


*Jewish perspectives on death discussed*

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## **Jewish perspectives on death discussed**

### **Three rabbis offer views during forum at Temple Society of Concord.**

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By Renee K. Gadoua

When Rabbi Evan Shore's father died, the son tore the left side of his garment as a sign of his broken heart.

"We want to say the person's passing has cut such a line in our heart we have to show visibly what that loss has done," he said.

"There isn't a day that passes that I don't think of my father," said Shore, spiritual leader of Young Israel-Shaarei Torah of Syracuse, an Orthodox synagogue.

Shore was one of three local rabbis who shared personal experiences with death and various Jewish perspectives on issues such as euthanasia, organ donation and funeral traditions Sunday during a daylong forum at Temple Society of Concord.

Rabbi Sheldon Ezring, spiritual leader of Temple Society of Concord, a Reform synagogue, said the gathering was unusual for its focus on theoretical as well as practical concerns about death. The event was also a rare example of showcasing Jewish leaders with divergent views.

"To get rabbis of three different strains to speak on the same dais is all too uncommon," Ezring said.

About 80 people attended the forum, which included sessions on mourning and the interfaith family; planned giving; talking to children about death and dying; and dying with dignity. Between sessions, participants visited exhibitors' booths including representatives of the Alzheimer's Association of CNY; Francis House; Hope for Bereaved; Hospice; Menorah Park; and Onondaga Pastoral Counseling Center.

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Orthodox Jews consider active euthanasia unacceptable, but passive euthanasia, such as not treating pneumonia in a patient with a terminal illness, is less clear, Shore said. Orthodox Jews believe the body must be buried and do not accept cremation. But organ donation is encouraged.

"Orthodox Jewry feels it's every person's obligation to try to save people's lives," said Shore, who provided the most traditional Jewish perspective. Rabbi Daniel Jezer, of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas, provided the Conservative Jewish perspective; and Ezring commented on the Reform tradition, the most liberal of the three major streams of American Judaism.

Shore said grief and anger are normal in dealing with death. But Orthodox Jewish tradition celebrates life, he said.

"As long as we remember the individual, the person spiritually never dies," Shore said.

Jezer said Jewish law provides principles, not inviolable rules, about death.

"What is for the benefit of the totality of that person?" he said in explaining the Conservative Jewish view of feeding tubes and Do Not Resuscitate orders.

Jews traditionally bury the body as soon after death as possible, both to honor the dead and to help the survivors, he said.

"It takes a bit of time to accept (death)," he said. "It helps you get over the in-between period and get on with the work of the grieving."

Shiva helps survivors by providing community support, he said.

"It doesn't matter what you say," he said. "Your presence speaks volumes."

Ezring said his colleagues' views of shiva and mourning are theologically correct, but the practice is different. Of his congregation's 20 to 25 deaths in a year, only about two families sit shiva for seven days.

Ezring said he thinks Jewish law should describe two responses: a longer shiva for

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tragic deaths and a shorter shiva for lingering deaths.

"Much of the dealing with the loss has already been done," he said of lingering deaths.

Ezring disagreed with Shore's view that kaddish, or prayer, helps the soul of the dead.

"I don't believe anything we do after does anything for them," Ezring said. "It does for me."

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