

For Father's Day

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

My father's father died when my father was 11 years old. His mother was a widow at 34, and he — an only child — bore much of his grief alone. In accordance with traditional practice, he began to walk very early to synagogue each morning to say prayers in his father's memory, a practice lasting for a year after a parent's death.

At the end of his first week, he noticed that the ritual director of the synagogue, Mr. Einstein, walked past his home just as he left to walk to synagogue. Mr. Einstein, already advanced in years explained "Your home is on the way to the synagogue. I thought it might be fun to have some company. That way, I don't have to walk alone."

For a year my father and Mr. Einstein walked through the New England seasons, the humidity of summer and the snow of winter. They talked about life and loss and for a while my father was not so alone.

After my parents married and my oldest brother was born my father called Mr. Einstein, now well into his 90's and asked if he could meet his new wife and child. Mr. Einstein agreed, but said that in view of his age my father would have to come to him. My father writes:

"The journey was long and complicated. His home, by car, was fully twenty minutes away. I drove in tears as I realized what he had done. He had walked for an hour to my home so that I would not have to be alone each morning... By the simplest of gestures, the act of caring, he took a frightened child and he led him with confidence and with faith back into life."