Anyway, I don't know if it was all the self-disclosure, or feeling like I was seeking approval, or the idea that I am actively seeking out a religion (with only a vague interest in adopting it), but I felt very odd after our meeting. I was left feeling somewhat scrutinised, and I am pretty sure that is only in my head because, again, she was very nice. I guess I just didn't feel invited, which I know is part of it; I'm not supposed to feel invited. Emotionally, though, I feel like I just went to confession - like I was seeking acceptance. Maybe our conversation connected me to feelings I've never really shared with a religious leader, because I haven't trusted them for a very long time. I just know there is a part of me that wants to protect me, and is saying "f feeling like this, f that person's approval, f trying to belong...whatever! I'll go it alone".

As I read these words, it seems to me that I'm afraid of the vulnerability this whole endeavour requires. I knew that I'd have to explore my own grief about my uncle, but it hadn't occurred to me that I would also face the grief of the little girl who lost her faith in God, or the teenager who wanted to find a place and belief system that accepted her as she was. It just dawned on me that I made a home in a religion/philosophy that doesn't require community. Buddhism is about being compassionate to others, but all the work is done on oneself. Becoming a Buddha is a solitary path, and only after enlightenment does it really become about other people. There is no authority - just people who are farther along on the journey. Sure, the Dalai Lama is a leader, but he's not like the Pope - at least, not the way I adopted Buddhism. So, maybe I'm not afraid of losing Buddhism because I like it as a label - or not JUST because of that - but also because I am afraid to open myself up to feeling betrayed/abandoned/shamed again. I'm afraid to be part of a community, as much as I crave the idea, because the last (religious) community I had didn't serve me at all. Huh...journaling DOES work.

### **GCAP 696 (Thesis I)**

#### ***September 9th, 2021***

It seems appropriate to start a new page and section as I go into a new semester. I am disappointed to write that I have not contacted any other rabbis or people from the Jewish community yet, as life got in the way this past month. Now, I am waiting for the High Holidays to end, so that I'm not catching people at the busiest possible time of the year. Anyway, this course recommends I do a survey of my **Strengths and Barriers to Completion** of this project/process, so here goes:

#### **"Lack of Time"**

##### **1. What time can I set aside to work regularly on my study?**

My goal is to set aside at least 2 hrs a day to work on school. Hopefully, 2hrs can lead to 3 or 4 as needed.

##### **2. What might get in the way of my being able to keep that time only for my thesis or dissertation?**

I've had a very difficult time being able to focus since lockdown started, and I think it's only gotten worse.

##### **3. What actions can I take now to ensure that this time will not be interrupted for other purposes?**

I think I'll ask the people who might interrupt that time in advance (to please not). I could also take myself to another location and turn my phone off - or leave it at home, if necessary.

##### **4. Can I decrease time at my job?**

I can, but I already work so little. I doubt it would make much of a difference.

**“Lack of Space”**

**1. What physical space do I have in which to work on my study?**

The only space I have for anything is my bedroom, which is fairly small.

**2. What do I need to do to make that space more functional and welcoming?**

I may need to get myself a real chair, as opposed to an exercise ball to sit on. I may also need a laptop stand so I can work in bed when my back hurts too much from sitting.

**3. What may happen to cause this space to be unavailable to me?**

If the stress from school begins to bleed too much into my seeing my room as my sanctuary.

**4. What action to take now to ensure that this space will be available to meet for the duration of my thesis/dissertation work?**

I need to come up with an alternative space, which I am hoping becomes the study in my aunt’s apartment, or perhaps a coffee shop, or even my former university campus. I need to try out different spaces, which I hope the 4th wave of COVID allows.

**“Non-support from partners, families, friends”**

**1. What kinds of support will I need from partners, family, and friends during this process?**

I need them not to have very many demands from me. I need them to give me space and time to vent, and a sense of predictability around when we spend time together. I may need them to check in on me, but that can stress me out too, so I’m not sure.

**2. What barriers or obstacles might partners, friends, or family create slow my progress?**

I frequently need to adjust my own schedule for my friends because they are also very busy. As for family...I often feel guilty about not spending enough time with my parents. Also, my closest friend can upset me at times, which adds to my sense of social isolation.

**3. What plan do I have for talking with partners, friends, or family about what I need from them during this process?**

I haven’t made a plan...because I hardly know what I need from them. I guess it’ll involve a conversation about how miserable I feel, and how much I’m trying to keep my head above water.

**“Lack of Organization”**

**1. What do I need to do to get myself organised to start this process?**

I need another meeting with my supervisor to try to create some sense of when things are supposed to happen. I also need to comb through the units of this course to give myself some deadlines.

**2. What are specific organisational schemes that I think will be helpful to me in this process?**

I’m not sure what an organisational scheme even is...I’ll use a calendar with reminders, and try to stick to a schedule as much as I can.

**“Emotional and psychological obstacles”**

**1. What are the primary emotional and psychological obstacles I see myself having, that may slow my progress with my thesis or dissertation?**

A deep sense of meaninglessness...apathy toward the world. Grief that has been accumulating, and having nowhere to put it, no one to listen because they've already heard it a thousand times and no longer seem to know what to say or do.

**2. Do I fully understand the origins of these obstacles?**

Yes. I am depressed and everything looks bleak because I'm exhausted and resentful that I cannot take a moment to breathe. I'm burnt out.

**3. What can I do, specifically, to help keep these emotional and psychological barriers from derailing my thesis or dissertation work?**

Making sure I have lots of time to myself, as well as scheduling proper self-care.

**"Shoulds" students tell themselves"**

**1. What "shoulds" do I tell myself regarding this thesis or dissertation process?**

I should be more engaged, do more reading for myself, feel more excited, do more preparatory work, be further along in drafting a proposal - be AT ALL along writing a proposal.

**2. What messages can I use to replace the "shoulds"?**

As a former mentor said to me, "it's just a show". It's just a thesis; it's just a course. No one will die if I don't finish writing or reading or doing any of the other things I'm supposed to be doing. If I need to take time off, I can find a way...it just adds time to my "sentence" but I'm never trapped.

**"A poor working relationship with your advisor"**

**1. How strong is my working relationship with my advisor?**

I'm quite fond of my advisor, and I think we get along really well. I feel I can rely on him.

**2. What fears do I have but working with him/her on this process?**

I don't want to seem high maintenance or weak or lazy/passive. I don't want to disappoint him.

**3. What can I take at this point, to ensure that I get what I need from my advisor?**

I could draw up a bunch of questions to ask him and go through them. I also need to find myself a therapist (which I've been trying to do with no success) I can work with because my emotional state shouldn't be my supervisor's problem.

**"Lack of control of data collection and analysis"**

**1. How much control will I have over my data collection process?**

At this moment, none. I have no idea how I will manage to recruit participants and it's by far the scariest and most overwhelming aspect of all this.

**2. What actions can I take to gain maximum control?**

Contact as many people as I can to try to get their help.

**3. How much control will I have over my data analysis?**

A fair amount. The goal is to be collaborative, so it's not like what I say necessarily goes, but I will be doing the bulk of it.

**4. What actions can I take to gain maximum control?**

I don't really want to.

**"Analysis of strengths"**

**1. What do I see as the primary strengths I bring to this process of writing a thesis or dissertation?**

Self-awareness, honesty, a greater desire to finish this degree than to prolong it - so I will run on fumes as needed - and (I'll say immodestly) a strong ability to write.

*September 15th, 2021*

**New draft of main question:** How have pandemic restrictions on religious services and social gatherings impacted the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians?

**“Share your thoughts about the influence of your background and experiences on the research process in the Unit 2 Forum. What strategies can you use to minimise this influence and/or to convey to readers of your research your possible biases?”**

Some of the aspects of my background that could influence my research process are: my Catholic upbringing, my own lack of exposure/inculcation/observance of rituals after a death, my affinity for Judaism and Jewish identity, my personal experience with loss during the pandemic, and my bias against the presumed equivalence of digital mourning spaces / bias toward embodied experiencing.

Some strategies I can use to minimise and/or convey this influence: (1) keeping a research journal so that I can continue to self-reflect throughout the process and challenge - or at least make explicit - my own assumptions; (2) collaborating with my participants to ensure that their most salient points are adequately highlighted; (3) consulting with my supervisor, peers, and mentors to help me gain different perspectives.

**“In one sentence, outline the significance of your study. Post your sentence in the Unit 2 Forum. The one sentence limitation will help you to concisely state this important consideration regarding your thesis.”**

In our lifetimes, we have never before had to cope with the death of a loved one while being in a government-imposed state of physical isolation, so our experience of grief may be equally unprecedented - especially so for cultural/religious minorities, whose traditional practices were dramatically disrupted.

**“Each member of the class may be at a different stage with determining their thesis topic and research question. Even if you feel you have nailed down the perfect researchable question, stop and take a look at your current research proposal focusing specifically on your research question.**

**Complete the readings for Unit 2 and consider your answers to the following Reflection Questions:**

- **Do you feel you have the research skill necessary to complete the project you have in mind?** Maybe not entirely, but I feel I have the resources I'll need to help me find my way through it
- **Do you have a supervisor with the expertise to assist you with your plans?** Yes. Although arts-based research might not exactly be his own forte, I believe he can be an invaluable guide.
- **Can you refine your research question to make it more researchable?** At this point, it feels narrow enough to be researchable while also broad enough to allow participants to steer the conversation to where it might be most useful
- **Is the scope of your project appropriate for a master's level thesis?** I sure hope so! Given the amount of consultation I've been doing so far, I believe so.

**Complete this Exercise:**

1. **List your top learning priorities for your research.** Firstly, I want to learn how to conduct research, obviously. Specifically with this topic and methodology, I hope to learn



something about adapting research into theatre, as well as, of course, to learn from my participants about their unique experiences with bereavement (how they have managed, what has helped them, what they have found especially difficult). More than learning, I want to connect with and perform a mitzvah for my participants.

**2. In what ways are these learning priorities related to your career goals and values?**

Firstly, I remain open to focusing on research in my career, so this experience can be a good indicator of how I end up feeling about it down the line. Secondly, I want to find ways to integrate my theatre/arts background into my professional life as a counsellor, and this is a perfect opportunity to start weaving it into my developing career. Thirdly, bereavement is something I am very interested in, and can see myself never losing interest in... whether that means supporting clients through grief, or facilitating conversations that destigmatize death in any form, or continuing to research the impact and value of ritual on mourning. Finally, I continue to search for a sense of community, maybe even a sense of spiritual resonance with other people - and though I don't expect to necessarily find either through this process, I do (in my heart of hearts) hope to find myself welcomed in the particular community I have long had such an inexplicable pull towards.

**3. What variables in your research topic interest you the most?** I find the ritual aspect of this exploration especially interesting, but mostly, I am interested in hearing human stories. I'm not sure variables enter the equation, but I suppose I am hoping, in my biased way, to find like-mindedness about digital funerals and the like being completely inadequate replacements for the real thing. On the other hand, I also look forward to being surprised by what I will find.

**4. List possible research questions within your topic that interest you the most.**

- a. What had your experience with bereavement been before the pandemic?
- b. What has been your experience of bereavement during the pandemic?
- c. What impact did the pandemic have on your experience of bereavement?
- d. What specific bereavement rituals have you observed prior to the pandemic?
- e. In what ways were the rituals that you expected/hoped to observe for your loved one changed?
- f. What are your thoughts and feelings around having had to make those changes (if any)?
- g. What are your thoughts on having a sense of closure after a person dies? Is it even possible to ever get closure? If so, how can it be attained?
- h. What supports have you had in your grief?
- i. What seems most relevant to talk about regarding your experience of bereavement during the pandemic?
- j. What are your thoughts on being physically present versus digital alternatives?
- k. How do you feel you have coped with the pandemic?
- l. What aspect(s) of the pandemic has(ve) been most disruptive to your life?
- m. What has been a source of comfort for you during the pandemic?

**For each research question evaluate the a) feasibility or how realistic it is to conduct this study, b) testability, and c) significance of the study in addressing current societal needs and making contributions to the professional literature.”**

Terms

- Shemira – guarding of the body (before and after Taharah)
- Taharah – ritual washing, anointing, and dressing of the body

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- Hespel – eulogy; mourners speak well of the deceased (only if truthful)
- Keriah – tearing of outer garment (or ribbon) over the heart
- Kevura – burial; mourners take turns shovelling dirt into the grave
- Kaddish – mourner's prayer
- Covering of mirrors (as part of shiva) - to encourage inward reflection

*September 29th, 2021*

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 2**

I started my next wave of reaching out to rabbis today. I scheduled an appointment for tomorrow with Rabbi Gila, in Edmonton, who was a recommendation from my colleague, Rebecca. I have also emailed Rabbi Dina, in Vancouver, who was a recommendation from my friend, Brain.

I also touched base with Mira, at Concordia. I was meant to talk with her in August, but it seems we both had a hectic summer. In any case, I look forward to hearing from her. Once I speak to these two rabbis at least, my next step will be to reach out to community centres in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, given that they are the biggest cities in Canada. Of course, an argument could be made for reaching out to more remote communities, but I will continue re-evaluating once I see what the response is to this first step.

*October 2nd, 2021*

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 2**

I am in the process of scheduling a phone call with Rabbi Dina, and I also rescheduled my appointment request with Rabbi Gila because I never heard back (I assume the turnaround was too fast). Rabbi Dina replied, stating that she doesn't have a congregation, but offered some times we could meet, and asked if I would be interested in speaking with a widower who may be interested in speaking with me.

I responded, clarifying that her having a congregation didn't necessarily matter, and told her more about what I am trying to accomplish and how I wanted to hear from her, as someone who converted to Judaism, what input (or even reassurance) she might be able to offer me.

*October 13th, 2021*

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 2**

I had received no reply from either rabbi as of this morning, so I sent each of them a quick "check in" message and got responses from them within minutes. So, I will be speaking to rabbi Gila tomorrow morning, and rabbi Dina on Friday morning. It's not worth including the exchanges because they were only logistical.

I also heard from Mira a few days ago, but we're, again, trying to coordinate a time because she is on mat leave and, obviously, very preoccupied with being a mum. Anyway, I'll send a follow up in a week or so if I hear nothing.

Back to the rabbis, I'm just going to jot down some notes for myself in case I get all tongue-tied on the phone:

#### **KEY POINTS**

- What: How have pandemic restrictions on religious services and social gatherings impacted the experience of bereavement for Jewish Canadians?
- Why: Two reasons: (1) I want to do something to contribute to a community that is important to me and may be less visible and/or have less of a voice (the

bereaved and Jewish people). (2) I want to do something that will help me be a better counselling practitioner and researcher, but also a better human.

- Death and mourning seem to be the subjects that hold my attention, so it started off as an academic interest.
- I've been casually studying Judaism with a friend for a couple of years, and, in general, it resonates a lot.
  - As a belief system, congruent with my own Buddhist philosophy
  - Culturally, reflects my own sensibilities and values
  - As a way of life, enviable (sense of identity and community)
- Another important element to me is social justice. I've been following pandemic bereavement from the beginning, and it occurred to me that restrictions must be affecting some people disproportionately. Other than technological limitations, I imagined, given what I already knew of Jewish rituals, that logistical delays and physical limitations on funerals and gatherings might be especially upsetting.
- Then, someone I love died during the pandemic, which made the research very personal, and highlighted that I don't have my own mourning rituals.
- I find Jewish ones quite beautiful, as well as psychologically sound - to the point of considering conversion.
- So, selfishly, this project would offer me a personal healing journey as I search for my own interpretation of ritual. **But I don't want to take without giving back**, which takes on 3 levels:
  - Micro scale - offering an empathetic ear to people who have suffered in this particular way
  - Meso scale - wanting to do what I can to make research less elitist (ethnodrama) and privileged in its focus (assuming Christianity)
  - Macro scale - the rise in anti-Semitism around the world is disturbingly outside my circle of control, but my academic work, and (with any luck, the play) is within my circle of influence
- When: over the next year
- Where: ideally, across Canada
- Who: probably 5-7 participants with a variety of perspectives and degrees of observance

### QUESTIONS

- Based on your own experience and the community *you* are in contact with, does this research seem like something you imagine people wanting to participate in? Would you expect people to be too apprehensive?
- What would you say is my biggest challenge going forward, in terms of connecting with members of the Jewish community? Is being a gentile going to be a significant hindrance?
- Where would you suggest I start in terms of outreach? Community centres? Other rabbis and congregations?

*October 14th, 2021*

**Reaching out to rabbis - Part 2**

I finally connected with Rabbi Gila, who was very kind. She was driving and didn't have much time, so I kept it brief, but she did tell me that she will try to connect me with a contact she has - a theatre instructor who is interested in ritual as well. She also recommended that I reach out to Jewish Family Services, as they have a branch that works with people through bereavement. This is, of course, in Edmonton, but I imagine those kinds of centres exist all over the place, so I'll be doing some research. She also offered to make some more time to talk about my topic more at length. So, after we got off the phone, I sent her an email to thank her for her time and also ask if/when she might have another opportunity to talk more leisurely. All in all, this was a positive, albeit brief, experience. I feel a little more confident in doing what I'm doing. She didn't think being a gentile would be a hindrance, which put my mind at ease. She thought Chevra Kadishas might be worth contacting, though she said it might not go anywhere because they're not meant to talk about their work.

***October 15th, 2021***

### **Reaching out to rabbis - Part 2**

I just got off the phone with Rabbi Dina, who could not have been nicer. She, unfortunately, did not have much input or suggestions for me. In general, she suggested I simply "try it" and see if I come up against a wall. She thought that the people who would be most impacted by restrictions, given that they actually observe rituals that might have been impacted (like Taharah), are the Orthodox - who, I can make an educated guess, would definitely not talk to me. So, it almost felt from our conversation that there won't be much there to work with, in terms of relating to specific rituals. But that's okay. She was concerned for people's privacy, and how that would work if I'm reaching out to family centres and such. I suggested that perhaps I could write up my research intent and contact information, and ask her/anyone willing if they could pass it on to people who might be interested in participating. She seemed okay with that, and she says she knows a few people. So... I guess that might be the next step, but I assume I need ethics approval first. Anyway, it seems I just have to keep knocking on doors, which is perfectly fine. I was mainly worried about the power dynamic, but she seems to think I'll be okay because of how I come across. Let's hope that's true!

***October 25th, 2021***

**"If someone asked you, "What exactly do you want to find out from your study?", what would your answer be?"**

I want to know how (a handful of) Jewish people have made meaning of being unable to mourn the way they might have wanted or expected during the pandemic. I want to know if and how the lack of meaningful rituals impacted their experience of bereavement: whether this added to their grief, stalled their sense of closure, or, if not, what narratives they developed to find resilience, and maybe even gratitude.

**"Does your research question, as it is currently worded, provide you with this information?"**

Yes, because it's open-ended enough for participants to speak of both negative and positive effects, and it does not necessarily narrow down the conversation *just* to ritual.

**"Given what you know about the different research paradigms, which is appropriate for your study?"**

A Constructivist paradigm seems appropriate, because it focuses on different realities and experiences of the world. In this case, I want to know the experience of a handful of Jewish

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Canadians. Though this identity gives them some religious/cultural common ground, the study will ultimately highlight the individual differences between their personal narratives around pandemic bereavement. Ultimately, the justification for this religious/cultural focus could be limited to my personal affinity for it - nothing more.

A Transformative paradigm would focus on the unique and overlooked challenges that exist within the chosen group, and especially, aim to provide some benefit to that community. To my knowledge so far, there may or may not be challenges around pandemic bereavement that are unique to Jewish Canadians. Though, perhaps, it is easier to assume that Orthodox or Ultra-Orthodox communities within the larger Jewish community were, indeed, disproportionately affected by pandemic death and virus spread, they are not representative of all Jewish Canadians. However, it is possible that unique challenges affecting the whole community could emerge following data collection, in which case, this study would serve to highlight and raise awareness around them. On the other hand, it seems presumptuous to assume a Transformative paradigm when there is no evident social injustice inherent in the focus of the study. (In other words, I'm not yet sure that I can make a social justice case around how Jewish Canadians have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic restrictions on social gatherings and religious services. So, adopting a Transformative paradigm seems to get ahead of what is known, and also set a high bar for what this study should do.)

*October 26th, 2021*

**“Define each key concept clearly utilising appropriate references. You may want to note these in your Research Journal for quick reference.”**

**“What are the key concepts from my study and have I defined and operationalized them as needed?”**

Traditional mourning rituals

Jewish rituals: Levine, 2015

- Aninut - period between death and burial
- Avelut - period after burial
- Shema - faith affirming prayer
- Kaddish - mourner's prayer
- Onen - immediate family of the deceased (before burial)
- Shemira - guarding of the body (before and after Taharah)
  - Shomer - watcher
- Taharah - ritual washing, anointing, and dressing of the body
- Hespel - eulogy; mourners speak well of the deceased (only if truthful) - Alpert, 2010
- Keriah - tearing of outer garment (or ribbon) over the heart
- Kevura - burial; mourners take turns shovelling dirt into the grave
- Shiva - 7-day mourning period after funeral
- Sheloshim - 30-day period after funeral
- Yud-bet chodesh - first year after funeral
- Yahrzeit - anniversary of a person's passing

\*Minyan - group of 10 congregants (sometimes only men are counted)

\*Chevra Kadisha - burial society that performs Taharah for deceased Jewish people

Virtual mourning alternatives:

- virtual funeral or telefuneral - a funeral that is streamed and/or attended online

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- online cemetery - a website hosting virtual graves, at which visitors can leave virtual flowers and/or comments - Bennet & Huberman, 2015
- virtual memorial - a website hosting virtual memorials, which may include music, photos, obituaries, and guest books - Bennet & Huberman, 2015
- memorial paradigm - “dominant practices, objects, places, spaces, and actors that are invoked in processes of memorialization”; has been shifting “from ‘monuments’ to ‘megapixels’, the former being ascendant at the beginning of the era of film photography and the latter becoming ascendant with the rise of social and digital media”
- Digital Literacy - “the ability to effectively find, identify, evaluate, and use information. Digital literacy specifically applies to media from the internet, smartphones, video games, and other nontraditional sources.” (CommonSenseMedia.org)
- Context Collapse - “individuals representing multiple social contexts (e.g., work, family, high school acquaintances, close friends) are “collapsed” into the flat category of “friends” or “contacts” on social media sites, creating what others have referred to as the multiple audience problem” (Marwick & Ellison, 2012)
- Post-mortem or post-death profile - the social media profile of a deceased person
- Memorialised profile - a social media profile that has been converted into a memorial page, which the deceased person’s legacy contact can continue to manage
- Troll - “people who post deliberately inflammatory messages with a disruptive intent, usually under a pseudonym” (Marwick & Ellison, 2012)
- Grief tourist - “strangers who wish to take part in an expression of public mourning” (Marwick & Ellison, 2012)
  
- Object loss - “the actual loss of an individual who has performed good deeds” (PsychologyDictionary.org) “When an object is recognized as absent, beyond the reach of the self, the subject makes a transition, as a result of working over in the psyche, to a capacity to do without the object. When the subject does not recognize the object as lost, as in melancholia, the object is incorporated in fantasy, where it maintains a silent existence within the subject” (Encyclopedia.com) “adult grief and mourning are related to object loss and separation anxiety in infancy and childhood, which often intensifies and complicates the grief reaction” (<https://dictionary.apa.org/object-loss>)
- Transitional object - “any person or thing that provides security, emotional well-being, and a symbolic connection with a valued other” (<https://dictionary.apa.org/transitional-object>)
- Rituals of letting go - “the process of working through the negative feelings associated with loss through death or separation” “one way for people to separate themselves from a former relationship by disposing of a symbolic artefact such as scattering ashes at a significant location, giving away physical possessions associated with the lost loved one, or tearing up an ex-partner’s photo” (Sas et al., 2016)
- Symbolization (of absence) - “an emergent symbolic realisation” that aids in transcending the conflict between an absent/lost object and the continued emotional relationship to it (Colman, 2010)
- Continuing bonds - “the presence of an ongoing inner relationship with the deceased person by the bereaved individual” (Stroebe & Schut, 2005)

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- Complicated Grief - “a chronic, impairing form of grief, distinctive from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions that may follow the death of a loved one” (Gesi et al., 2020)
- Grief Literacy - a concept that aims to empower everyday citizens, networks and communities to understand the loneliness and isolation caused by grief, and to respond with acts of kindness and compassion. (<https://www.mcgill.ca/ihse/article/supporting-those-grieving-requires-literacy-scholar-suggests>)
- Trauma - deeply distressing or disturbing experience (Oxford Languages)
- Resilience - capacity to recover quickly from difficulties (Oxford Languages)

### **“Is the research paradigm I am working in appropriate for my research question?”**

Yes

### **“How would I describe the conceptual framework for my study? Can I diagram it?”**

My conceptual framework emerges from the particular circumstances created by the *pandemic*. It is because of the pandemic that bereaved people had to consider and take consolation in *virtual alternatives* to *traditional mourning rituals*. However, a fundamental aspect of grief work, and the purpose of mourning rituals, is their ability to help the bereaved (1) feel a sense of control, and (2) make meaning - both of which the pandemic interfered with. Furthermore, the pandemic created and magnified a sense of isolation in addition to the isolation bereavement already creates.

### **“What is my proposed sampling protocol and can I justify my plan?”**

Homogeneous sampling, because I am choosing people who have particular shared qualities.

### **“What data collection strategy am I proposing and can I justify this choice?”**

Semi-structured interviews, because they allow the collection of thick information, but also allow the flexibility to adapt to specific participants.

### **“How do I plan to analyse the data I collect?”**

Thematic analysis

### **“What steps do I plan to take to enhance and maintain the quality of the data?”**

Member checks, triangulation, and the heavy use of verbatim transcripts

### **“What are the potential limitations to my study design?”**

My sample will be very small, and not representative of the chosen group, especially given the channels I will use for recruitment (i.e. going through rabbis and family services). Other potential limitations are: my cultural outsider-ness, the vulnerability required of the topic, timing of the interview (relative to when the participants' loved one died), timing of the death of the person (how significant were the restrictions), religious observance degrees.

***November 8th, 2021***

### **Feedback from Webinar 2**

Rehearse and time yourself so you can cover everything.

***November 15th, 2021***

### **Update: Mira**

I finally spoke on the phone with Mira, which was great. She was very interested in and excited by my research topic. She seemed to respond well to everything I have planned out, and didn't have much constructive criticism. Like the rabbis I have spoken to, she thinks that approaching Jewish Family Services would be a great place to start. Likewise, she offered to

forward whatever blurb I can send her about my research to her own contacts. I still need to do that. Aside from that, she suggested contacting Concordia's Drama Therapy department and/or the North American Association of Drama Therapists, in case they have connections to people who might want to participate in an ethnodrama, given that it involves theatre as well. Beyond that, we didn't talk about much; it was a fairly brief conversation, but she says she knows a fairly high-profile rabbi personally. I'm hoping she can send my blurb to him and maybe *he* can put it out to his many social media followers or something. It'd cast the net very wide, but then again, I have no idea what kind of participation I'm going to get!

In the meantime, I have started an Excel spreadsheet to compile a contact list of Jewish Family Services across Canada, as well as individual rabbis and any other relevant contacts in my search for participants.

***November 18th, 2021***

### **Call with Dana**

Rabbi Gila put me in contact with Dana because she is involved in theatre (a dramaturg) and, as I recall, also interested in ritual. I spoke with her on the phone yesterday, not entirely sure what I even wanted to ask her at this stage. One thing I did know I wanted to ask was if she knew of any playwriting resource for beginners...some kind of master class or crash course or something! Alas, she didn't know of anything, but what she did tell me is that I probably should let go of the idea that I need to become a playwright. She suggested that, since I will not be writing dialogue, I might be better off focusing on the form that my mostly "pre-written text" will take. In other words, the dialogue/monologue will already be there, but what my focus should be is: how do I represent this in a theatrical way? She suggested that maybe it doesn't have to look like *The Laramie Project* or *The Vagina Monologues*. Maybe it doesn't have to be written to happen in a theatre at all. Maybe it's site-specific, or happens partly online, or happens in movement... In short, she prompted me to think a little more outside the box in terms of what stage directions and design notes I write. As a way of being respectful and transparent about my role in the study, she did suggest writing myself into the piece as another character, which has been an idea I had already considered an option, depending.

Something else that occurred to me during the course of our conversation is the idea that, maybe I should talk to rabbis not just so that they can pass me on to congregants, but also to ask them how they have interpreted scripture. As an example, Dana and I wondered about whether a minyan has to exist in a physical space or if it can exist in a virtual one: can the Kaddish be recited over Zoom or do people have to be in the same room? Likewise, does sitting Shiva necessitate sitting in the same room as someone else, or can one drop off some food and meet over Zoom? Is it considered work to log on to a Zoom meeting? If so, does that mean Shiva does not happen? Does that mean ignoring pandemic restrictions? Does ignoring pandemic restrictions put a life in danger? If so, then all other rules are out the window. The point is that there have doubtless been countless questions that rabbis have had to navigate, and give guidance on, during the pandemic.

This thinking then reminded me that I am immersing myself in these rituals and concepts, but outsider outsiders won't know much about these at all. So, maybe, as a way of creating a framework, I can write into the play some kind of "idiot's guide" sort of bubble about what the scripture says, and how the debate might arise on any given topic - whether it's a minyan, or work, or endangerment - and within that, house how those questions played out for my participants. For example, I start with the definition of a minyan, whether that refers to only men,



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or either sex, or in-person, or virtual, and then include dialogue with my participants about what their chosen definition meant for what played out. If their personal definition was that it's only men, then, did they get a chance to have one and say the Kaddish? Or did they choose the definition that a minyan can happen online, in which case they had to have a Zoom Kaddish? How do either of these make them feel? How did it affect them, if at all?

In any case, it was a conversation that left me with a lot of ideas about where I can take the play part of the study, and created some flexibility in my mind about what I can create depending on what kind of responses I get. I may get 30 people wanting to participate, or 1, or none, but there are still ways for me to pivot and still create something interesting and meaningful to me. So...it was very much a worthwhile conversation. Dana also sent me a few links to plays and companies that are doing some creative pieces and/or devising, which I will look at soon. I know the play part is so far down the line, but I'm glad to be opening myself up creatively so that I can better respond to the material I end up getting.

### **GCAP 697 (Thesis II)**

*January 6th, 2022*

#### **Email to Mira**

I wrote to Mira, following up on our last conversation, and to send her the "blurb" she had asked me for, which I asked if she could pass on to the rabbi she'd mentioned to me.

*April 20th, 2022*

#### **Follow-up email to Mira**

Not having heard back from Mira, I followed up to give her a timeline of where I'm at, and to ask again if she could connect me with the rabbi she knows.

*April 30th, 2022*

#### **Response from Mira**

Mira replied with apologies for the delay and gave me the contact info of the rabbi she knows. She said the blurb looked great and to keep her posted on the project. I thanked her and assured her I'd keep her in the loop.

*July 31st, 2022*

#### **Email from Jenny Peetoom**

Jenny was my TA in Group Therapy this spring semester, and she mentioned having worked with Jewish Family Services when she did her practicum as a counselling student. I asked if she would mind connecting me with someone she knew there, in order to have a connection to recruit participants. She said she had touched base with the ED at JFS in Calgary, but that she hadn't heard anything yet. She encouraged me to reach out myself, as she knows this is a busy time. I'm going to give this a bit of time to sit, in case the ED is simply away or too busy, and reach out closer to September.

*August 23rd, 2022*

#### **Email to Rabbi B.**

Finally, I contacted the rabbi Mira put me in contact with. I sent him a variation on what I have been sending other people, telling them what my research is about and how I intend to present it.

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I said I hoped he'd be willing to speak with me about the project and possibly collaborating with me (or even pointing me in the right direction).

I sent Jewish Family Services in Vancouver an almost identical email. My next task is to contact JFS in Edmonton, if not Toronto and Montreal as well.

### *August 25th, 2022*

#### **Email from JFS**

I received a reply from someone at Jewish Family Services in Vancouver, suggesting that I contact local synagogues and the Jewish Seniors Alliance. I simply responded with a thank you and an assurance that I will do what he suggests.

### *September 4th, 2022*

#### **Email to Jewish Seniors Alliance**

I contacted the Jewish Seniors Alliance, telling them about the research I'm doing, what it would entail if they did connect me with participants, and how my professional interests intersect with the population they serve.

### *November 21st, 2022*

I've had responses from both Grace and Charles at JSA, but have only had a very brief phone call with Charles. It was his suggestion that we arrange for a Zoom call with Grace, which I am trying to set up for next week.

### *December 12th, 2022*

After a number of follow ups to arrange a meeting, I finally spoke with Charles. He said we could meet without Grace, given that we were only having a preliminary conversation to see if he could help. I explained again what the project was about, including my personal connection to it. He expressed appreciation for the idea of it, but he said he would have to go through his list of clients to see if anyone might be an appropriate fit. He was concerned about the level of impairment of the seniors at JSA and warned me that any interview would have to happen with someone else in the room, to which I agreed - assuming the participant consents, of course. He said he would require me to verify who I am and what my university affiliation was, and that I would have to go through a criminal record check. Immediately after the meeting, I CC'd him in an email to Paul, to which he replied right away, confirming who I am and the processes I have gone through to get this research approved.

### *January 24, 2023*

I have had no follow up from Charles, which leads me to believe the JSA is not a good fit.

### *November 23, 2022*

I reached out to a number of local rabbis, using a slight variation of the template provided earlier, and got one response, saying my email was forwarded to another rabbi.

### *November 25, 2022*

Rabbi A. contacted me and offered to meet up.

### *December 1, 2022*

**Meeting with Rabbi A.**

I met with Rabbi A. today, which left me a bit flustered. I was nervous to begin with, and it was made a bit worse when Rabbi A. asked me to explain the research (as he had not had a chance to read my email with care). He struck me as a high energy person, used to leading conversations perhaps. Regardless of that, he was very generous with his time, and by offering to tell me - at least in general terms - what his experience with pandemic bereavement had been. It left me with the sense that people have absolutely been affected by pandemic restrictions in their grief - whether or not they are willing to speak with me. He had kind things to say to me, and agreed to ask the senior rabbi if he would feel comfortable sharing my invitation to participate with congregants.

***Dec 12, 2022***

Very generously, Rabbi A. offered to help me make sure I'm reaching out to all those of his colleagues who might be able to help, and even offered to nudge them a little and vouch for me. This was extremely generous of him and I'm very grateful.

***Dec 13, 2022***

Rabbi A. said he got permission from the senior rabbi at his synagogue to reach out to congregants in case they would be interested in participating. He asked me for a blurb that he could send out, which I did.

***Dec 19, 2022***

Rabbi A. said he'd reach out to a few people he could think of who may be interested. He also invited me to come to the synagogue to attend a "service or program".

***Jan 5, 2023***

I told Rabbi A. I would love to attend a service and he asked if I'd prefer a Friday night or Saturday morning. He also informed me that he reached out to a couple of people, and he is waiting for a response.

***Jan 16, 2023***

Rabbi A. said he's received no responses from anyone yet, so that he followed up with them today. I admitted to him that I find the idea of attending a service pretty intimidating, so that I will be going with my friend to his temple first, just so I'm less of a fish out of water.

***Jan 18, 2023***

Rabbi A. reassured me that, if I let him know I'd like to come for a service in advance, he can arrange to have me sit with someone who would be more than happy to give me some guidance. He also has given me some contact information for two people who are open to participating.

***December 5, 2022***

I emailed another local rabbi, T., the same template email I sent to others. She said she had someone in mind and asked me how to proceed. I sent her the invitation and said she can pass it on, letting people know they can contact me if interested.

***January 16, 2023***

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I still haven't heard back from rabbi T., so I thought I'd follow up with her. Stay tuned.

### ***December 6, 2022***

I had an exchange with the owner of my practicum site, as he has previously offered practicum students access to talks through an organisation with Jewish affiliations. After explaining my topic, I asked if he might have some insight into what organisations I might get some interest from for my thesis. He then connected me with Rabbi L.

### ***December 7, 2022***

Rabbi L. replied to me, saying my research sounded quite interesting and important, and wished me the best. He immediately offered to forward my information to some of his congregants to see who might be interested, and to tell them to contact me directly. I was very touched by his encouragement and immediate willingness to help.

### ***December 8, 2022***

Rabbi L. told me he contacted someone who did seem interested in having a chat about the research, and gave me his phone number. I think I'll wait until the new year to contact him.

### ***January 11, 2023***

#### **Meeting First Participant**

I went to the Jewish Community Centre in Vancouver today, and was reminded of my privilege as a non-Jew when I passed a guard at the entrance of the building, and then had to be buzzed in by someone who could see me and make sure I didn't pose a threat. It's not surprising to me that these security measures are in place, and I recognize them as necessary, but I hate that they are. In my rush to get into the building, I passed a lady with mobility issues, who was the one who explained to me that I needed to be buzzed in. I, of course, opened the door for her, and she asked me if I knew where I was going. Because I said, "not exactly", she gave me a quick orientation to the building and told me where I needed to go. This seems so minor and mundane as I write it...and yet, it felt like a hug.

Meeting my first participant was quite a lovely experience. I was amazed that he scheduled our meeting in the middle of his workday, but he was extremely warm. Though the conversation flowed quite naturally, we took detours I definitely did not anticipate, which I suppose is the whole point of research. Like so many other people on this journey, he was exceedingly generous with his time, and disarmingly open. I walked away feeling humbled that he would share such intimate information with a perfect stranger, and deeply inspired by his attitude, his energy, and extraordinary resiliency.

### ***January 28, 2022***

#### **Attending a Shabbat service (taken from my personal journal)**

I got back from going to a Shabbat service with a friend at Burquest. I'm still processing, but it brought up a lot of feelings before and after.

Before, it was mostly nervousness (and slight annoyance at my friend wanting to correct my GPS and teasing me about my clothes maybe not being right). Of course, he was just wanting to make me laugh, but I was surprised at just how nervous I was. I just didn't want to have basically a cross tattooed on my forehead. I can honestly say that I felt very welcomed, and my worry about not knowing what to do was largely dispelled by the fact that the cantor led us through it with

pretty explicit instructions to sit/stand/turn to page \_\_. Though we were asked to take turns reading, it was just in English, and not the weird Bible English. Still, I hate that... the lovely thing was that people remembered my name – my very pagan name! I was somewhat comforted that more people arrived a bit late, because there were barely 5 of us there altogether when we arrived. So much for disappearing in a crowd. Anyway, I obviously understood next to nothing of the Hebrew, but at least the prayer book had a phonetic spelling, so I could sound it out in my head, and it had English translations at the bottom.

Coming out of it, I felt very much out of place, and as I said to my friend, couldn't shake the feeling that I had no right to be there – irrational as it seemed. As I debriefed with him about things I liked, or things I observed, or was surprised by, he brought up the idea that our respective baggage would undoubtedly inform the experience. That struck a chord. Suddenly, I felt emotions I couldn't even label at first; I just wanted to cry.

As we kept talking and I kept reflecting, it became clearer to me that I was getting in touch with emotions I probably disowned when I decided to leave Catholicism. I'd been so motivated by disappointment, anger, and resentment, that I "forgot" to feel sad – not about the leaving/dropping/abandoning/discarding/etc., but about the strong sense of faith and community that I once got from being Catholic. Maybe that's just part of growing up, and maybe this is a ripple from that crisis of faith so long ago. All I know is that I felt outside of *this* community (for not knowing anything about the service, really – except that they might bring the Torah around), but also, and more painfully, I felt an absence of community very acutely. As much as I sometimes tell myself that I don't need to convert because I don't want or need a label, this notion of belonging would seem to require some kind of label.

Buddhism is a beautiful philosophy, and I don't feel any differently about my embracing of it...but it does feel lonely. Once again, I feel between worlds, wanting a "home". This lack of grounding, lack of solid identity, lack of belonging/community, makes me feel profound grief. Like I am alone, and no one is coming...and the idea that my suffering comes from attachment is no great comfort. In fact, it's hard not to think about the grieving I have yet to do, and as I said to my therapist, it's why (at least partly), I immerse myself in death: because maybe, if I look it in the face, it won't be so scary; maybe if I imagine my most beloved people dying, I'll spend the right kind of time with them (i.e. enough not to later torture myself with regret). In that regard, at least, I seem to be a model existentialist.

### ***January 30, 2023***

#### **Reaching out to Montreal Rabbis**

I sent out my blurb email to every rabbi I could find in Montreal with a larger congregation, making a total of 15.

### ***February 2, 2023***

I reached out to someone whose name was given to me by one of the Vancouver rabbis. We're trying to arrange a time and place to meet for an interview.

### ***February 3, 2023***

I spoke with a Montreal rabbi over Zoom to explain my research, and he was pretty wonderful to speak to, and once again, so generous with his time. He offered to put some information about my research in his newsletter, which I was very much thankful for. I left him on a note of saying

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that this is a personal project for me, which he said he wanted to know more about, so we said we'd set up another time for that.

### ***February 6, 2023***

I have received a total of 4 responses from my Montreal mailing list so far. Two rabbis have agreed to pass on my invitation to participate to their congregants. I also met with one rabbi last Friday for 45 mins, and with one cantor last Saturday for about 30 mins. They were both very warm and generous, and expressed interest in the topic. They spoke in general about what they witnessed or heard from congregants during the pandemic, and how some of the pandemic changes persist today. In the rabbi's case, this has meant that he's kept his phone on and available 24/7 to dealing with crises and preventing suicides, as well as maintaining a YouTube channel that he posts to daily with wisdom from the Torah. In the cantor's case, he has observed a kind of laziness in people using sickness as an excuse for not attending services or participating in the community the way they used to.

It has been interesting to me that most of the responses have come from Orthodox Jews, whom I had expected would be especially private about grief/bereavement. However, I suspect that with their added adherence to Judaism, perhaps the loss of ritual is that much more significant. Whatever the reason, I am moved that there is any interest at all, and touched by the conversations I have had so far.

### ***March 12, 2023***

This was a busy day for interviews! After trying to arrange a time and place with one of the Vancouver people since February, we finally managed to make it happen. She invited me to her house so we could then go find a place to have lunch. First of all, her house is beautiful, and although it was having some work done when I arrived, she took the time to show me some of the artwork in her living room, and the multiple menorahs in her dining room, and tell me about the stories behind them – how she came to own them, what they meant to her, and so on. She also had piles of photographs that she was going through, because she inherited them from a relative and didn't quite know what to do with them. That seemed on point for our conversation. Our interview happened over lunch, which went on for much longer than an hour. I was very grateful for her time and generosity. Though part of me was frustrated that the plan got very sidetracked, another part of me was amused at how she pretty much took over, and yet another part of me embraced this opportunity to sit with someone who was also interested in getting to know *me*, offering whatever she could on this theological journey of mine. I very much appreciated our time together. She shared a story about her father's funeral that I won't include here for fear that it might be too specific and identify her, but suffice to say that it was a touching and thoughtful way for her to express her grief along with her family. I envied that kind of unity and outward expression in grief.

### ***March 17, 2023***

I met again with the Montreal rabbi I'd spoken to in February. Much to my surprise, he was the one who followed up. I had decided to leave it, as I felt bad about taking up even more of his time just to speak about me. I am so glad that he did reach out, because it was such a moving conversation. He asked me about my uncle, which almost immediately made me cry, partly because I don't think anyone has given me the opportunity or curiosity to talk about him - at least not beyond his illness/decline/death. This rabbi (who asked to remain anonymous) asked me

what he was like, what I loved about him, what I missed about him. Right away, he highlighted that this research project is a tribute to him, and it is...I just never quite thought of it that way before. I told him about how much I feel a sense of belonging in Judaism, and yet how foreign I feel from not having been brought up in it. He essentially said to take what I like and leave what I don't like, but I can't convey with words what that meant to me. All I can say is I felt like he saw my heart, held it very gently, and offered me back exactly what I'd been longing for. It was like he threw the doors open and said, "come inside and sit by the fire; you look cold". I already wish I could be in Montreal constantly, but the thought of being able to meet him in person is just one more reason.

*April 17, 2023*

### **Reaching out to Toronto Rabbis**

I reached out to every large congregation I could find in Toronto. I didn't make it as personalised as my Montreal outreach because there are simply a lot of them, and I'm losing hope that any more people want to participate.

*April 24, 2023*

### **Interviews**

Hallelujah! I've received a good number of responses so far, both from people saying they'll forward my information, and a few who actually are willing to participate! Yay! Now it's just a question of scheduling them.

*June 7, 2023*

I think today was my last one. There were a couple more people who'd expressed interest but never replied to me with availability, so I think I'll let those go. I'm at 9 participants now, and if I want to include them all, that's a great number - certainly well above what I had anticipated. I have to say, I have been so busy juggling that I have not had much of a chance to journal about it all. I feel so immersed in what I'm doing. But I will say that I've loved speaking to every single person. One in particular is someone I genuinely wish I could be friends with. We seemed to share a sense of humour, philosophical outlook, and even interests. It was a real treat speaking with them.

*August 1, 2023*

### **Analysis and Play Writing**

I realise I didn't journal much during the analysis part, but once again, I think I am so immersed in the data, and feel so genuinely embedded in the community I'm studying, that it hasn't even occurred to me to step outside.

I have, however, made the process of analysis pretty explicit, so I hope that'll be okay. As for the play writing part, I got an idea today about the general structure of it being in chronological order, from introductions, to talking about the departed loved one, to how they died, to how they were buried/mourned, to what relationship remains with them. All of this would be bookended by myself as a kind of MC, going through my own process. That way, I don't have to interrupt the flow of participant accounts too much, and my story can serve as a kind of contextual frame for everyone else. I dictated some stuff to my voice recorder about my uncle, which I will likely use in a monologue for my character at the beginning.

*August 21, 2023*

**Working on Results Section**

I just sent off the first draft of the play part to Paul, and I hardly know where to start on getting back into an academic mindset and tone of writing. I figure the only way to do it is to do it, so here we go.

*October 3, 2023*

**Tree Planting**

I expect this is the last entry. Today, I sent participants a certificate to verify/document the tree that was planted in Israel, in honour of their loved one. It's something that I offered most of them at the end of our interviews, as a way of saying "thank you". Most of them gave me their preferences, in terms of dedication, whether or not to use their real name, etc. It felt really good to send those out, and all of them replied with heartfelt thanks.

*October 30, 2023*

**War**

It's disturbing to think that just a few days after sending/receiving such lovely thoughts/messages about trees, the massacre of October 7th took place. I've found it hard to come back to complete the finishing touches on this research because it seems like there are much bigger and more important things happening "out there". I debated contacting participants again to send a message of support and solidarity, sending strength and care, because one does not have to live in Israel to care about Israel as a Jew. I decided against it, thinking that that went beyond the contact that we agreed to have in our contract. It felt like, ethically, I would be blurring a line. Yet, as a human, I wanted to reach out to participants as if they were clients, or even friends, because I care about them very much! If they read this journal, I hope they know. As a human, all I want to do is protect the Jews of the world from the vitriol and hate and gaslighting and violence that I see taking place.

How is this related to the research? Well, my counselling program emphasised the importance of using my power and privilege in a socially just way. This is also why I wrote that I hoped the resulting play of this study would highlight shared humanity and demystify Jewish identity in a way that possibly even combats anti-Semitism. I knew back then that that was a lofty idea, but now, this project has taken on new meaning for me. It is my way of saying "I'm with you and I stand with you unwaveringly". I wasn't born or raised Jewish, but something inside me very much is Jewish now, and I want to do my part to highlight and celebrate the beauty and light I see in Jewish culture and faith. I genuinely hope that whoever reads this thesis leaves with at least some small sense of that.