

Prophet and Mystic

by Rabbi Stephen S. Pearce

In the realm of the religious world, there are two types of individuals who experience God and His power, the mystic and the prophet. For the mystic, religiosity is a constant search for Divine Presence; the prophet feels sought out by God. The former is in pursuit of God while the latter is being pursued. The mystical experience is man's turning toward God; the prophetic call is God's turning toward man.

There are those, who though called upon by God, take to flight. Jonah is greatly frightened by the mission he views God demanding of him. In the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel: "We feel at times as if the echo of an echo of a voice were piercing the silence, trying in vain to reach our attention. We feel at times called upon, not knowing by whom, against our will, terrified at the power invested in our words, in our deeds, in our thoughts." Jonah ran away but there was no escape. As the Psalmist clearly teaches: "Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in the nether-world, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there would Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand would hold me." God becomes audible to the prophet and only with great reluctance is he willing to respond. The dilemma for the individual who feels called upon is how to respond.

The mystic is in search of what comes so unexpectedly to the prophet. He tries to sense, to intuit God's will. This search is beautifully expressed in our own prayerbook: "O Lord, how can we know Thee? Where can we find Thee? Thou art as close to us as breathing and yet art farther than the farther-most star. Thou art as mysterious as the vast solitudes of the night and yet art as familiar to us as the light of the sun." The task of the mystic is to sense the ineffable.

Though both may find God in different ways, often the prophet fails to respond and the mystic is unable to sense. This failure to respond and sense are similar, for God's will in the world goes unheeded. And when this is the case we despair for lack of meaning and direction.

All of us have within us both prophet and mystic. Sometimes we are called upon; at other times we search desperately for God. Often we fail to respond; on other occasions we note His absence with terror. Perhaps our task as Jews should be to be more aware of the mystical and prophetic forces within us. In that way we will never stop seeking and when we are sought, we will never stop responding. Perhaps that way we can do His work on earth and redeem His word from the vast solitude of silence.

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Rajiv Joseph's Animals Out of Paper tells the story of a professional origamist, Ilana, and her biggest fan and admirer, Andy. In this scene, Andy describes his book of blessings. The two are drinking tea, and Ilana tells Andy that she lost her dog.

"He could barely walk across the kitchen floor for the past two years and then one morning he's gone. Poof. Disappeared."

"Ah. I count my blessings." Andy says

"That's great. Good for you."

"No, I literally count my blessings. I keep them here. When I think of one, I number it and add it to the list."

"You're kidding me."

"It's just something I do. Number 1: my health. That's pretty basic. Number 2: I can still go bowling, even with my elbow. Number 1943: I like teaching and am good at teaching. Number 2845: It is quiet and warm in my apartment in the morning and I always can have a cup of tea and look out my window. I mean, that's a blessing. That's an honest to goodness blessing!"

"Right"

"I'm at 7904 right now. 7904 blessings counted."

"You've counted 7000 blessings. How long did that take?"

"I started when I was twelve. I had a fortune cookie. It said: count your blessings."

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THE TENSION BETWEEN AUTHORITARIAN AND HUMANISTIC RELIGION

The closing chapters of Deuteronomy are usually the kind of text that an individual skips over when reading the Bible because it is concerned the fastidious observance of ancient priestly rituals which are described in meticulous, painstaking details, excruciatingly explicit blueprints for the design of the tabernacle and its furnishings including the ark, table, lamp stand, altar, laver, and enclosure. It gives a blow by blow description of the priests' apparel and accouterments:

Of the blue, purple, and crimson yarns they also made the service vestments for officiating in the sanctuary; they made Aaron's sacral vestments--as the Lord had commanded Moses. The ephod was made of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen. They hammered out sheets of gold and cut threads to be worked into designs among the blue, the purple, and the crimson yarns, and the fine linen. They made for it attaching shoulder-pieces; they were attached at its two ends. The decorated band that was upon it was made like it, of one piece with it; of gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen--as the Lord had commanded Moses. They bordered the lazuli stones with frames of gold, engraved with seal engravings of the names of the sons of Israel. They were set on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the Israelites--as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Deut 39:1-6)

These kinds of descriptions go on and on, page after page! So much space devoted to the ritualistic details of cultic practices must have some kind of meaning. What were the authors trying to convey to the listeners? Biblical scholar, Nahum Sarna (1986) attempted to shed some light on this situation. He wrote: "God's unity and perfection were intended to be apprehended through the aesthetic form of the structure." In other words, by creating elaborate dress for the priests and lavish accoutrements for the Temple that are detailed with exact specification, perfect in every way, we should intuit the notion that as it is in heaven, so it should be here on earth. The perfection we attribute to God is demonstrated in the human effort to display this quality in our religious practice. Such a sense of perfection is what is behind the lives of many who are reassured in knowing that perfection is desirable although practically unattainable. However, such perfectionism in ourselves can be dangerous and debilitating. The author of the *midrash* (Tahnuma, IV. 35) understood this when he described the creation of the world as well as that of the sanctuary. He wrote:

“Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this sanctuary that we are to build Thee? God comforted him with these words; ‘I shall not ask what is due Me, but only that which I can fulfill.’”

Insurmountable expectations and quest for perfectionism set worshippers up for failure. Nevertheless, there are a number of incidents in this part of the Bible that could make us realize that perfection is not the most significant role of ritual practice. When Aaron builds the golden calf, when Moses shatters the Ten Commandments, they are presented in very human terms. When the people doubt Moses’ leadership and complain about their conditions, we realize that perfection in ourselves and perhaps even in God is impossible. The writers of the Talmud spent as much time dealing with issues of error, damages, and accidents as they did with the perfection of the Temple cult because they recognized that the world is good, not perfect.

Noted therapist, Eric Fromm, once made a distinction between authoritarian and humanistic religions. Authoritarian religion is based on obedience and reverence. In this form of religion God has:

a right to force man to worship Him and that lack of reverence and obedience constitutes sin...Submission to a powerful authority is one of the avenues by which man escapes from his feeling of aloneness and limitation.

Humanistic religion, on the contrary, is centered around man and his strength...Man’s aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength, not the greatest powerlessness; virtue is self-realization, not obedience. The prevailing mood is that of joy, while the prevailing mood in authoritarian religion is that of sorrow and guilt. Inasmuch as humanistic religions are theistic, God is a symbol of man’s own powers which he tries to realize in his life, and is not a symbol of force and domination, having power over man.

The Divine-human encounter must be one which strengthens spiritual life, not one which hardens connections to God as Exodus (19:20) suggests: “The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mount and Moses went up.” The Bible speaks descriptively yet simply of the value of ritual. In order for God and Moses to meet, in order for worshippers to meet God, God must descend and worshippers must ascend. It is a tension we all feel when we observe rituals that should enrich rather than limit our lives.

Sarna, N. (1986). *Exploring Exodus: The highlights of biblical Israel*. Schocken Books, New York.

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Barnes, Barry K. (2002/2006)
Ethical Wills: Putting your
values on paper. Cambridge, MA
Dacapo Press Books.

How to Write an Ethical Will

THREE APPROACHES FOR WRITING YOUR ETHICAL WILL

At this point, you have an understanding of what an ethical will is, and what you can expect to find in one. Additionally, you probably have a good grasp on why you want to write one and when would be a good time to do this. If this describes you, you're transitioning into the next two stages of readiness, the Preparation stage and the Action stage.

If you don't think you're ready for the Preparation stage and you need more time to think about and process the concept, access some of the suggested resources listed at the end of the book. Try to engage your friends and family in conversations about ethical wills. Don't be surprised if others express an interest in creating their own ethical will, too.

In the Preparation stage, you'll want to review different ways to move toward your goal of creating your ethical will. This chapter presents three approaches arranged in order from "easiest" to "hardest," according to:

- your available time (little time to lots of time)
- your sense of urgency (high to low urgency)
- your comfort with writing in general (very structured to very open-ended)

Once you select the approach that's most comfortable for you, you'll find ample information to move ahead confidently. Each approach follows a similar strategy by first collecting key ideas and elements, then organizing the information to be integrated into your document later. You can use any or all of them.

Another option is to work with others who are also interested in writing an ethical will. Check with local community organizations to see if they offer any group classes on this subject. Or, try to set up your own community of people interested in writing ethical wills. You can do this by using bulletin boards or contacting your community's religious, educational, social services, and seniors' services organizations. It's often easier to create an ethical will in a community setting. Sharing your ideas and listening to the ideas of others will stimulate your thinking and help you come up with additional content. It also is mutually motivating.

Regardless of which approach or method you choose to begin working on your ethical will, you have progressed into the Action stage.

Here's a quick overview of the three approaches.

Approach #1 Starting with an Outline and a List of Items to Choose From

- The easiest approach for getting started
- The best approach for those who want to produce a document quickly
- Features a complete outline structure and several item choices in each category of the outline

Approach #2 Starting with an Outline and Specific Writing Exercises

A good method to use if you want to:

- create some detailed material in a short time
- establish some momentum right away
- have natural "next steps" for building on and revising your draft if you started with approach #1

Approach #3
Starting with a Blank Sheet of Paper

A good approach for you if:

- a blank sheet of paper feels like an opportunity
- you prefer a more open-ended approach
- you already keep a journal or a diary

Now that you have an overall picture of the different approaches, let's get started on the actual exercises.

APPROACH #1
**STARTING WITH AN OUTLINE AND
A LIST OF ITEMS TO CHOOSE FROM**

This exercise will provide you with a framework to quickly and efficiently complete a rough draft. Then you can edit the phrases and sentences you chose, so that they'll be more reflective of your writing style and your own thinking. Seeing these phrases will stimulate other ideas and thoughts you will want to write about.

Ethical wills have many elements in common. Here they are consolidated and arranged in a combination of the more common phrases and frequent theme categories. The

uniqueness of your ethical will is in the stories that fill in the pictures that this framework provides.

This "master template" guarantees that you will have a first draft of an ethical will. You can personalize it further by adding your life stories and experiences that make it the only one of its kind. Approaches #2 and #3 can help you to revise and enrich your draft.

As you explore the different categories and items in the following pages, have a pad of paper ready to write down your selections. Choose as many of the items as you want to. As you write them down, you can revise them by changing the wording of the phrases or adding to them.

Opening Thoughts

- To my unborn child: I am writing this in eager anticipation of your birth. I know that I have much to learn about being a parent . . .
- Dear family and friends: I leave to you these things that I have learned through my life . . .
- Dear children: A few words to express my thoughts and feelings about what is important to me . . .
- To my family: In reading my ethical will, I hope you find few surprises because . . .
- I want you to know how important you are in my life and how much I love you . . .

ETHICAL WILLS

If you wish, write down your own opening thoughts.

Now that you've started your ethical will, you can begin to move on to identify the things you value and stand for. The following subcategories under "Values and Beliefs" are arranged in a way that reflects the level of frequency that these themes appear in ethical wills. Concentrate on the ones that seem most important to you.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

The Importance of Family and

Other Relationships

- As I've grown older I continue to value the family more and more....
- So much of what I am is because of Grandpa, and I dearly miss him every day....
- I had a special relationship with my grandmother. From her I learned that one should "do good for the sake of good, not for the sake of reward...."
- I hope, especially for my family, to get along in life....
- If you find a good, true friend, hold on to him or her as hard as you can....

If you wish, write down your own ideas about family and other relationships.

Religion/Spirituality

- I hope you continue the traditions and faith of (fill in your faith community) and pass these on to future generations....

HOW TO WRITE AN ETHICAL WILL

- My mission is to serve God by creating a balance between family, friends, profession, and community....
- I know I have never offered much in the way of spiritual guidance. However, I hope that my manner of living has served as a living example of my own moral code....
- Faith in God is important. I am not all that religious, but I am a believer....
- (Fill in your faith community) is your foundation but it is also important to be part of the larger world....

If you wish, write down your own thoughts about religion and spirituality.

The Importance of

Education/Learning/Knowledge

- An important value to cherish is that as long as you live you can continue to learn....
- It is a privilege and responsibility to share your knowledge and your love of learning with others....
- Read as if your life depended on it; it does....
- I tried to give you, my children, a good education....
- Have a passion for learning. Learn for the sake of learning and not with an eye only to a future career or how much money you can make....

Record your own thoughts about the importance of education, learning, and knowledge.

Here's one example of how you can select a phrase and then enrich it with a personal anecdote. In the above category, one

of the phrases is: "I tried to give you, my children, a good education." The story is as follows:

Providing a good education was important to me because of what I experienced growing up. I was in the tenth grade during the Great Depression in the 1930s. I had to leave school in order to go to work. Many of my friends did the same thing. I never felt I had the chance to get a good education. I made a promise to myself that when I raised a family, my kids would go to college and hopefully beyond. You can always earn a living with your back. It's better to earn a living with your head.

Respect for Life

- Respect life—yours and others. Treat other people the way you want to be treated. . . .
- Be positive and look for the good in people. . . .
- What is hateful to you do not do unto others. . . .
- Cultivate a diverse group of friends and remember to judge a person as an individual, not by their ethnic, religious, or racial group. . . .

If you wish, write down your own ideas about respect for life.

Learning from Mistakes

- Learn from mistakes. It's impossible to be successful in everything you try to do. . . .

- Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Just be sure you learn something from them. . . .
- You can learn more from a mistake than from always doing everything right. . . .
- Don't fear mistakes, for mistakes are the springboard of future success. . . .
- If you focus on things that are important to you, failures may come, but they will be fewer. . . .

If you wish, write down your own thoughts about learning from mistakes.

Being Honest, Truthful, and Sincere

- Be sincere yet decisive. . . .
- Act as if all your actions will be part of a story published in the newspapers. . . .
- I have always believed in honesty and advocated truthfulness. . . .
- Be sincere and honest and learn to recognize these qualities in others. Call these people your friends.

If you wish, write down your own thoughts about being honest, truthful, and sincere.

Giving and Receiving

- In giving you make your life worthwhile. . . .
- If you don't take, you will have nothing to give. . . .
- Don't refuse to accept: Others need a chance to give also. . . .
- In sharing, one learns, experiences, and reaps the highest level of satisfaction. . . .

If you wish, write down your ideas on giving and receiving.

Good and Evil

- Do good and avoid evil. . . .
- Be aware of the evils of the world, but do not be consumed by them. . . .
- I hope you will make the world a better place, both on a smaller scale and in the wider sense. . . .

If you wish, jot down your thoughts on the value of doing good.

The Importance of Humor

- Having a good sense of humor is very important. . . .
- Humor can help you to get through difficult situations. . . .
- Humor ought to be a large part of every person's day. . . .

If you wish, jot down your ideas about the value of humor.

LESSONS AND
REFLECTIONS ABOUT LIFE

Lessons

- Act on situations and opportunities, rather than be acted upon. . . .
- Don't make assumptions of what people need. Ask them. . . .

- Have a willingness to be open. You will learn more by listening than by speaking. . . .
- Learn to be humble. . . .
- Hard work and a broad understanding will bring success. . . .

If these phrases stimulate your own thoughts about life lessons, jot them down.

Reflections

- Remember that one person can make a difference. . . .
- Stay true to yourself and give your best effort. . . .
- Be courageous and persistent and accept differences. . . .
- If you gauge your achievements on those of others, you will most likely be disappointed. . . .
- Don't let yourselves be easily discouraged. . . .

Record your own reflections.

Hopes for the Future

- I hope that you can remember the good memories. . . .
- I hope you are as lucky as I was in finding a soulmate like (name) to share your life with. . . .
- Pursue your chosen path, study things that interest you, and use your college education to get you started. . . .
- Try to be a part of the solution, not part of the problem. . . .
- Keep before you for inspiration a vision of the way things ought to be, and help us move, albeit so slightly, in that direction. . . .

If you wish, write down additional hopes for the future.

Love

- My love for my grandchildren is too great to express in words. I hope I have expressed it in other ways. . . .
- Show everyone you love that you love him or her, and be sure to tell him or her as well. . . .
- Be generous with love. . . .
- To my precious family, I express my deep, unyielding love, for they were a great part of my life. . . .
- No matter how lost or disconsolate you may seem at various points in your life, I hope this helps to bring you back on track: that your parents loved you intensely, unconditionally, and imaginatively. . . .

If you want to record your own thoughts about love, jot them down.

Forgiveness

- I apologize for the times I wasn't the mom you would have liked. . . .
- Never be afraid to say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me. . . ."
- Forgive whatever misunderstandings there are. . . .
- Forgive me if I have hurt you in any way or if I have been too hard on you at times. . . .

If you think of more ways to express forgiveness, record them on your writing pad.

Requests

- Because no one can predict the future, I ask that should it ever be necessary, please see that your mother remains comfortable financially and otherwise. . . .
- Enrich your mind, exercise your body, and feed your spirit with music, art, meaningful work, friends, and helping the community at large. . . .

- Be broad-minded and curious about the world. . . .
- Try to find joy and beauty in the simple, ordinary things that life has to offer. . . .
- Time is precious; do not waste it or take it for granted. . . .

If you think of additional ideas for your own requests, add them to your draft.

Concluding Thoughts

- You all have been a great source of joy and strength for me. I love you all very much. . . .
- Finally, I am thankful for all those who have been good to me and have been helpful. I've learned to live a good life. I hope a good life for all. Good-bye. . . .
- As I close here, I have to chuckle because I realize that even at the end of my life I do not stop giving directions. Humor me, it is who I am. . . .
- My love will always be with you—you get to keep it and remember it forever. . . .
- I love you all. . . .

If you wish, write your own concluding thoughts.

APPROACH #2

STARTING WITH AN OUTLINE AND
SPECIFIC WRITING EXERCISES

In this section you'll find specific writing exercises with illustrations of how these exercises might look when completed. Plan on completing several or all of the exercises over a period of weeks rather than trying to finish them in one sitting.

You will want to think about some of the ideas presented, so take your time.

After you have a working draft, you can move categories around so they are in an order that makes sense to you. You can add more categories using the outline in approach #1.

Another way to use this approach is to ask a family member or friend to help. Present your thoughts and stories verbally. Your helper can tape-record your discussions or take notes to create a written transcript. You might want someone to interview you with specific questions to stimulate your thoughts and memories. These techniques can serve as a sounding board and offer feedback. An added advantage is that hearing what you've said rather than reading it may help you determine whether the words you've chosen convey what you intend.

Use separate sheets of paper for each outline section, or buy a blank notebook to write in. Consider the following as a high-level outline structure for your ethical will:

1. opening thoughts
2. statements of values and beliefs
3. meaningful and personally instructive life experiences
4. hopes for the future
5. concluding thoughts

It's sometimes easiest to get started on writing if you have the salutation already in place. Use any of these for starters, or just use one as a placeholder.

Possible openings for your ethical will:

- To my family:
- To my dearest family:
- Dear . . . (use actual names of the recipients of your ethical will):
- To the people who are most important to me:

You can also review some additional opening thoughts that were presented in approach #1 or review the ethical wills contained in Appendix I.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

Now that you have an opening, you can move on to the first exercise. The goal of this exercise is to identify the values and beliefs that are important to you. There are a number of phrases that invite completion. Use some or all of them. Don't be surprised if you find yourself writing several paragraphs or more!

To get started, here's a list of commonly held values and beliefs. However, if you think of other values that are more important to you, make your own personal list to work from. If you need more ideas, look at the list presented in the first approach.

- being honest
- keeping your word
- being dependable

- helping others in need
- learning from mistakes
- having a sense of humor

Exercise #1: What's Important to Me?

- What I value most is . . .
- I believe in . . .
- What I did in-my life-to stand up for my values and beliefs is . . .

Here's an example of something I believe in and what I did to act on my beliefs:

I've always felt that helping others in need and volunteering to support your community are important personal values.

While training to be a physician, I volunteered in a migrant workers clinic. The migrant workers didn't have any health insurance or easy access to medical care. They often went without needed health care in order to support their families. They were so grateful for any medical services, I really felt like I was making a difference in their lives.

I hope you will experience this same feeling of making a difference in other people's lives. There are many opportunities for this. You usually receive more than you give whenever and wherever you volunteer your time to help others in need.

Stories like this say so much more than a simple value statement. They provide a window into your soul, illustrating what gives your life meaning. In addition, such stories provide information about the lives that we've lived. If we never tell our stories, who will? They are too important to risk losing forever. Even if our children remember these stories, our great-grandchildren won't. So it's important to write these down to preserve them.

In addition, recording significant memories, events, mishaps, successes, and your past experiences will help you see the patterns that have shaped your life. For example, write about where you grew up, experiences with your family that stand out in your mind, stories about your jobs, and how you chose your occupation.

For example:

I grew up in Bensonhurst, in Brooklyn, NY. When I was 5 years old, my family moved from an apartment to a two-family house that my uncle bought. As it turned out, my father and his brother married my mother and her sister. It was like having two moms and dads and two more siblings! We were very close as a family. We took family vacations together every summer to the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York.

My grandparents lived a few blocks from our house, so I saw them several times a week. When my grandma was unable to live by herself in her apartment, she moved in with us.

The importance of family was a value that my parents taught to me. I hope you kids will stay close to each other and look after each other after I'm gone.

The intent of Exercises #2 and #3 is to record important events, decisions, and meaningful life experiences. Here is an example that illustrates personal narrative.

Learning is a lifelong occupation. I love to learn new things all the time. I've found that the more I learn the better understanding I have of others and myself. This has been very important in my work because I encounter a diverse group of people every day.

I worked from the time I was in high school. I sold newspapers, worked in a candy store (that's what they called soda fountains in Brooklyn), and did some office work all through college. I had an opportunity to interact with people from many walks of life. I discovered that I enjoyed interacting with people. I chose an occupation (being a physician) in which I could interact and help a diverse group of people. It's important to choose an occupation that you really enjoy—even if it takes a while to figure out what you want to do.

Exercise #4 is another exercise for which I've provided some starter thoughts. Use these or develop your own, or, if you need more ideas, review the items in approach #1.

Exercise #2: Personal Narratives

IMPORTANT EVENTS

Write about important transitional events in your life as you remember them. After you've written them, see if you can identify values that are illustrated. Another way to undertake this exercise is to choose values, such as love, beauty, truth, justice. Write about experiences in a way that sheds light on your personal perspective.

In the second part of this exercise, I've included a number of writing options. There are phrase completion items, recording of life events and activities, and reflective scenarios to think and write about.

MEANINGFUL OR INSTRUCTIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES

- The lessons I've learned from life are that . . .
- The person who had the biggest impact on who I am as a person and why was . . .
- The event in my life that had the biggest impact on who I am as a person was . . .
- I am most proud of my . . .

Make a record of:

- Activities you devoted time to and why.
- Favorite sayings and examples of how they guided you.

The next three exercises are more reflective in nature and may take more time to complete. You can determine at a later time where you want to fit this material into your ethical will.

Some of the items presented may strike you as sensitive and personal. If it's hard for you to write about these things,

Exercise #3: Important Decisions Your Made in Your Life

Think about critical decisions you've made throughout your life. Write in as much detail as you want. Then, ask yourself and record the answers to the following questions:

- Why am I glad I made these decisions?
- In retrospect, what would I have done differently?
- What positive actions can I undertake now to change the situation or circumstances that resulted? (This is a good exercise for heating and repairing relationships.)

don't worry. The previous exercises presented in this chapter can help you achieve your goal.

Exercise #4: Hopes for the Future

My hopes or my dreams for you are to:

- continue the family traditions of . . .
- stay involved with . . .
- be successful in . . .
- follow the religious observances of . . .

Exercise #5 is a phrase-completion exercise. This exercise can evoke a strong emotional response. As you think about people who were, or have been, important to you, or who had, or have been, a major impact on your life, strong feelings may emerge. If this occurs, don't be alarmed—it's very natural for this to happen. Complete the phrases with as many thoughts as you wish.

Exercise #5: A Reflective Exercise

- From my grandparents I learned that . . .
- From my parents I learned that . . .
- From my spouse/children/siblings I learned that . . .
- From experiences I learned that . . .
- I am grateful for . . .
- My most meaningful religious holiday/experience/tradition is . . .

The next two exercises are "visioning" or "imagining" exercises. They have you thinking about the future. Imagining a future situation can be helpful by putting into focus values that are important to you today. And, it can spur us into taking some action.

Exercise #6: What Will I Miss When I'm Gone?

Write about what you'll miss most after you're gone. Be specific. What are things that only you know about, care about, that will die with you? Slow down, let yourself note and remember what you don't ordinarily, and realize that when you go, you'll miss it. Begin each sentence with: "I'll miss . . ." Here's an example: "I'll miss the dew on the grass on a summer morning when I pick fresh tomatoes from my front-yard garden."

Here's an example for Exercise #6 to illustrate this point: During a family discussion we talked about holiday celebrations and special foods that were prepared by the "older generations" in the family. They had these special recipes

memorized but not written down. Many of the ingredients were determined by taste rather than by measurement. Realizing that these treasures would be lost and missed when our elder generation died, several nieces and grandchildren signed up for "cooking lessons" with *Baube* (a Yiddish term for Grandma) to record and learn how to make these ethnic specialties, thus ensuring the preservation of one aspect of her legacy.

The last exercise in this series, by confronting your mortality, is useful for identifying your core values and what you hold dear. It creates a personal "call to action" to effect change in how you live your life today. In that sense it is a very meaningful exercise to complete.

Exercise #7: The Eulogy

You are attending a funeral. Familiar people are filing in and sitting down. The eulogy is about to begin. You realize the eulogy is about you. What would you like to hear said about yourself?

Here are some phrases you can use for your conclusion. Refer back to the examples in approach #1, or look at some of the ethical will examples in Appendix I.

Concluding Thoughts

- Thank you for your love and support through the years . . .

- I love you all very much . . .
- Think of me when you . . .

After you've completed several of these exercises, you will have a good working draft for your ethical will. As for organizing what you've written, integrate the material into the general outline. You can also assemble your work in an order that reads well and seems more logical to you.

APPROACH #3

STARTING WITH A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER

If you select approach #3 as your starting point, you probably have a high-comfort level with writing in a less directed way. This is an open-ended way to compile material for your ethical will.

Collecting Ideas

Keeping a journal or diary is a tried-and-true way to collect ideas. It involves writing things down regularly over a period of weeks, months, or years. This method is an unstructured and spontaneous way to write about events, thoughts, and feelings that strike you as important, and possibly to

discover what you really think or feel about a given situation, relationship, or experience.

Common Techniques for Journaling

- **Lists:** Pick topics relevant to the task, then write until you've exhausted them. This is an excellent way to mine and unleash both the conscious and unconscious mind.
- **Dialoguing:** This involves engaging in a dialogue with yourself, a part of yourself, or another person who is, of course, actually not present. This is a good way to examine and explore; to loosen your memory; and perhaps discover or recover information outside your recognized knowledge bank.
- **Dreams:** If this appeals to you, record your dreams in as much detail as you can. Who knows what's to be gleaned? In addition you can save items like quotes, cartoons, and so forth, that articulate your feelings or illustrate your values.

After you've been writing and collecting "data" for a while, you'll want to take some time to review. Here are some suggestions for organizing the content that you've compiled. As you examine your notes, you'll see salient topics and patterns emerge.

Organizing Your Ideas

- Group similar items together.
- Where you have just a few, but meaningful words, expand the thought into sentences. Logical separate paragraphs should follow.
- Arrange the information in any order that seems comfortable to you under outline headings. (You can use any of the outline categories described in approaches #1 and #2.)
- Add an introduction or opening paragraph and a conclusion, and you have your first draft!
- You may want to set the document aside for several days or even weeks, and then review it.
- Revise your draft as you deem appropriate.

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It's been said that a first draft of any document is a necessary evil. Use any of these three approaches to create a draft of your ethical will. Or, invent your own way of doing this by taking suggestions from all of the approaches. My goal is to get you started and for you to be comfortable with the process. And, it's easier and a lot more fun to work on revisions of your ethical will once you've completed your initial draft.

As I described the three approaches, I focused on writing as the means to collect information. However, writing isn't the only way to compile information or to assemble your ethical will. I'll expand on this issue in the next chapter.

