

YORTZITE THOUGHTS

Every year certain dates bring special memories. Yortzite – or Yarzeit or יארצייט or however you want to spell it – the anniversary of death of a next of kin, is a hallowed observance for many of us. We light the memorial candle. We find a synagogue and say Kaddish, if we can. And we spend a few minutes with echoes and mental pictures or faded photographs of Mom or Dad or some other close relative that once shared our life.

Approaching still another such date, I revisit some of the conditions that make it significant, that make it mine.

Jewish tradition considers it a special mark of value to die on the Sabbath. Folklore tells us that a *tzadik* – someone who is righteous – meets our Maker on the holiest day of the week. Both of my parents died on Saturday. That doesn't mean I have an opportunity to honor them any more than if they died on some other day. But conceptually it tells me that I'm not the only one who honors them. Tradition also identifies parents in the memorial prayer as אבי מורי *avi mori* -- or אמי ימורי *imi morati* – my father, or mother, **my teacher**. And indeed they were my first and best teachers.

Dates are also worth considering. My father's *yortzite* is 18 days into the Hebrew month of Av, also called אב מנחם *Menahem Av* – literally “consoling the Father.” I like to think of that date as *chai av* – *chai*, the Hebrew word for Life, א with the numerical value of 18, and אב – *av* which means Father. Thus, *chai av* translates “father lives.” But that's not how I first thought of it. The month of Av is the saddest month of the Jewish year, the month when we commemorate the destruction of both the First and Second Temple and the 1492 Expulsion from Spain, all on the same day, *tish'a b'av* – the ninth of Av. Nine plus nine = 18, my father's *yortzite*. His death at just 71 hit me as a double tragedy, *tish'a +tish'a*. Only as the years passed and I found ways to honor his memory did I begin to feel the day as אב א -- *chai av* – father lives.

My mother was blessed with a long life, and left us at the age of 100. I will always be grateful for her many years. Her day of memory falls on

the 20th day in the month of Iyyar, just two days after the minor festival of Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day we count between Passover and Shavuoth. ל"ג -- Lag = 33, therefore two days later would be ה"ג -- Lah, which means "to her." Indeed that day belongs to her.

More than likely, you have *yortzite* dates that bring you special significance. I invite you to share your thoughts and/or questions about them.

If you care to reply, you can use email or my blog at <http://blog.cantorabbi.com/>.