

## **Notice of Passing Notification Letters: “*Ta’aziya*,” According to the Tradition of Northern Yemenite Jewry**

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In Yemenite communities there were those who would announce the death of an important person by sending a letter of condolence, called a *Ta’aziya*, to all the acquaintances of the deceased in towns near and far. To the nearer towns the notification letter would arrive during the *shiva*-the period of the seven days of mourning, and to the further towns, after that period.

This article will focus on the “letters of passing” of Northern Yemenite Jews, since in that area there was a more widespread custom to send them. The letters were sent by messengers from the community of the deceased, to communities listed in the letters, where relatives and acquaintances lived.

This article will discuss ten of these “letters of passing” from the twentieth century, accompanied by a discussion regarding the structure of the letters and their content, while also detailing their wording and language. Eight of the letters describe the passing of men, and two of the passing of women, this is probably due to their special status.

The writers of the letters used various stylistic methods to enhance the feelings of sadness. After accepting the justness of the Divine decree which was accompanied by verses from Scripture, the letter continued with words of lamentation regarding the deceased as well as describing his virtues. It went on to list the names of the communities and the recipients to whom the letter was sent. This was followed by the name of the deceased’s community accompanied by listing the names of the senders, meaning the community and the family which was sending the letter, who were the relatives and friends of the deceased. The letter continued with a prayer and possibly a request in the merit of the deceased. It closed with verses of consolation, and then listed the date of passing. The letter was read in each of the communities which were listed within, and afterwards it was transferred to the next community on the list.

The letters also enlighten us regarding the specific protocol which the Jews of Northern Yemen had developed for themselves in the religious-communal area.

Through these aforementioned letters we are given a glimpse into the community and history of northern Yemenite Jewry, and to the names of rabbis and important public figures, whose names were hitherto erased from the pages of history.