



A PRIMER TO LEGACY LETTERS

Since the times of our forefathers,
Jews have written legacy letters.

The classic example comes from Yaakov Avinu:

And Jacob called his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; Hearken to Israel your father... This is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him. Then he instructed them, saying to them, 'I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my ancestors in the cave...'

When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his kin. (Breishit 49)

According to the Talmud, Jacob requested from God that he not die suddenly but rather be granted a few days of illness so that he can part from his family with some final words.

Historically, Jews have written many different forms of legacy letters. These include extended treatises, poems, short pearls of wisdom, words of reconciliation, and autobiographical vignettes. Today, they can also be perpetuated through audio or video recording. The process of creating an ethical will can be challenging but is extremely rewarding. It's an incredible opportunity to share wisdom in your lifetime or to leave a parting message after your passing.

Why create a legacy letter?

A LEGACY LETTER IS AN OPPORTUNITY
TO EXPRESS TO YOUR LOVED ONES:

What is most important to me and what I've learned through experience.

Some final ideas that you want to say to your family and friends.

What do I include in my legacy letter?

There are no set rules! You decide who you are addressing and what you want to share.

The following is a general list of different elements that you might want to include.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- Favorite photo of yourself and why
- Your personal story/history
- Transformative events in your life
- Historical events that you lived through that shaped the way you think and act
- Objects of significance that tell a piece of your life story
- Aspects of your parents' life that influenced you greatly

PERSONAL HAPPINESS & SATISFACTION

- Most impactful quote or book
- Places of significance to you and why
- Small things that have brought you happiness
- Favorite or important rituals
- Role of religion/spirituality in your life

THE ROLE OF OTHERS

- Enumerating what you love about each person who is significant in your life
- Thanking and acknowledging what each significant person in your life has brought to you
- What I learned from my parents
- What my children taught me
- What my teachers or rabbis taught me
- Thoughts on family

FINANCES

- Most important charitable causes and why
- How you used money to make a difference
- Your life advice about money

LIFE ADVICE

- Five important spiritual values or rules you live by
- Your life advice about friendship
- Your life advice about love & marriage
- Your life advice about work
- Your life advice about education & knowledge

FORGIVENESS

- Regrets
- Mistakes
- Asking for forgiveness generally or from certain individuals
- Granting forgiveness generally or to certain individuals

GETTING STARTED CAN BE COMPLICATED! HERE ARE SOME INTRODUCTORY SENTENCES TO HELP YOU.

These were the formative events of my life:

These are some of the important lessons that I have learned in my life:

These are the people who influenced me the most:

These are some of my favorite possessions that I want you to have and this is what makes these things so precious to me:

These are causes for which our family feel a sense of responsibility, and I hope you will too:

Some of the Torah passages that have meant the most to me:

These are the mistakes that I regret having made that I hope you will not repeat:

This is my definition of true success:

This is how I feel as I look back over my life:

I would like to ask your forgiveness for ... and I forgive you for:

I want you to know how much I love you and how grateful I am to you for:

A family story passed down to me from my parents that I want you to know and pass on to future generations as well:
