When Elizabeth (Wyner) Mark went to Israel as a civilian volunteer in the Israeli army during the 1991 Gulf War, few were surprised that she would happily do kitchen patrol chores and other dirty work to replace soldiers going into combat.

"She helped people and wanted to make a better world," said her husband of 55 years, Melvin Mark, retired dean of engineering and provost at Northeastern University. He said she had always been a woman of many causes, a champion of the underdog, and was all about connecting with people.

A clinical psychologist and Judaic scholar, Dr. Mark died Dec. 29 at Tippett House, a hospice residence in Needham, after a long battle with cancer. She was 75 and lived in the Waban section of Newton for 55 years.

In 1985, Dr. Mark joined the Reconstructionist Havurah of Greater Boston, a small congregation now known as Shir Hadash, "and immersed herself in Jewish learning," her husband said. She had known "very little about Judaism" when she joined the congregation, said her son, Jonathan, of Alexandria, Va., but through study she became a religious leader of Shir Hadash. She officiated at many of its ceremonies and took part in its growth. She studied with rabbis and with David Gordis, president of Hebrew College in Newton Center, he said.
In Shir Hadash, Dr. Mark was "a leader and teacher to many people," said member Naomi Myrvaagnes in a eulogy. "Single-handedly, for years, even while in the throes of grueling chemotherapy, she organized weekly Shabbat services, constantly adding new people.

"As a rabbinic figure at High Holy Days, she made ancient concepts and rituals meaningful to a large annual gathering of the Shir Hadash members and guests. She presided at more than a score of bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies. She motivated the young people to cherish their heritage."

Dr. Mark also took part in a group that met with Gordis Sunday mornings to study the Talmud. She brought a unique perspective to this group, Gordis said, stemming from her background in psychotherapy and feminism, as well as from "her strong moral fiber and original and creative way of looking at things."

"She articulated not only how the text spoke to her, but what she was bringing to the text," he said.

Dr. Mark was also active in the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University, where Shulamit Reinharz, the center's founder, described her as "one of the most creative thinkers with regard to Jewish texts."

Dr. Mark was a board member of the Americans for Peace Now movement, headquartered in Washington, and traveled to Israel with the group several years ago.

"We talked with both Israelis and Palestinians," said Debra DeLee, president of the American branch of the Israeli Peace Movement. "In addition to her spirituality, Elizabeth had a wonderful sense of humor. When you have a large board discussing serious issues, she was able to break the angst so we could take a deep breath and start over again."

She was born in Brookline, daughter of Rudolph and Sarah (Goldberg) Wyner. Her father founded Shawmut Woolen Mills in Stoughton. When she was growing up in the 1930s, Dr. Mark's brother, Justin Wyner of Boston, recalled her riding in the sidecar of his tricycle. "She was the spitting image of Shirley Temple," he recalled, referring to the curly-haired child star of that era. "In those days she looked up to her older brother, and in later life I looked up to her."

After attending the Runkle School in Brookline and Beaver Country Day School, she enrolled at Radcliffe College. While there, she met Harvard graduate student Melvin Mark. They were married in her senior year. When she graduated from Radcliffe, Mark said, the job placement officer there suggested that she "go to Katherine Gibbs [School] and become a secretary or go home and have babies."

She chose the latter, but also worked on her master's and doctoral degrees while raising three sons. With a master's degree from Northeastern University, Dr. Mark went to Boston College for her doctoral degree, riding her bike there
from home. She earned her doctorate in 1976 and started her 30-year practice in psychotherapy in Newton Center.

She served as an instructor in psychology at Harvard Medical School and as clinical supervisor at McLean Hospital in Belmont. For about a decade, she served on the ethics committee of the Massachusetts Psychological Association and was given its special recognition award "for contributions to the enhancement of psychology as a science and as a profession."

She also became involved with causes unrelated to her profession. "Elizabeth's life did not revolve only around family and home," Rabbi Sue Fendrick of Brandeis, said in a eulogy. "She was vehemently against the war in Vietnam, supported environmental causes and the civil rights movement, and got involved in feminism... Elizabeth was a woman who knew perfectly well how to be proper and appropriate, but she also knew, in the most constructive way possible, how to raise hell."

She had been ill for so long, said another son, Peter of Newton, that she "planned her own funeral."

In October, on the day before her last hospitalization, his mother took part with her children and grandchildren in a walk in Dorchester to raise funds for pancreatic cancer research, he said. "Mother was so energized," he said, "she ended up walking 3 miles."

Besides her husband, her two sons, and her brother, Dr. Mark leaves another son, David of Sharon, and six grandchildren.

Services have been held. Congregation Shir Hadash will dedicate part of its service at 9:45 a.m. on Feb. 3 in remembrance of Dr. Mark at its quarters at the Lutheran Church of Newton Center.

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