

Instructions for a Shiva

By Lyman Gamberton

Put the deadname in a box; plain pine or cardboard, nailed down hard. In the shiva house the coffin is covered with a tallit and two candles placed at head and foot. Cover the mirrors. Take the batteries out of every clock. Silence all phone alarms.

Assemble a minyan. They come with over-salted over-priced latkes from the 'World Foods' section, and bags of gummy candy from Kosher Kingdom, and too much potato salad always. They take spare kippot from the box you keep by the front door, the hand-crocheted Pride and Palestinian flags that every trans Jew makes for pocket money, the grubby suede skullcaps from bargain bins in Golders Green. They find you sitting on the floor, unshaven, unwashed, unshod, sobbing or stimming or breathing with your head between your knees, and do not speak to you. No-one may disturb a mourner's peace. *May G'd comfort you amongst all the mourners of Tsiyyon and Yerushalayim.* They pray with you, reading from parts of the siddur that have transliteration or squinting at their phones. Somebody remembers that one prayer 'for the death of a difficult relationship' from that one open-source halakha project. Someone else sings a Hasidic setting of a liturgy they heard on Soundcloud, one from the Selichos services you never attend (*The body is Yours, the soul Your handiwork; o Lord have mercy upon the fruits of Your creation*).

You weren't planning to cry, but you do.

That long first night your friends act as shomrim for your deadname, staying awake until the sky undarks itself, witnessing transition. *It's passing from me to the next trans person who wants it,* you say, eating leftover potato salad standing up at the kitchen sink, and your friends say *Amen*.

Anything both Jewish and dead must be buried within twenty-four hours of the death, whether a body or a Torah scroll, so you all schlep out to the garden, or the very end of a Tube line, and bury your deadname. Over the empty-not-empty grave you recite *El Malei Rachamim* and feel a frisson of weirdness over your shoulders (*shelter it under the shadow of Your wings forever*). Everyone throws a fistful of dirt into the hole. There is no headstone yet; someone, with great ceremony, pushes a popsicle stick into the earth to serve as temporary marker. Pile stones into a cairn to hold the deadname down.

The first Rosh Hashanah after you sit shiva for your deadname, write it out again one last time, then burn it in a havdalah candle. Reserve the ashes. Put them in your tallit with a pile of small stones. At tashlich unfurl the tallit like those wings that beat over you; cast your sorrows, your deadname's ashes, the danger you escaped, the year and body gone, into flowing water. The light will catch them as they go. *Blessed are You o G'd, Master of all worlds, who shows favour to the undeserving, even to me.*

Shake the cloth. Wrap it close. Gone beyond.