

The Power Of A Small Ritual After A Stillbirth

As told by the grandmother

When I learned that a conference related to miscarriage, stillbirth and neo-natal Death was being planned, I immediately recalled a long ago experience of my own. It dramatically demonstrated how a simple ritual together with community support can play a powerful role in bringing comfort and assuaging grief after a late miscarriage.

Several years after initial planned, my daughter finally became pregnant with her second child. Her then seven year old daughter was very excited about the prospect of a sibling and was very much a part of the joy around the pregnancy. Unfortunately, the pregnancy did not go to term and the baby miscarried during the seventh month. The hospital requested a decision about whether a funeral would be planned hours after a long labor that led to a stillbirth. Since Jewish tradition does not require a funeral in this circumstance, a hasty decision not to have a funeral was made.

In the week or two following the stillbirth, my seven year old granddaughter was having some difficulty falling asleep, was crying every night and was writing poems about the loss. In a sense, she appeared to be expressing the feelings of the entire family. All of us were feeling as though there had been no way to mark the loss and were sorry that there had been no funeral. What to do?

Together the family decided to have a memorial service. My daughter belonged to a havurah at the time. A date was selected. The rabbi of my congregation helped to plan a service and came to it. Our extended family and the havurah families came with their children. A simple service was held during which my granddaughter had an opportunity to read her poems. The ritual that marked the loss had a profound impact. Almost like magic, the crying stopped, and usual sleep patterns were resumed. The small ceremony provided an opportunity for the extended family and community to acknowledge the sorrow and express their support. The caring and the acknowledgement of grief provided comfort and permitted the family to express their grief and move through the process of mourning.

Although it is not possible to replace a loss, two years later another child was welcomed with much love into the family.

This resource was developed for "A Loss Worthy of Grief: Jewish Approaches to Bringing Comfort after Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Neonatal Death" -- a conference and an edition of *The Outstretched Arm*, a publication of the JBFCs National Center for Jewish Healing.