

Legacy Letter

These resources were compiled for the Jewish Future Promise by Dr. Erica Brown.

Sometimes it's easier to write your deepest thoughts than it is to speak them.

Elana Zaiman coined the term "Forever Letter" for the kind of correspondence that we might share with those who live with us and after us about what matters most. In her book, *Forever Letter*, she writes, "The forever letter is simply this: a heartfelt letter that we write to the people who are most important to us with the hope that even if the letter isn't kept forever, the wisdom and love that we share will be."

Think of someone who might receive a Jewish Legacy Letter from you. It might be an adult child, a grandchild, a dear friend, a mentor, or a spouse.

It's often easier to write to one person to focus and customize what you really want to say. And, if it seems overwhelming, don't write it all in one go. Break it up into manageable sections.



Here are some ways you might divide your Legacy Letter:

The Why:

You might open with a few sentences on why you're writing this letter, your feelings about writing it, and why you are writing it now. If you feel the urge to cry, give yourself permission. Legacy letters often put us in touch with our own mortality, which can generate a host of uncomfortable or unsettling feelings. Don't be afraid to lean into the discomfort zone. This is precious, sacred work, but it is not easy work.

Praise and Thanks:

In this part of the letter, identify qualities and characteristics about that recipient that you love, appreciate, or admire. Recall a story or share a memory that involves the recipient. Express gratitude in detail for what you've learned from the recipient or experienced together. Talk about what this person means to you. Be specific. Don't hold back. Sometimes we think we've said it all or that others know we love them – even without words. But people hold on to words of love. They linger in our memories.



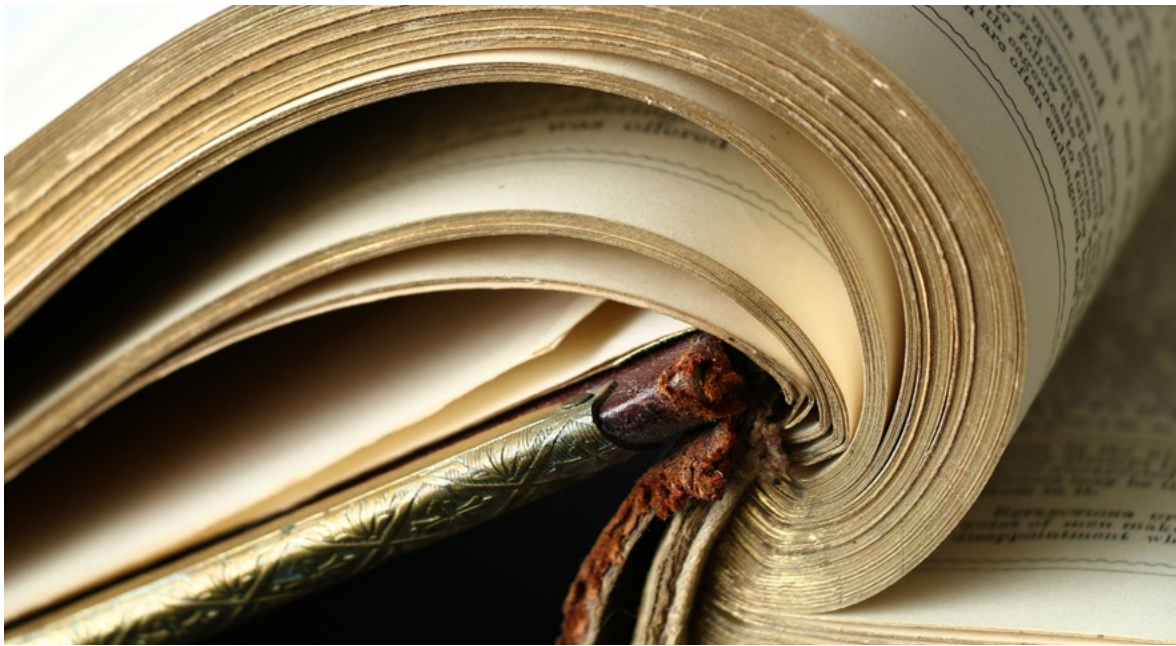
Your Family Story:

Researchers have demonstrated that powerful family narratives create resilience, especially stories of a family's ups and downs. This section is a place to share the salient points of your family narrative that have had the most profound impact on you. For more, read [this article](#) by Professor Marshall Duke from Emory University about resilient families.

The Values You Learned from Your Family Story:

As you are telling or retelling* your family story, identify the values involved and how they influenced you. It might be around Jewish pride, doing what's right and just, or having a strong work ethic. This connects the facts of the story to the way that it has shaped you.

*Even if your kids have heard it a thousand times, remember that someone in the future may not know this story unless you take the time to tell it.



Your Jewish Life:

What have been the major milestones in your Jewish life? These can be holidays or trips that stand out in your memory, acts of study, or moments of community that made you feel connected to a people with a purpose. Share the rituals and practices that mean the most to you. Discuss your relationship with G-d – even if it's a struggle. Share your hopes for Israel and the Jewish future. Your Jewish life is unique to you, even if others share aspects of your story.

Keep it Short and Sweet:

A short, meaningful letter will have more impact than a long, rambling one. *One forever letter that has been in a family for generations contained only six wishes. They were short enough for every family member to carry them in their hearts.* Write everything out that you want to say and then edit yourself. You'll be able to identify repetitions and tighten the language so that it reflects your deepest and unadorned feelings.

For more tips, see our resource on [Conversations that Matter](#).