



Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters: The Book of Departure and Caring for People at the End of Life

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What can the deathbed stories of Hasidic holy men (*tzaddikim*) teach Jewish caregivers about belief, character and spiritual renewal as they accompany others at the end of life?

Almost every adult in America will at some point experience caring for a parent, grandparent, spouse or friend as they approach death. How do we best accompany those we serve on their final journey old and young, those whose lives are rich with family and friends and those who leave the world with no one there? How do we fulfill this purpose from within a Jewish framework?

Students of the Hasidic masters wrote down the stories of the last months, days, hours and moments of the lives of their rebbe. A compilation of their experiences, called *The Book of Departure* (*Sefer haHistalkut*), first published in Hebrew in 1930, brings together the rich end-of-life stories of 42 holy men who died between 1760 and 1904 and sheds light on Jewish traditions about death, the afterlife and how to care for people in their final days.

Translators and annotators Joel Baron and Sara Paasche-Orlow, both rabbis and Jewish chaplains, use their clinical pastoral education training, rabbinic knowledge and experiences working with people in hospice and hospital care to draw insights and suggest helpful teachings from these stories. In a unique facing-page format, they approach the end-of-life stories of these rabbis as narrative theology, bringing their own experiences into conversation with those of the Hasidic masters and of their biblical, rabbinic and intellectual forebears.

By following the pathways into the texts to which the stories refer, and by extracting modern pastoral lessons, Rabbis Baron and Paasche-Orlow help caregivers and chaplains of all kinds make Jewish meaning out of the experience of caring for others at the end of life.



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