



When A Loved One Dies

Death and Mourning Customs

In Judaism, the funeral is an opportunity to show final respect for the dead, and for the community to gather around the bereaved to comfort them. Many laws and customs govern the process of death, burial and mourning. The Jewish rituals for mourning combine honoring the deceased, with deep wisdom about the process of grieving. They help us honor the dead, reflect on the meaning of this unique life, pray, and bring some measure of comfort to the living.

When a Death Occurs:

Call the Chevra Kadisha, (“holy society”) the first to be notified of a death. It is a loosely structured organization of Jewish men and women who ensure that the bodies of Jews are prepared for burial according to Halacha (Jewish law) and are protected from desecration, willful or not, until burial. Two of the main requirements are the showing of proper respect and the ritual cleansing and subsequent dressing of the body. The body is dressed in traditional burial shrouds, tachrichim, which are simple white garments.

Eph Mazer.....Co-Chair Chevra Kadisha..... 967-5733, 870-1112

Micky Rubenstein.....Co-Chair Chevra Kadisha..... 967-4679

Once Chevra Kadisha has prepared the body, John-Ridouts Funeral Home will transport the body for further care and will deliver it to either the funeral or grave-site, depending on the family’s plans. The family will receive a bill from Chevra Kadisha covering the costs of preparation and dressing.

Call the Executive Director to discuss funeral arrangements 933-2740. If after hours, please contact Bob Greenberg, cell # 365-6351. He will contact Rabbi Stephen Slater and help set up a time to meet with the family prior to the funeral. If death occurs in a hospital, the hospital staff may help make the call. If funeral prearrangements have not been made, it might be helpful to ask someone, perhaps a close friend or family member, to help make decisions and arrangements. We will need information from you so we can notify the congregation of funeral plans.

Cemetery Plots. To confirm ownership deed and location, to purchase cemetery plots, and to assist in arrangements for opening the grave, contact our wonderful volunteers. For Elmwood Cemetery, contact David Reznik at 322-4746 or 967-7208, and for the Beth-El/Kneseth Israel Cemetery, contact David Kimerling at 410-6900 or 879-0505. Please note that Temple Beth-El clergy may not officiate at the funeral of someone who will be entombed in a mausoleum.

Meet with staff at Johns-Ridout's Funeral Parlor-Southside. Our tradition has long stood for simplicity in funerals and mourning. Temple Beth-El has arranged with Johns-Ridout's Funeral Parlor-Southside for simple standard funerals at reasonable costs. Beautiful but simple wooden Kosher caskets are used when funerals take place under the auspices of Temple Beth-El. (Cremation is strongly discouraged as it is not in keeping with Jewish tradition. Temple Beth-El clergy may not officiate at the funeral of someone who has chosen to be cremated.)

Set the time and place of the funeral in conjunction with the Executive Director, the Rabbi and the Chevra Kadisha. Although our tradition encourages having the funeral as soon as possible after death occurs, there are times when a delay is proper. You may ask that the service be held at graveside, in the chapel at Johns-Ridout's Funeral Parlor-Southside or in the main sanctuary or chapel at Temple Beth-El. Determine with the Rabbi the best plan for the service. See pages 125 for information about burial at Elmwood Cemetery.

Meet with the Rabbi. Members of the immediate family gather information (including the Hebrew name), and stories for the preparation of a eulogy. We will set this meeting as soon as the funeral time and place are set. We will at this time also determine plans for Shiva. There should be enough time for a leisurely talk with the rabbi, so ideally this would happen on the evening preceding the funeral.

Choose six people to serve as pall bearers to carry the casket. Although it is customary not to choose immediate family members, they may be chosen if needed. You may choose others as you wish to serve as honorary pallbearers. Non-Jews may also be chosen for this honor.

The funeral home will assist you in preparing and submitting the obituary if you like, but you may also write it yourself or have a close friend or relative prepare it. Items to consider including are: age, place of birth, occupation, college degrees, membership in organizations, military service or noteworthy achievements. The time and place of the funeral should be provided as well. Suggest where memorial contributions may be made. You may also want to include a photograph of your loved one. Cost of an obituary is priced by the inch by the newspaper so be aware of the length when you are preparing the obituary.

Temple Beth-El will also send an email to the congregational e-mail list. Provide the Temple office with information to be included in the email announcement. You should be given a chance to review the email before it is distributed.

As a general rule, **Jewish tradition does not allow autopsies.** However, there are times when an autopsy might be required by law or is needed for other reasons. Each case must be reviewed independently. You may consult the Rabbi for further information. Jewish tradition discourages embalming except in rare circumstances at which time it might be required by law. The Funeral Director can help determine if embalming is required.

Flowers are not part of Jewish mourning practice. In the spirit of honoring the memory of the deceased by helping the living, suggest in the obituary that in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to Temple Beth-El or an appropriate charity. If flowers are sent, they should be shared

with the living. Consider giving them to a local hospital or other institution where they could give some joy to others.

Before the funeral service begins, the first formal act of mourning takes place. This act is known as *keriah*, the tearing of clothing as an act of mourning, or alternatively the tearing of a ribbon that is pinned to the clothing. For parents, the ribbon is worn on the left side. For all others, the ribbon is worn on the right side. *Keriah* is a centuries old custom externalizing the mourner's sense of grief and loss. The Mourners stand as this ritual is performed to show that grief is faced directly. First, the Rabbi helps the mourners recite a blessing and then the ribbon is torn. The torn clothing or ribbon is worn during Shiva, except on Shabbat.

The funeral service should ideally be held in the Chapel or Sanctuary of Temple Beth El. While it may be held at the graveside it is hard to hear each other, and the weather is frequently uncomfortable. It may also be held in the Chapel at Johns-Ridout's Funeral Parlor-Southside. In the meeting with the funeral home, the family will need to make a decision about the location of the service. Generally, the funeral service is brief. Selections are read from Psalms and a eulogy is presented. Extended family members are encouraged to participate through reading a Psalm. If a family member or a friend would like to offer some remarks, please consult and discuss with the Rabbi prior to the service.

After the casket is lowered, interment is begun by shoveling some earth into the grave. This mitzvah is known as *chesed shel emet* true loving-kindness. This mitzvah demonstrates our continuing concern for the deceased as we make sure the final journey is completed. Although this practice may at first seem uncomfortable, it is actually based on much wisdom. For the bereaved, the sound of the earth on the casket has an undeniable finality that may help them accept the reality of their loved one's death. At the conclusion of the funeral service, all are invited to participate in this holy act. Using the back of the shovel, we place three spades (or handfuls) of earth on the casket. Rather than passing it from hand to hand, we return the shovel into the earth.

There is not a definite rule about children's attendance at funerals. If a child is old enough to remember a relationship with the deceased, that child should be considered for attendance. The child should sit with an adult that he or she knows during the service. Children also need the opportunity to say "goodbye" to a loved one. A child who is old enough should be given an opportunity to say farewell and begin the grieving process. A child should NEVER be forced to look at, interact or touch the casket or the grave. Let the child do what she or he is comfortable with and maybe discuss it with an adult later.

Mourning, the period of time between death and burial, is called *anninut* and the bereaved is called an *onen*. The prime responsibility of the *onen* is to make funeral arrangements. During this time, an *onen* is exempt from positive religious obligations. As such, prayer is not obligatory at this time. However, an *onen* who finds it helpful to express feelings through prayers may do so. Only relatives or very close friends should visit during this time, primarily to help make arrangements for the funeral and Shiva. No one should offer condolences until after the funeral.

After the funeral, a mourner is known as an *aveil*. One is a mourner by obligation for parents, children, siblings or spouse. However, anyone is allowed to observe the mourning rites.

Immediately after the funeral service at the cemetery, a lay volunteer will conduct a Mincha (afternoon) service at the Shiva house. At this time, the formal rites of consolation begin. There is an important custom to rinse one's hands with water after leaving a cemetery. A pitcher of water and paper towels is usually made available as one enters the Shiva house. Once inside, the seven day "shiva candle" is lit. Next the Rabbi or Lay Volunteer will conduct a Mincha (afternoon) service at the Shiva house.

Following the Mincha service, the *seudat havra'ah*, the meal of consolation, is served. The meal is provided by friends and neighbors to relieve the bereaved of the need to prepare food. The meal customarily includes hard-boiled eggs, bagels or lentils. The atmosphere in the Shiva house should be one of respect and appropriateness. The guests should allow the family to speak first. People should reminisce, tell stories, even appropriate telling jokes. Deference should be shown to family and friends who would like to share stories of the life of the deceased. The Temple Beth-El Chesed Committee is honored to deliver a special cake to the Shiva house.

Shiva, the first week following burial, is a period of initial adjustment to the death of a loved one. There is a strong preference that the family hold a Shiva. Some families have been skipping shiva, and this is unfortunate, as this period of intensive grieving, is often the most helpful for people. This time, focused on sharing of stories and re-igniting of relationships is one of the most effective practices that Judaism can offer to the bereaved. The many customs and laws defining Shiva, are all designed to assist the bereaved through the most difficult stage of mourning. Traditionally during this period of five and two partial days, the mourners do not leave the house but are sheltered from everyday concerns by friends and relatives who come to visit. Visiting during Shiva is considered an important mitzvah. During Shiva, friends, relatives and neighbors bring food to the mourners, console and bring comfort to them in their grief. Those "sitting Shiva" sit on low stools or the floor, rather than regular chairs, as an bodily expression of their grief. Mourners do not focus on their external appearances. Hence using cosmetics, shaving or cutting hair are forbidden. Mourners do not engage in sexual relations. They do not drink wine or eat meat. They do not wear freshly laundered clothing, nor wear leather shoes. While not required, there is a tradition that mirrors should be turned to the wall or covered with white sheets to prevent anyone from an act of vanity. The Shiva period lasts for seven days. Counting the partial days, the day of the funeral is counted on the first day. On the seventh day it is only necessary to sit for one hour in the morning. Shiva is suspended before Shabbat, beginning at 1:00 p.m. Friday afternoon and is resumed after Shabbat is over. If a major holiday, such as Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur falls during the Shiva period, Shiva is concluded at 1:00 p.m. on the eve of the festival. If you are unable to sit the full seven days, and wish to do so, you may consult with the Rabbi about alternative practices.

Following the initial afternoon service at the Shiva house, it is common that mourners and friends attend daily morning and evening services at Temple Beth-El and to recite Kaddish. This has become the practice to ensure that there is always a daily minyan at Temple Beth-El. The service schedule is on page 6 and the minyan schedule is on page 13.

If a family desires to hold services at a Shiva house, Temple Beth-El will provide siddurim and kippot. However, family members or friends are responsible for making up the ten Jewish adults needed for the quorum. During Shiva, mourners attend Shabbat services at the Synagogue. The name of the deceased is announced from the bimah during the Shabbat following burial.

With the conclusion of Shiva, a period of mourning called shloshim begins and continues until the thirtieth day after death. Mourning for spouses, children and siblings ends after thirty days; when the deceased is a parent, the state of mourning lasts for eleven months. During shloshim, the mourner returns to work and everyday life but refrains from attending festive gatherings such as weddings or parties where there will be live music. Mourners are also prohibited from visiting the grave of the deceased because, we are a religion of life and not death and we don't want to make a grave a place of regular pilgrimage. Consult the Rabbi if you feel you must visit the grave.

Anyone who feels close to the deceased may wish to say kaddish. While the mourning period is for a full year, kaddish is only recited for eleven months and a day. You are invited to attend services morning and evening at Temple Beth-El. Efforts should be made to say kaddish as often as possible. The obligation to say kaddish should not be transferred to another person.

A formal unveiling service is not required. If a dedication is desired, it may be led by a friend, family member, or when necessary by the Beth-El clergy. The Temple will provide you with appropriate prayers and readings which can be recited at the graveside. The information is also available online at www.templebeth-el.net. A monument may be unveiled at any time after Shloshim (thirty days). One may also participate in a Yizkor observance if it occurs after the end of the first thirty day period.