

3. Monuments 101

For those wanting to decode most monuments with some Hebrew, without a lot of explanation, this chapter is provided as a stand-alone guide. Each of the chapters referenced below provides a more complete explanation of the specific information presented in this chapter. If the monument doesn't follow the pattern of this chapter, you will need to move to another monument or consult one of the following chapters.

1. Decoration See also chapter 4
2. Introductory Line See also chapter 5
3. Name Line See also chapter 6
4. Date (including Information on the age of the deceased) See also chapter 7
5. Epitaphs See also chapters 8 through 10

The monument of Mollie Segal is used as the paradigm for this chapter.



1. Decorations:

Magen David



Hands



Menorah



Sometimes the letters: פ"ד pronounced: *Po nikbar (nikb'ra)* meaning "Here lies," also appears as part of the decoration as shown in the Magen David above.

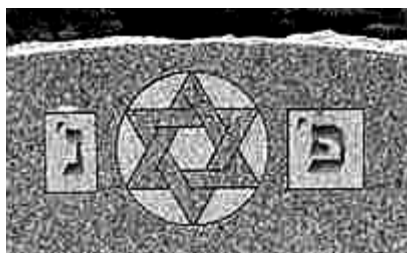
The six-pointed star known as the Star of David, the Magen David, or the Jewish Star is one of the best known symbols of Judaism. It is the most common decoration on contemporary Jewish monuments.

The menorah or candelabrum appears on some women's monuments. The lighting of candles is a commandment (mitzvah) specifically designated for a woman to perform. Older monuments show these candelabras with two, three, five or seven branches. Some newer monuments use a nine-

branched Cha-nukah menorah, which is counter-intuitive because lighting a Chanukah menorah is not specifically a commandment for women.

For those who claim to be direct descendants from the *kohanim*, כהנים, “the Biblical priests,” the hands are shown at the top of the monument in the position in which they are held when the Priestly Benediction (Numbers 6:24-26) is offered.

In the example shown below, the decoration is the Magen David, with the פ”נ separated by the decoration. The use of abbreviation marks varies greatly from monument to monument and it is shown in the example as פ”נ.



Other decorations include insignias of fraternal organizations. The most common is the Masonic insignia. Insignias associated with a profession, for example, scales for a lawyer or caduceus for a physician also appear from time to time.

2. Introductory Line

The “Introductory Line” in the 101 version is a simple declaration of survivor’s relationship to the deceased. This line sometimes may not appear at all. Examples of the “Introductory Line” include:

My beloved father	A-vi ha-ya-kar	אבי היקר
Our beloved father	A-vi-nu ha-ya-kar	אבינו היקר
My beloved mother	I-mi ha-yi-ka-ra	אמי היקרה
Our beloved mother	I-mei-nu ha-yi-ka-ra	אמנו היקרה
My beloved wife	Ish-ti ha-yi-ka-ra	אשתי היקרה
My beloved husband	ba-a-li ha-ya-kar	בעלי היקר

Some very common “introductory lines” strings two nouns strung together:

My beloved wife and	Ish-ti	אשתי ואמנו היקרה
our beloved mother	ve-i-mei-nu	הא-י-מנו
My beloved husband	Ba-a-li	בעלי ואבינו היקר
and our beloved father.	ve-a-vi-nu	הא-י-מנו

The following do not follow the above rules but are sufficiently common to be included here. The syntax is presented in greater detail in chapter 6.

For a man:

A man of integrity	Ish tam	איש תם וישר
and uprightness.	ve-ya-shar.	

For a woman:

An important	I-sha	אשה חשובה וצנועה
and modest woman	cha-shu-vah	u-tze-nu-ah

In the paradigm, shown also below, the first line is “Our beloved mother, *I-mei-nu ha-yi-ka-ra*, אמנו היקרה.”



3. Name line simplest syntax:

The common name syntax is shown below:

a. b. c. d. e. f. g.
 Here lies <title><name of deceased><son/daughter of> <title> <parent’s name> <last name>

Note that the name does not always start at the beginning of a line. If it is not clear where the name starts, look for a, b or d. At least one of them should be present.

- a. Here lies. (Masc.) Po nik-bar פה נקבר פ"נ
 Here lies. (Fem.) Po nik-be-ra פה נקברה פ"נ
 (Often omitted here if included in decoration.)

b. Title [Sometimes omitted]

Mister	reb	רב	“ר
Mrs.	ma-rat	מרת	“מ” or “מר”

c. Name of the deceased:

Note that there are cases where there is no correlation between the Hebrew name and the English name. While there are potentially thousands of names, the 25 men’s names and 25 women’s names that follow represent over 70% of the Hebrew/Yiddish names on monument inscriptions.

The Most Common Men’s Names

<u>English</u>	<u>Transliteration</u>	<u>Hebrew or Yiddish</u>
Abraham	Av-ra-ham	אברהם
Aaron	A-ha-ron	אהרן
Elijah	Ei-li-ya-hu	אליהו
Eliezer	E-li-e-zer	אליעזר
Aryeh (Ari)	Ar-yei (A-ri)	אריה (ארי)
Benjamin	Bin-ya-min	בנימין
Dov	Dov	דוב (דאב)
David	Da-vid	דוד
Hirsch	Hirsch	הירש (הערש)
Wolf (William)	Ze-eiv	זאב
Chaim (Hyman)	Cha-yim	חיים
Judah	Ye-hu-da	יהודה
Joshua	Ye-ho-shu-a	יהושע
Joseph	Yo-seiph	יוסף
Jacob	Ya-a-kov	יעקב
Isaac	Yitz-chak	יצחק

Israel	Yis-ra-eil	ישראל
Leib	Leib	לייב
Meyer	Mei-ir	מאיר
Michael	Mi-cha-eil (Mi-chel)	מיכאל (מיכל)
Mordecai	Mor-de-chai	מרדכי
Moses	Mo-she	משה
Tzvi	Tze-vi	צבי
Solomon, Zelman	She-lo-mo, Zel-man	שלמה (זלמן)
Samuel	She-mu-eil	שמואל

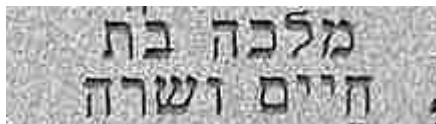
The Most Common Women's Names

English	Transliteration	Hebrew or Yiddish
Etta	E-ta	אטא איטא איטע עטע...
Esther	Es-ter	אסתר
Belle	Bei-leh	ביילה ביילע
Brina	Bri-na	בריינה בריינע
Basha	Ba-sha	בתיה באסיה באשע
Golda	Gol-da	גאלדא
Gittel	Gi-tel	גיטל גיטאל גיטעל
Deborah	De-vo-ra	דבורה
Henna	He-neh	הינה הענע הענא היענע
Chaya	Cha-ya	חיה
Hannah	Cha-na	חנה
Leah	Lei-ah	לאה
Libby	Li-ba	ליבא ליבע
Minnie	Mi-na	מינא מינע מאניע מיניה
Mollie	Mal-kah	מלכה
Miriam	Mir-yam	מרים
Ethel	E-tel	עטיל עטל
Fay	Fei-ge	פייגה פייגע פיגא...
Pesha	Pe-si	פעסי פעשה פעסיע פסיה...
Freida	Frei-da	פריידא פריידע

Rebecca	Riv-kah	רבקה
Rachel	Ra-cheil	רחל
Rose, Risa, etc.	Rei-zel	ריזל רייזעלע רייצעל רייזיל ריסע...
Shana	Shei-na	שיינא
Sarah	Sa-rah	שרה

Notice that the spelling of Yiddish names varies greatly. In some cases, multiple spellings are shown, but a general rule is that the following letters or letter combinations are sometimes used interchangeably. (While grammar experts may argue other-wise, these results are based on empirical observations.) א and ה and ע; ב and ו; ז and צ and ס and ש; ח and כ; ט and ת; י and יי and יי.

A middle name may also be included, but it is not in our paradigm. The name in our paradigm is “Malkah, מלכה”, which corresponds precisely to the English name, Mollie.



d. Relationship (Son/Daughter of...)

Son of	Ben	בן	
Son of Mister ...	Ben reb (Bar)	בן רב	“בר”
Daughter of	Bat	בת	
Daughter of Mister	Bat reb (Bar)	בת רב	“בר”

In our paradigm above, Mollie, “Daughter of (Bat, בת)”.

e. Title of parent:

The titles of the parent are exactly the same as the titles of the deceased and were described in b., above.

In our paradigm, there are no titles.

f. Parent's name:

Traditionally, the only parent mentioned on the monuments was the father. This is still the case in most Orthodox cemeteries. Reform and some Conservative cemeteries now include both the father and mother's name. This is the case in our paradigm, which identifies "Malkah as the daughter of Chaim and Sarah."

g. Last name (surname):

The last name is usually a transliteration. It often does not appear at all or may stand alone on the following line. In our paradigm, it does not appear.

4. Dates

Like the names, dates do not always start on a new line. Also, dates are not limited in length to a single line. The easiest way to find the date line is to look for "נפ" (short for niftar נפטר or nift'ra נפטרָה, meaning he or she died) and the date will follow. If the "נפ" is missing, a way to find the date line is as follows: if the date of death is 1940 or later, look for an abbreviation beginning with תש. If the date of death is between 1840 and 1940, look for an abbreviation beginning תר.

Generic Example:

a.	b.	c.	d.	d.	c.	b.	a.
Died	<day>	<month>	<year>	<year>	<month>	<day>	"נפ"

Specific paradigm:

d.	c.	b.	a.
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a.	b.	c.	d.
Died	21	Tevet	5758

See Table 1 for days, Table 2 for Months and Table 3 for years.

Table 1: days

Note that below all numbers are shown with quotes as the abbreviation mark. Sometimes, other marks are used for abbreviations including an apostrophe, a dot, a tilde or even.

1	"א	11	"יא	21	כ"א
2	"ב	12	"יב	22	כ"ב
3	"ג	13	"יג	23	כ"ג
4	"ד	14	"יד	24	כ"ד
5	"ה	15	ט"ו	25	כ"ה
6	"ו	16	ט"ז	26	כ"ו
7	"ז	17	"יז	27	כ"ז
8	"ח	18	"יח	28	כ"ח
9	"ט	19	"יט	29	כ"ט
10	"י	20	"כ	30	ל"

Table 2: months

Tishri	תשרי	Adar Bet or	אדר ב'
Cheshvan	חשון	Adar Sheini	אדר שני or
or Mar-chesh-van	מררחשון or	or veAdar	ואדר or
Kislev	כסלו	Nisan	נסן
		or Aviv	אביב or
Tevet	טבת	Iyar	אייר
Shevat	שבט	Sivan	סיון
Adar	אדר	Tammuz	תמוז
or Adar Alef	אדר א' or	Av or Menachem	אב
		Av	אב or
or Adar Rishon	אדר ראשון or	Elul	אלול

Table 3: years

Most monuments have the common calendar year on them. You can compute the Hebrew calendar year (usually given by a string of Hebrew letters) using the following equations:

If the common calendar year ends in an even number and

1. If the Hebrew year ends in טז add 3760.
2. If Hebrew year ends in א, ג, ה, ז (except טז), ט or ט add 3761.
3. In all other cases, add 3760.

If the common calendar year ends in an odd number and

1. If the Hebrew year ends in טז add 3761.
2. If the Hebrew year ends in א, ג, ה, ז (except טז), ט or ט add 3760.
3. In all other cases, add 3761.

Examples of computation of the year:

Example 1 (from paradigm):

נפ' כ"א טבת תשנ"ח January 19, 1998

The common calendar year, 1998 is even. The Hebrew date ends in ח. The letter is not on the list.

$$1998+3760=5758.$$

Example 2 (a random date):

נפ' ג' חשוון תשל"ד October 19, 1974

The common calendar year, 1974 is even. The date ends in ד. The letter is on the list. $1974+3761=5735$.

Note: More than 80% of the time, the age of the deceased can be determined from the monument, but usually, not from the Hebrew or Hebrew dates.

5. Epitaph

Epitaphs can be long and complicated. However, a large majority of monuments have one of the following three choices as their epitaph.

Let his (her) soul be bound up in the bonds of the living. (Adapted from 1 Sam. 25:29)	Te-hi naf-sho (naf-sha) tza-ru-ra be-tze-rur ha-cha-yim.	ת'נ'צ'ב'ה
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May his(her) memory be a blessing (Based on Prov. 10:7)	Zich-ro-no (Zich-ro-na) Le-ve-ra-cha	ז"ל
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May the memory of the righteous be a blessing (Prov. 10:7)	Zei-cher tza-dik Le-ve-ra-cha	זצ"ל
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Many Jews believe in the concept of “life after death” or a “World to Come”. However, from the point of view of Jewish theology, there are no guarantees. The only guarantee is that we will be remembered by the living for those things we did in our lifetimes. This is the message reflected in the acronyms זצ"ל, ז"ל and ת'נ'צ'ב'ה.

In the paradigm for this chapter, the first example of the epitaph is shown:



Full Example



Here lies
our beloved mother
Mollie daughter of
Chaim and Sarah
Died on 21 Tevet 5758

May her soul be bound up
in the bonds of the living.

פ'נ'
אמנו היקרה
מלכה בת
חיים ושרה
נפ' כ"א טבת תשנ"ח
MOLLIE SEGAL
DIED: JANUARY 19, 1998
ת' נ' צ' ב' ה'

A Worksheet for Monuments 101:

Example



Line 1: Here lies
Line 2: My beloved husband בעלי ואבינו היקר
and our beloved father
Line 3: Yitzchak son יצחק בר' יעקב
of Mister Ya-akov
Line 4: Died 28 Nisan 5734 נפ' כ"ח ניסן תשל"ד
Line 5: Let his soul be bound תניצ'ב'ה'
up in the bonds of the living.

April 20, 1974

1. פ' <decoration: _____> נ'

Likely options: Magen David, Menorah, Hands

2. Introductory Line _____

3. Name _____

4. Date of death Year Month Day
_____ | _____ | _____ נפ'

5. Epitaph
_נפ' _or_ ז'ל_ _or_ ז'ל_ _or_ שלום_ _or_
