

EPITAPH & EULOGY - HOW COME PERHAPS?

By *MIKE HARRIS*

This time of year, two of the most important religious Jewish Holy days, Rosh Ha Shona and Yom Kippur, which include The Days of Awe, come along. Without trying to explain in too much depth, just accept that these are most important religious Holy Days. The Days of Awe, the period from Rosh Ha Shona which marks the start of the new year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a period devoted to reflection and evaluation. Each individual is directed to reflect and take stock of their actions, behavior, and attitudes during the previous year and evaluate their effect on self and others.

Custom, not necessarily tradition, dictates a visit to a cemetery, to visit the site of a dearly departed. Perhaps that during the days of Awe or Judgment, someone would say a good word to the court on their behalf and so influence the final decree for the coming year.

Custom, tradition, superstition, earliest communities consigned human remains all in one place. That the spirits of those that they were a part of the community could rest on in the company of the ones they knew in life and so be comfortable in the new world in which they now found themselves.

There were always those who felt that their lives, while similar as lives go, felt that their passing was more important because of their wealth, leadership, and status and wanted it recorded, so came the "EPITAPH" carved into the marker where the individual was buried. A sort of summation carved in stone, usually denoting dates of birth and death, some succinct comment on their life and a wish for their peace. The following carvings followed by date of birth and death go something like this:

"Wife, Mother, Companion, will be sadly missed, REST IN PEACE." "Husband, Father, Companion, and Provider, will be sadly missed, REST IN PEACE."

Occasionally some reference is made to one's profession or manner in which they affected the community or society of which they were a part, most always ending with "REST IN PEACE" so finally wishing all, regardless of wealth or worldly standing, that they ended on a level playing field.

Another custom evolved, usually on the body being confined to the grave, the "eulogy." Someone, a religious leader, or a prominent personage of the community, one who knew the individual, would speak and give a short summation of the individual's life. This was oral and would be remembered only by those present. With advent of the printing press, this too became the history of the deceased as an obituary.