
Compassion in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and the Jewish Tractate *Mourning*: A Comparative Study

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Compassion is a quality admired around the world. No religion could possibly be without it, but some religions are more expressive about it than others. Tibetan Buddhism, particularly since the advent of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, has made compassion its focal point, indeed, the most important quality sought for in a human being: to be truly compassionate is to be closer to buddhahood. Compassion in Judaism is also admired and discussed at length in many texts, but it is in no way as strongly expressed as it is in Buddhism. In this article I will compare the ways in which compassion is expressed in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (henceforth the *Bar do thos gro*) to its perhaps less obvious expression in the Jewish rabbinic text the *Tractate Mourning*.

Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism

Compassion is the trademark of Tibetan Buddhism. Not only is it the primary quality that will lead a Buddhist to enlightenment, it is thought to be the manifestation of enlightenment itself. Without the quality of compassion, Buddhism would be meaningless and empty. The Dalai Lama defines compassion as being “based on a clear acceptance of recognition that others, like oneself, want happiness and have the right to overcome suffering. On that basis one develops some kind of concern about the welfare of others, irrespective of one’s attitude to oneself. That is compassion” (Dalai Lama, 1995, 62_63). Compassion is a concern for others, and it is generated out

of the belief that others are just like oneself. To understand that all beings feel pleasure and pain, that all beings want happiness, just like oneself, is to have a compassionate heart. In the words of the poet Śāntideva (695–743),

And therefore I'll dispel the pain of others
For it is simply pain, just like my own,
And others I will aid and benefit
For they are living beings, just like me.

(Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:94)

The *bodhicitta*, the Mind of Enlightenment or the Awakening Mind, is developed from deep compassion for the suffering of others. This is the mind of the Buddha. Williams (1989, 198) quotes the Dalai Lama as saying that, in Mahayana, there are no absolutes, but if there were one, it would be compassion, for compassion is the essence of the Buddha mind. Without it, there would never have been a Buddha. Prince Śākyamuni would never have been moved by the image of the old man, the sick, or the dead had his heart not been filled with compassion. He consequently would never have sought enlightenment or brought the Dharma to this age. Neither Śākyamuni Buddha, the Dharma nor any present-day Buddhist teacher would have come to be without the power of compassion.

It is the force of compassion that leads the bodhisattvas of the world to choose rebirth over and over again, for it is out of compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings that a bodhisattva will vow to return until all beings are free. The bodhisattva vow is central to Mahayana Buddhism, and the vow itself is centered around compassion. Again, Śāntideva expresses the bodhisattva vow most poignantly: "So long as sentient beings remain, so long as space remains, I will remain in order to serve, or in order to make some small contribution for the benefit of others" (quoted in Dalai Lama 1995, 82). To truly feel deep compassion for others, to truly generate this *bodhicitta*, is believed to be a life-transforming experience that simply cannot be underestimated.

The *Bar do thos grol*

In the *Bar do thos grol*, the issue of compassion is a recurrent theme, both directly as well as indirectly. I believe compassion is illustrated in two principal ways in this text: towards the deceased and towards the mourners.

The compassion displayed towards the deceased is the most obvious expression of compassion in the text. The very act of having someone read the text to the deceased as he or she travels through the *bardos*, the stages of death and after-death, is an act of compassion. The journey along the *bardos*, as the *Bar do thos grol* illustrates quite explicitly, can be tumultuous and disturbing. All kinds of frightening and horrific images overwhelm the mind in this state. It can be a time of terror and isolation. However, it may also be a time of enlightenment, of profound insight and understanding into the nature of reality and the nature of one's own mind. Moreover, the very fact of the existence of this text as a guide is an act of compassion; to guide is to concern oneself with the welfare of another, and this is nothing less than the definition of compassion.

The manner in which the text guides is very precise in both detail and structure. This use of detail and structure can be said to be drawn from a source of compassion. The text describes the *bardos* with a strong sense of accuracy; very little is left to the hearer's imagination. It is as though the guide is taking one's hand and indicating, step by step and moment by moment, where to go. It is, in effect, being an excellent guide; the hearer is in good hands with the text. Although it may seem presumptuous to the modern western mind for a text to go into such detail about states which may not exist, it may also be seen as a truly compassionate act, for the detail may in fact serve to soothe the hearer in his or her journey. It may relax them through this journey, for no event remains unexplained, and all events are predicted. Were the text anything less than compassionate, such detail and precision would not be included. The audience would be left on its own, fending for itself.

The most striking feature of the text is the unceasing hope it offers the audience, as the opportunity for enlightenment is repeatedly presented. Regardless of how many times this opportunity is missed, there is always another opportunity in the process of flowering. No being, no matter how blind or ignorant, is beyond the salvific reach of the *Bar do thos grol*. Every being always has the opportunity for enlightenment. This view expresses an immense amount of compassion for human frailty and error. It would perhaps be wonderful if all beings could seize opportunities as they come, but life generally does not function that way. A person may walk past an opportunity a hundred times before recognizing it; by accepting human nature as such, the text, so to speak, offers a hundred and one.

This may all be attributed to the important Mahayana Buddhist notion of *tathāgata-garbha*. The *tathāgata-garbha* is the buddha-nature

that all sentient beings carry within them. It is the seed of potential for enlightenment that lies within, which will eventually grow into a buddha. *Tathāgata-garbha* may also be seen as the part of a being that is a buddha already and thus needs only to be recognized. Either way, it is generally agreed that buddha-nature is carried within every living being, and that it is linked with enlightenment. The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* says that,

all living beings, though they are among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, have the Buddha's wisdom, Buddha's Eye, Buddha's Body sitting firmly in the form of meditation. - Thus, in spite of their being covered with defilements, transmigrating from one path... to another, they are possessed of the Matrix of the Tathagata, endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence are not different from me. - Having thus observed, the Buddha preached the doctrine in order to remove the defilements and manifest the Buddha-nature (within the living beings) (Takasaki 1958, 51).

This belief that all living beings have within them the Buddha Body—that, despite the fact that they live among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, they are nonetheless endowed with virtues and are always pure—is rooted in compassion and hope. It does not permit turning one's back on any living creature, no matter how corrupt he or she may have become. It is a belief that always offers the opportunity for liberation. The *Bar do thos grol* follows the path of the *tathāgata-garbha* in that it never closes the door on anyone, for all essentially carry the Buddha within.

An example of this continual "open-door-policy" is the moment of the Clear Light of Death, which takes place during the *bardo* of Dying, is the most powerful moment experienced during the *bardos*, the most intense moment of clarity and therefore the most accessible window to enlightenment. All too often however, despite the wonders it offers, the moment of the Clear Light of Death frightens or overwhelms the subject, thereby causing him or her to reject it. The opportunity afforded by the Clear Light of Death thereupon vanishes. The compassion lies in the fact that, although the greatest of opportunities has not been recognized, the door to other opportunities remains open. Due to its intensity and clarity, the moment of the Clear Light may be the most accessible moment for enlightenment, but it is not the only one—enlightenment is forever at one's disposal. Although some schools may argue that *tathāgata-garbha* is not universally present in every sentient being, that there are exceptions to this rule such as the *Ichchantikas*—beings so corrupt that they have lost their

access to the seed of their own buddha nature—the text clearly rests on a premise of universality. The text speaks to all beings as buddhas waiting to emerge.

The *Bar do thos grol* is therefore compassionate both in the fact of its being a guide to the pilgrim and in the philosophy with which it guides. I would like to argue here that it further displays compassion towards the mourners, although this only indirectly.

The Jewish text we will shortly explore, the *Tractate Mourning*, focuses entirely on the living left behind. It is a purely legal work that deals with how, when and with whom the mourners are to mourn. The *Bar do thos grol* however gives no direction to the mourners; it is entirely centred around the deceased. The text is read aloud by a lama or close friend (dharma-brother) in the deceased's presence and is meant to guide the deceased along his or her journey. The mourners, however—the loved ones, the family and the friends—seem to be completely overlooked by this text. How are they to grieve? For how long? Who is to direct them in this time of despair? Is it not the role of a religion to guide its people in such times? Although the *Bar do thos grol* is indeed nothing more than one text in a vast sea of many others in Tibetan Buddhism, and thus direction may be offered to the mourners elsewhere, the *Bar do thos grol* is nonetheless considered today to be the principal text used and referred to at the time of someone's death. Where then, in this particular text, is the mourner's direction?

Although the text is virtually silent about the mourners left behind, I submit that it actually does offer some indirect guidance to them as well. The only direction given to the mourners during the entire reading is provided once at the beginning of the text, when the reader is instructed to shut out any crying or weeping relatives from the death chamber, for these sounds of grief are considered to be “not good” for the consciousness of the deceased (Fremantle 1975, 34), and again near the end, when it says that “in the presence of the corpse, friends and relations should not weep and mourn and make a noise, which may be done elsewhere” (93). Other than this, the mourners are given no instructions, and so one might conclude that they are neglected in their time of grief. However, these sparse directions in effect direct the mourners more than may seem evident at first.

We learn two things from the instructions that mourners are not to grieve in the presence of the corpse, but are permitted to grieve outside: 1) grieving is permitted but is to be controlled, and 2) mourners are to be present during the reading of the text. These two

significant factors must be considered if one is to understand the mourners' role during this time.

Grieving is permitted, but it is kept under control. The mourners in the Tibetan tradition need to grieve and cry as do mourners in the rest of the world, but their grief is to be curbed. They may not grieve in the presence of the corpse, for this is believed to disturb the journey of the deceased through the *bardos*. They may only wail outside. This direction given to the mourners has an incredible impact on the psychology of mourning. Grieving may not get out of hand; it cannot be limitless in either time or place. It has a boundary, and this boundary may serve to keep the internal grief within bounds as well. The Jewish tradition, as we shall soon see, creates regular boundaries for the grief of the mourner by subscribing times to grieve and the behaviour appropriate to them. Although the Tibetan care for its mourners in this text is not nearly as sophisticated or as detailed, I believe that this instruction to limit when and where the mourners may grieve serves the same purpose. Indeed, this one direction, which appears only twice in the *Bar do thos grol*, is in my view the Tibetan equivalent of the many outlined grieving periods of the Jewish tradition.

The second thing we learn from these minor directions given to the mourners in the *Bar do thos grol* is that the mourners are present during the reading of the text, other than when they are grieving. The text is traditionally read for forty-nine days after death has occurred. If the family and friends are to be present during the reading, they are consequently to assist for a total of forty-nine days. This is an enormous commitment. The text does not state who is responsible for this presence during the reading, nor does it regulate at exactly what time of day it is to take place or how the mourners are to conduct themselves during the reading and thereafter, nor even if the entire text is to be read forty-nine times, or whether just a fragment is to be read daily for forty-nine days. All it specifies (and even this specification is done indirectly) is that the mourners may be present during the reading.

We have seen that the reading of the *Bar do thos grol* consists of a description of the difficult and at times chaotic events that the psyche goes through after death. The text takes the subject through this journey, step by step and moment by moment. But perhaps the subject of this reading is not only the deceased. Perhaps there is more than one subject involved; perhaps, the reading is meant to apply to the mourners as well.

Tibetan Buddhist death rites are clearly meant to center around the being who has recently died. They are meant for the deceased and are about the deceased. When prayer is to be recited, it is directed to the deceased. The rites are in no way directly concerned with the living left behind. However, by assisting in the reading of this text, the mourners go through their own *bardos*, and perhaps the *bardos* described as being experienced in the after-death state by the deceased are experienced as well in the living *bardo* by the mourners in their own way. By having them assist this profound reading, the text allows them to undergo a process of their own, and forty-nine days later, to emerge somehow changed. Why would the mourners otherwise be present? What would be the purpose of having them there when they may interrupt or disturb the process with laments, talking or sneezing? The text instructs the reader to read the text by putting "the lips close to the ear [of the body] without actually touching it" (Evans-Wentz 1960, 87), for according to Tibetan belief, a dead body must not be touched in order that the *bardo* process not be interfered with. If the process is so sensitive that the ear may not even be touched during the reading of the text, why would the text risk interference by offering the mourners a place during the reading? Why else but because the process of the reading is meant for them too.

Although the text seems to be entirely concerned with the consciousness of the deceased, it would simply not be in keeping with Tibetan Buddhist philosophy to leave the rest of those in such intense suffering completely unaided. Tibetan Buddhism is particularly concerned with the alleviation of suffering in the world. Buddhism at its most basic level is centered around the recognition of suffering and the means of liberating the world from it. It would be inconsistent for such an important Tibetan text not to ease the mourners out of their own distress. We must therefore conclude that, in this indirect manner, the text does in fact supervise the mourners through their pain. They are neither neglected nor overlooked. Furthermore, by having them keep their grief under control in the presence of the corpse for the sake of the deceased, the text may be offering the mourners the opportunity to care for someone else despite their distress. It forces them to see beyond their own pain, to remember that the needs of others come first. We can thus see that no opportunity is missed to emphasize the importance of compassion; even in life's most dramatically painful moment, the tradition urges one towards compassion. It would be easy to wallow in isolation, but the tradition forces mourners to participate and take part in life and in the care for another instead. The tradition is urging its mourners to make use of

their own potential for compassion, and consequently, through this compassion, to heal themselves.

Compassion in Judaism: The *Tractate Mourning*

Judaism does not share the same philosophical emphasis on compassion. Compassion is discussed and profoundly valued throughout the religious literature, but it is rarely expressed as a pivotal concept as it is in Tibetan Buddhism. One may argue rather that the Jewish tradition revolves around law. Although there are many founding premises upholding this vast and ancient tradition, law is certainly one of the most prominent. The concern is primarily one of *how* one is to live a good life, *how* one is to be a good Jew, the code of conduct that would lead one to become a good human being. Does such a rule-based attitude imply a lack of philosophical insight? In brief, no. This abundance of regulation actually reflects an enormous amount of philosophical insight, and more particularly, of compassion. Through this long list of rules, Judaism is not necessarily attempting to stifle and to control but to care and to support through wisdom and compassion. This abundance of rules is a means by which the tradition expresses its emotion.

The *Tractate Mourning* is an early rabbinic document focused entirely on the rules and regulations to be followed in the case of a death. Any philosophical issues, such as the after-death state of the deceased or the meaning of death, are completely absent from the text. Unlike the *Bar do thos grol*, the abstract afterlife is of no concern here. To be sure, other Jewish texts are concerned with such issues, but this text is not one of the founding texts in this area; it consists only of a code of conduct, a "death-etiquette." Unlike the *Bar do thos grol*, the *Tractate Mourning* is entirely concerned with the living left behind, directing them along a path that is meant to help them deal with their loss. The most obvious element of compassion in this text is therefore the compassion it displays towards the mourners.

The mourners are directed in their grief from the moment their loved one has died until the end of *sheloshim*, the first thirty days of mourning. Not one day during this time is without instruction on how to behave, whom to greet and what to eat. The wealth of detail here is astounding; it is as though the text's intention is to predict any and all situations that may arise during this time and to prepare for each one, so that the mourner need not decide for himself¹ in this desperate time. Indeed, before all else, I would argue that this enor-

mous attention to detail is the first and most important expression of compassion to the mourners.

For example, we may look at how the text deals with regularly scheduled religious festivals that fall during the mourning period. In section VII:2, it states:

If one has a death in the family a day before the festival, he should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count six days after the festival. If two days before the festival, he should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count five days after the festival. If three days before the festival, he need no longer invert the bed.

Such precise explanations leave little room for improvisation or conjecture. The text makes clear to the reader what the mourner must do in as many cases as possible. Another example may be the text's approach to *keri'ah*, the rending of garments. In chapter nine, the text examines how, in which manner and for whom one is to perform the act of *keri'ah*, going into great detail about, for example, how long and how deep the rend should be, and even instructing the mourners on how to mend the garment once the mourning period has ended.

These laws on mending the torn garments are a wonderful example of the care the text expresses to its people. Let us imagine what it would be like to perform *keri'ah* and then to be left in the dark about how to deal with the garment thereafter. The torn garment is meant to represent the grief, the tear one feels in one's heart as a result of a loved one's death. It therefore represents a very difficult and trying time. When that time comes to an end, what is one to do with that symbol? Is the person expected to just throw it away, or to mend it so that it looks as it did before, hiding the stage in between? Should he mend it partially, in order to leave some evidence of the trauma? If the text did not direct its readers about this, would it not leave them somewhat uncared for? By going into such detail, even in the post-mourning period, the text is expressing ongoing support and care for its mourners. It attempts to leave no stone unturned, no question unanswered.

In a system not so focused on law, a lack of precision would not necessarily express a lack of care. However, for a tradition whose very foundation rests to such a large degree on law, precision is essential and expresses compassion. The Jewish people *expect* law and look to law for the answers to their questions, so any gaps in the law would lead to confusion or perhaps a feeling of abandonment. By providing

legal answers to as many situations as foreseeably possible and setting up the dynamics to solve new problems, the tradition is expressing a great deal of compassion towards its people. It is caring for them as they need to be cared for. The Tibetan tradition does not revolve around law, and therefore the Tibetan people do not seek it so much in order to resolve their questions. However, although they do not seek precision in law, they do seek precision in “celestial affairs”—were the tradition not to provide precision in this realm, the Tibetans would come to feel abandoned. In both traditions therefore, precision and detail comfort the followers, give them solace and a sense of security. The only difference lies in where this precision is to be found.

Precision is not the only means used by the text in order to demonstrate compassion toward mourners. The content of the laws itself is compassionate. Each and every law discussed in the *Tractate Mourning* is clearly derived from insight into the psychology of mourning. For example, let us consider the progression the text requires of the mourner, from the stage of *aninut* to *shiv'ah* and finally to *sheloshim*.

During *aninut*, the period before interment, the *onen*, as the mourner is called at that time, is released from the obligation to fulfill any positive precepts of the Torah, for example the reciting of prayer and the donning of *tefillin* (the phylacteries). He is further forbidden to overeat, drink wine, eat meat or be included in any benediction. He is restricted from indulging himself in any way and may not even follow any of the *mitzvot* dictated by Scripture, for he is a man that must entirely concern himself with burial arrangements and his own grief. To ask or require anything more of him would indeed be uncompassionate. If the *onen* would like to do more during this time, the law actually forbids him to do so. He may not escape either his responsibilities or his pain. He must deal with both, and consequently, given that both of these are so intense at this time, he is forbidden to do anything else. The period of *aninut* requests of the subject that he deal with the issues at hand immediately. Should such legal restriction not be present, the *onen* might procrastinate and consequently find himself dealing with the death of his loved one years after the event. *Aninut* secures the followers of the Jewish tradition from such psychological dangers.

Once burial has taken place, the period of *shiv'ah*, the first seven days of formal mourning, begins. The beginning of *shiv'ah* marks the transition from being an *onen* to becoming a mourner. The grave has been sealed, there has been closure, and thus the period requesting acceptance of this death begins. This is *shiv'ah*. During this time, the

mourner is forbidden to work, to cut his hair or wash himself, to wear shoes, to leave the house, and more. His life becomes very restricted; all activities that are not completely necessary are forbidden. He remains at home in order to meditate on his grief, and the community comes to him. As a result, he is never alone during his most poignant moments. Rather, he is surrounded by the community to which he belongs; he is cared for and supported. Moreover, since this time leads to a reflection of the most basic of realities about life, his *vie quotidienne* is reduced to the most basic of necessities. In this way, his inner and outer worlds reflect each other. Instead of burying his mother and the same day returning to work—a place which could hardly reflect anything he is experiencing at that time—the law orders that he create for himself a time and place that resembles all that he is feeling. He is seated on a low stool for seven days and remains unwashed. This offers him a chance to truly experience his state. At the same time however, he is never alone, and his community is even instructed on how to approach him. Greetings are changed to suit his needs, and his status as a mourner is never taken away. He remains in mourning in the community's eyes until the time allotted has passed.

When the first seven days have come to an end, the most difficult time is considered to have passed. However, the mourner does not suddenly return to his former life, but is eased out of it slowly. The tradition does not request that mourning come to an end altogether; the end of the *shiv'ah* period rather marks the end of one of the stages of mourning. For a period of thirty days after burial, thus for approximately twenty-three days after the close of *shiv'ah*, the mourner continues to be restricted. However, just as the mourner is eased out of *aninut* and into *shiv'ah*, so he is eased out of *shiv'ah* and into *sheloshim*. He is still barred from cutting his hair and washing his clothes, but he is no longer restricted from wearing shoes or leaving his home. He may eat and drink freely, but he is to curb his appetite for celebration. Therefore, he is not to arrange wedding feasts or to celebrate a betrothal during this time. Most importantly, he is to mourn. He must never forget at any point during these thirty days that he is still a mourner. *Sheloshim* is a period of formal mourning, but it is in no way as strict or as harsh as the periods of *aninut* or *shiv'ah*. As time passes, the laws lessen their hold on the mourner. We can therefore see a direct correlation between restriction and grief: the greater the grief, the greater the restriction, as though the restriction were implemented in order to steer the mourner in his most vulnerable time. It is in one's moment of most profound pain that one is the most susceptible to despair and escape. It is therefore at this time

that the laws hold and direct their mourners the most. As time passes and the wounds begin to heal, the laws slowly let go.

This progression of mourning rites emanates from a profound insight into the stages of mourning, and they are put forth in compassion for those who undergo these. Even if compassion is never directly discussed, and perhaps never even consciously considered as a motivation, compassion is one of the directing forces behind the establishment of these laws. There are many more examples of this expressed throughout the text. For instance, the attitude the text holds towards its own rules is a wonderful expression of such compassion. It would be easy for such a rule-based religion to become stubborn about adherence to rules, and yet regularly the text explains that in cases of emergency, adherence is not necessary. For instance, a mourner is expected to invert his bed and couch. However, the text explains that this is not required in places in which this action gives rise to anti-Semitism. Similarly for walking barefoot while in mourning. The text also permits a breaking of rules when finances are endangered. For instance, even though work is forbidden during *shiv'ah*, a mourner may nonetheless finish pressing his olives if there is a chance that they will spoil if left unattended. A baker is permitted to continue working if the community has no other baker. From these we can see that the laws are meant to direct its mourners, but they are not meant to stifle them. When adherence to law causes more pain than healing, adherence is no longer required.

Although we cannot argue that the *Tractate Mourning* is at all concerned with the state of the soul once life has departed (as is the *Bar do thos grol*), in its own way, the *Tractate Mourning* cares very much for the dying and is concerned to ease the journey towards death as much as possible. It is therefore not only a manual for the mourners in their grief, but a manual for soon-to-be mourners as well; the manual extends its direction both to those who deal with loss and to those who are about to. And as the living are directed to respect and care for those whose life is ebbing way, they provide comfort and peace for them.

The directions given to the community about the manner in which they are to treat the dying are few. They appear at the very beginning of the text: the family is not to close the dying person's eyes or bind his jaw, stop his orifices or wash his body. In other words, they may not in any way act as though the dying person is dead until he is dead. Moreover, the text makes it explicitly clear that the dying man is to be considered "the same as a living man in every respect" (Sm. I:1). He is to have all the rights of the living, and consequently,

all the powers. He may marry, divorce, inherit property and transfer it. He may do anything he wishes, for a dying man is not dead. According to the text, a dying man is very clearly a man alive; until he is dead, he does not forfeit any of his rights.

This emphasis on the dying man's rights must alleviate some of his anxiety. For him to know that the tradition respects him and his rights so long as he lives must indeed be consolation. If the tradition discarded its members as they began to deteriorate, naturally the journey towards death would be more painful. The assurance of welfare and respect that the text provides to the dying offers some solace. A dying man in the Jewish tradition is deserving of the respect of the living.

Moreover, a dying man is aware during his life of this respect and care that he will receive. He is aware of the tradition's approach to the body and the mourners, and thus as he himself approaches that fateful moment he may rest assured that all will be taken care of and he will be buried with the utmost dignity. He will also be soothed by the thought that his body will be washed and cleaned carefully, respectfully, and that his family and friends will be guided along as they mourn. These recognitions must appease the dying, and appeasement, in my view, is provided out of a sense of compassion. Whether or not the appeasement of the dying was the intention of the founders of this tradition we cannot know; nevertheless, the result remains: all those affected by a man's death, even the man himself, are cared for compassionately. None are left by the wayside.

Conclusion

Both traditions, as they are expressed in these two works, evidence an enormous wealth of compassion. The Tibetan tradition makes this explicit and uses it as its founding philosophical premise; the Jewish tradition is more subtle. However, both the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the Jewish one clearly care for those touched by death with much compassion and tenderness. The difference in emphasis is a difference of perception, but the result is the same. Furthermore, although it may seem that the Tibetan tradition cares for both the living and the dead whereas the Jewish tradition cares only for the living, I would argue that they both essentially only care for the living. In the Tibetan view, the dead are in a sense living too, for their existence has not ceased; life in that particular body has certainly ceased, but existence goes on. There is no death then in the Tibetan world view—no death as an ultimate end. The cycle of *samsāra* goes

round and round for all those caught within it. Until one breaks through this cycle and achieves liberation, there is no beginning and there is no end. The only distinction to be made between life and death is one of state. The tradition must consequently offer guidance and instruction for all states of existence, the state of after-death included. It cares for the living and for the deceased alike, for ultimately, they are not different from each other.

The Tibetan tradition, as evidenced in the *Bar do thos grol*, cares primarily for the deceased, under the belief that the deceased in comparison with the mourners is facing a much more difficult task. It offers compassionate guidance to the one who needs it most. In the Jewish tradition, the ones requiring the most guidance are the mourners left behind. The deceased in the Jewish tradition is in the hands of God and thus out of the hands of the living. The tradition is therefore taking care of the ones it to which it has access. So too in the Tibetan tradition. In the end, all are cared for in both traditions. The difference lies in the fact that in one tradition, God does part of the work, while in the other, the people are responsible for everyone.

Endnotes

1. Since the *Tractate Mourning*, as well as most of the other legal texts of the time, speaks only for the male gender, and since many of the mourning laws regard men only, I will designate male gender to the Jewish mourner as well.

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