

1. Ancient Mesopotamian Tale

A merchant in [Baghdad](#) sends his servant to the marketplace for provisions. Soon afterwards, the servant comes home white and trembling and tells him that in the marketplace, he was jostled by a woman, whom he recognized as [Death](#), who made a threatening gesture. Borrowing the merchant’s horse, he flees at great speed to [Samarra](#), a distance of about 75 miles, where he believes Death will not find him.

The merchant then goes to the marketplace and finds Death, and asks why she made the threatening gesture to his servant. She replies, “That was not a threatening gesture, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

2. Jewish Ritual to Change the Name of an Ill Person

Our holy rabbis have said,¹ “Four things can cancel the evil decree against a person. They are: *zedakah*, prayer, a change of name and a change of behavior...That a change of name is effective is based on that which is written: ‘As for your wife Sarai, you shall no longer call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah.’² And later it is written, ‘I will bless her; indeed I will give you a son by her.’³”

In the name of all the names written in this Torah and by the authority of the Ultimate Authority, with the acknowledgement of God and the heavenly and earthly courts, we do change, alter and modify the name of this ailing individual from ___1___ to ___2___. In fulfilling the rabbis’ words, we have changed ___1___’s name, rendering (him/her) a new person. If a decree was issued against ___1___, it was not issued against ___2___.

And as (his/her) name was changed so may the evil decree against (him/her) be changed, from severity to compassion, from death to life, from sickness to health. Quickly send physical and spiritual well-being to ___2___ and prolong (his/her) days and years, that (he/she) may enjoy a quality life, vigor and peace, from now and forever, Amen. Selah. (Follow with Misheberach for healing, using the new name.)

¹ *Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah 16b*

² Genesis 17:15

³ Genesis 17:16

3. The Grim Reaper

The Grim Reaper comes to visit more often these days.
Nothing serious, you understand.
Certainly not her to serve the big Eviction Notice
yet.
Just a friendly visit.
You couldn't call it a chat
Because he doesn't say anything.

You'd think this would be an unwelcome visitor,
walking in,
Leaning that scuthe over against the wall
And sitting down at my table
For a cup of coffee,
Not speaking,
Just being there,
Reminding one of you know,
Curtains.
The big sleep.
That's all she wrote.

But you'd be surprised.
He makes no demands.
No criticism.
Doesn't even glance askew.
Actually, an ideal guest.
Unconditionally accepting,
And quiet.

David Gerson Robboy 9/9/2001

4. Take Me

Adonai, this living has squeezed the juice from me;
I am but a rind, my innards pulp.
I can no longer go out and come in.
You tendered my early self,
You amazed my childhood.
I Yearned in my youth
 and loved in my ripeness.
I have sought and found and lost and found again.
I have borne my fruit.
I have searched my ambition
 Studied to my achievement and served with compassion.
I have lived in Your glorious work of art, Creation,
 with curiosity, attention, joy and thanksgiving.
I have taught what I learned,
And when I had no more to teach, I simply loved.
I have peeled away the husks to find my soul: Your spirit within me.
Wherever you placed me, I did the Tikkun I could. Thus I have offered
myself in the Temple of Your world.

I have sung my song and danced my dance; and now I am old.
The trickle in my veins barely nourishes me. I ache in every part of me.
So many of my dear ones are dead.
Why have you sustained me in this withering?
How is it possible, now, to add to Your Majesty?
What purpose can there be in my suffering?
Is there yet a task for me that I have missed?
If so, keep not this secret from me.
For I am ready, My Creator,
To give up this body to the Earth To be remixed into fresh life.
I long to be joined to you
 as I yearned for the lover of my youth.
In your mercy, Dear One,
I beseech you—
Walk by and offer Your hand.
Take me.

Rabbi Me'irah Iliinsky 8/19