

A close-up photograph of several hands being held together in a supportive grip. The hands are of different ages and skin tones, suggesting a multi-generational group. The background is blurred, showing colorful patterns. The text "Ethical Will" is overlaid in white on the bottom left of the image.

# Ethical Will

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

## What is an Ethical Will?

An ethical will is called a tzava'a in Hebrew. Think of it as ethical and emotional estate planning. Some read the book of Deuteronomy as Moses' ethical will or farewell speech to the Israelites, where he reviews their history together, teaches some laws in preparation for when he is no longer their leader, and gives them general advice.

Throughout history, some people left ethical wills because they didn't have anything of real material value to pass on to the next generation apart from their wisdom. An ethical will is more formal than a legacy letter. It is often attached to a will or estate document so that those who come after us will have pieces of the wisdom and experience we've learned throughout our life.

**Ethical Wills usually answer three central questions:**

- Do those closest to me know my burial wishes?
- Do those I care about know what is most important to me and what I've learned through experience?
- Have I said everything that I need to say to my family and friends?



## An Ethical Will Structure

Below you will find some ideas for structuring your ethical will. This task might seem daunting, so you may find it helpful to complete it one section at a time.



### Personal Information

- Favorite photo of yourself and the story behind it
- Your personal story/history
- Transformative events in your life
- Historical events that you lived through that shaped the way you think and act
- Objects of significance that tell a piece of your life story



### Personal Happiness and Satisfaction

- Most impactful quote
- Places of significance to you and why
- Small things that have brought you happiness
- Favorite or important rituals
- Relationship with G-d
- Why the Jewish people and our future matters to you



## The Role of Others

- Enumerate what you love about each person who is significant in your life
- Thank and acknowledge what each of those people has brought you
- What you learned from your parents
- What your children taught you
- Thoughts on family



## Life Advice

- Spiritual values or rules you live by
- Your life advice about friendship
- Your life advice about love/marriage
- Your life advice about work
- Your life advice about education/knowledge



## Finances

- Most important charitable causes and why
- Why you decided to take the Jewish Future Promise
- How you used money to make a difference
- Your life advice about money



## Forgiveness

- Mistakes and regrets
- Asking for forgiveness generally or from certain individuals
- Granting forgiveness generally or to certain individuals

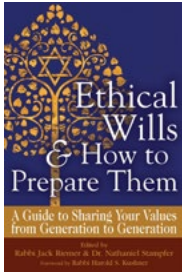


## Burial Requests

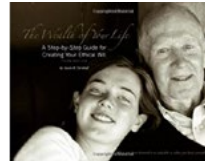
- Type of burial
- Location of burial
- Requested speakers at the funeral
- Requested rituals at the funeral, including prayer, poems and songs to be included.

# More Resources

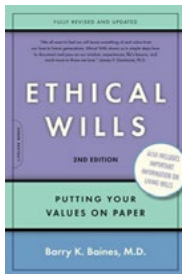
## Books to help you write an ethical will



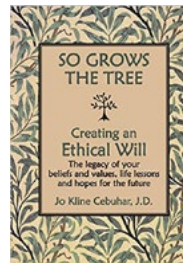
**Ethical Wills & How to Prepare Them: A Guide to Sharing Your Values from Generation to Generation**  
by Rabbi Jack Riemer, Dr. Nathaniel Stampfer



**The Wealth of Your Life: A Step-by-Step Guide for Creating Your Ethical Will**  
Spiral-bound  
by Susan B. Turnbull



**Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper**  
by Barry K. Baines



**So Grows The Tree – Creating an Ethical Will: The legacy of your beliefs and values, life lessons and hopes for the future**  
Kindle Edition by  
Jo Kline Cebuhar

## Articles

- <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/writing-an-ethical-will-how-to-get-started>
- <https://www.everplans.com/articles/how-to-write-an-ethical-will>
- <https://www.nextavenue.org/ethical-will>