

# *The Shiva Candle Is Lit*

Closer to the grave  
The nearness changes us  
Do we think we will live forever?  
Speech, acts, gestures  
That once enraged seem foolish now.

Before the images of shrouds, envies, jealousies  
Sworn vindictiveness  
All shrivel into nonsense.

Before the shovel of dirt  
The sound of pebbles on the casket  
The angers and gnawing regrets  
Are strangely petty.

How did the Rabbis put it?  
At the end of time, when the Evil Impulse will be slain  
People will look at its corpse and wonder  
That this small hill seemed so hard to climb  
That this impulse as thin as a hair was  
So difficult to conquer.

Awareness of death may bring courage to live  
Knowing our mortality  
How dare we be afraid?  
Before who, and of what afraid?  
Before what choices do we tremble?  
What questions are we afraid to ask?  
What doubts will we not seize with both hands?

The wise counseled  
That each of us should live as if this day were our last  
And if it were, each breath would be deeper  
Each step would be firmer  
Each dream would be bolder  
Standing in the shadow of death  
A brave new light shines.

