

I have not eaten from it in my intense mourning. (26:14)

In the days of antiquity, pagan cults commonly based their religion upon death. They filled the caves of their departed relatives with stores of food and personal objects to accompany them on their journey through death. Jewish law vehemently forbids these rituals, refraining from providing any materials or provisions to the departed. We fashion our coffins from simple wood; we clothe the corpse in plain white shrouds. To paraphrase **Horav Eli Munk, zl**, "Judaism's primary focus is upon life, that it be positive and productive." In no way, however, are we lax in our care for the dead. We accord respect and dignity to the Jewish body. Our goals are "life oriented," directed to asserting the holiness of life. Death is associated with spiritual contamination. Death symbolizes the bridge between life on this world and the life of *Olam Habah*. We demonstrate respect to a corpse because it had been a vessel that had contained within it the soul - the life of a person. In death, the soul passes over the bridge to its new/original life.