

Guide to the
Jewish Funeral
Congregation Beth Emeth
12523 Lawyers Road Herndon, VA 20171

INTRODUCTION

The Jewish way of dealing with death is one part of a larger philosophy of life in which all people are viewed with dignity and respect. Our people believe that, even after death, the body, which once held a holy human life, retains its sanctity. Our sages have compared the sacredness of the deceased to that of an impaired Torah scroll, which although no longer usable, still retains its holiness. In Jewish tradition, therefore, the greatest consideration and respect is accorded the dead.

Jewish law and tradition have endowed funeral and mourning practices with profound religious significance. To this end, Jewish funerals avoid ostentation; family and visitors reflect in dress and deportment the solemnity of the occasion; flowers and music are inappropriate, embalming and viewing are avoided; and interment takes place as soon as possible after death.

Funerary customs are traditionally supervised in Jewish communities by a chevra kadisha, a holy society, comprised of volunteers to aid the bereaved and to ensure that appropriate practices are followed.

Assisting in the preparation and burial of the body is a highly-valued mitzvah. It is a chesed shel emet, a true act of kindness performed without ulterior motive, for the dead cannot repay this service.

WHEN DEATH OCCURS

Contact the Rabbi or the Synagogue Office first:

- 703-860-4515 (*days*)
- (703) 798-5368 (*Rabbi Mina—Cell*)

The rabbi, synagogue staff and Ritual Committee are prepared to assist and advise you in making all necessary arrangements.

When a member of a community dies, it is the community's responsibility to lovingly assist the deceased's family in this final act of respect. In this spirit, Congregation Beth Emeth has prepared this basic guide to provide essential information concerning Jewish death, funeral and mourning practices.

FUNERAL PRACTICES AT CONGREGATION BETH EMETH

We want every synagogue member family to know that our congregation is prepared to assist in a variety of ways:

- The rabbi is available to assist all members when death occurs. The congregation's staff and leadership are able to contact the Rabbi (or an alternate if the Rabbi is unavailable) at all times. The Rabbi should be contacted prior to contacting a funeral home or making other funeral commitments in order to counsel the bereaved family concerning traditional Jewish practices.
- Congregation Beth Emeth is part of a consortium that has contracted with Jefferson Funeral Home, 703-971-7400, for the conduct of authentically Jewish funerals

at a predetermined cost.

At present, we do not have such a contract with other establishments for specified services at a predetermined cost. However, owners of other funeral homes have indicated that fully traditional services and equipment are available if requested by families.

- Congregation Beth Emeth welcomes family members to hold funerals in the sanctuary. The Synagogue staff will assist the family in making arrangements.
- The rabbi can assist families in making arrangements with a funeral home and advise them concerning traditional practices and requirements.

Funeral Arrangements

Jewish tradition suggests that burial take place as quickly as possible. Burial may be delayed for a variety of reasons, and is not to be held on Shabbat or another holy day. In any case, it should not be delayed longer than necessary. Please consult the rabbi for guidance. In any event, it should be borne in mind that it is inappropriate to make funeral arrangements on Shabbat.

SHMIRA - WATCHING THE BODY

According to Jewish tradition the deceased is not to be left alone prior to burial. During shmira psalms or other meditative prayers are read. It is preferable that shomrim (guardians) be members of the family, or friends of the deceased.

AUTOPSIES

The practice of routine autopsy is contrary to Jewish law, since it is viewed as a desecration of the body. In cases when an autopsy is recommended, or where an autopsy is required by law, the rabbi should be contacted for guidance.

ORGAN DONATIONS

Though organ donation is viewed by some as involving some desecration of the body,

Conservative Judaism views it as an example of k'vod ha-met, bringing healing to the living. Thus, it not only permissible but commendable to donate organs or tissues.

TAHARA - RITUAL CLEANSING

According to Jewish law the deceased is cleansed according to a prescribed ritual as an expression of respect. A group of specially trained persons, called a chevra kadisha (holy society), is available to perform this mitzvah.

TACHRICHIM - SHROUD AND BURIAL ATTIRE

Jewish tradition prescribes burial in plain white garments (tachrichim) to demonstrate the equality of all. In addition, it is customary for Jews to be buried wearing a kipa and talit.

EMBALMING

According to Jewish tradition, embalming and the use of cosmetics on the deceased are not permitted. Embalming is not required by civil law, except in certain cases.

CREMATION

Cremation is not traditional.

ARON - COFFIN

In order to avoid interference with the natural process of "returning to the earth", Jewish

tradition requires that a coffin be made entirely of wood, without nails or metal decoration.

The Funeral

K'RIA - RENDING OF GARMENTS

Mourners for parents, spouses, children and siblings traditionally participate in the rite of k'ria (rending of garments) usually just prior to the funeral service. This rite consists of tearing a visible portion of clothing or a black ribbon. The torn garment is worn throughout the 30-day mourning period (shloshim) except on Shabbat.

FUNERAL SERVICES

Funeral services may be held in the synagogue, in a funeral home, or at the gravesite. The funeral service is usually brief and simple. It usually includes the chanting of psalms and Eil Malei Rachamim (the traditional memorial prayer), and a hesped (eulogy) honoring the deceased.

PALL AND PALLBEARERS

At a funeral the coffin is often covered with an especially-prepared cloth called a pall, and is borne from the funeral service to the burial by family or friends (pallbearers) selected by the mourners.

CONDOLENCE CALLS

During the period from death until burial the mourner (called an onen during this period) is exempt from performing all religious duties. Condolence calls should be made after the funeral during the shiva week except on Shabbat.

KOHANIM - PRIESTS

There are many special provisions related to the attendance of kohanim at a funeral. For details, consult the rabbi.

VIEWING THE REMAINS

Public viewings are contrary to Jewish tradition.

FLOWERS

Flowers are not appropriate. Friends and associates of the deceased who wish to show some concrete expression of condolence should be encouraged to contribute to a charity which was of importance to the deceased.

Burial

CARRYING THE COFFIN

The pallbearers may stop several times while carrying the coffin to the grave. The coffin precedes the mourners, family and friends as a mark of respect.

K'VURA - BURIAL

In traditional practice, the coffin is lowered into the ground and the grave then symbolically filled. The kaddish is recited at the grave after k'vura.

LEAVING THE CEMETERY

It is customary for the mourners to pass between two rows of the others in attendance to receive traditional expressions of consolation. After burial, it is also traditional to wash one's hands after leaving the cemetery or before entering the house of mourning. This washing is an affirmation of life after involvement with death.

Periods of Mourning

SHIVA - THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS

Shiva is the seven-day period of intensive mourning observed by the immediate family of the deceased beginning on the day of burial. The mourners include anyone whose parent, spouse, child, or sibling has died. During the shiva period mourners are encouraged to stay away from work or school, to remain at home, and to contemplate the meaning of life and the manner in which adjustment will be made to the death of the beloved.

Public mourning observances are suspended on Shabbat in view of the belief that the sanctity and serenity of this day supersedes personal grief. Mourners are permitted, indeed encouraged, to attend Shabbat services; but they are not given an aliyah, do not conduct the services, and the k'ria is not displayed publicly. A major festival terminates shiva (for details consult the rabbi). Since Judaism teaches that the feeling of loss of a human life is not limited to the deceased's family alone, but is shared by the entire community, it is customary at our synagogue for the name of the deceased to be read at a Shabbat service after the funeral.

It is customary for family and friends to arrange for a condolence meal (which traditionally includes round foods such as eggs) to be served to the mourners at the house of mourning when they return from the cemetery. The mourners should not serve as hosts or otherwise entertain their visitors.

It is customary, as symbols of mourning, for the mirrors in the shiva home to be covered, and for mourners to sit on low chairs, for a seven-day memorial candle to be kindled, and for the mourners to refrain from wearing leather shoes and from shaving. It is also customary for there to be minyanim in the shiva home.

SHLOSHIM - THE FIRST THIRTY DAYS

During the thirty days following burial (except shiva) mourners return to work and normal activities, but refrain from public entertainment or social activities. The k'ria is customarily worn during shloshim, and mourners attend synagogue services to recite kaddish.

SHANNA - THE FIRST YEAR

Mourners for deceased parents continue to attend services to recite kaddish for eleven months.

Yahrzeit - Anniversary of Death

The kaddish is recited each year on the anniversary of death (not burial).

Yizkor - Memorial Prayers

Yizkor prayers are recited on Yom Kippur, Sh'mini Atzeret, Pesach and Shavuot and should be recited beginning with the first Holy Day after death.

MITZVAH OPPORTUNITIES

Our Caring Committee is most eager to add concerned and interested volunteers to its subcommittee on condolence meals. Please contact the synagogue office to volunteer.

PRE-PLANNING FORM

The time of bereavement is not the ideal time to make many of the decisions which survivors must face. An earlier preparation of a will is the first step to relieve such anxiety and anguish. Advance purchase of gravesites is another important step. The following is offered as a guide to a few key items to form a minimal source of information to help the survivors make necessary arrangements. We encourage you to fill out the form below, and to keep it together with this guide in a well-identified location.

FULL NAMES: English		FULL NAMES: Hebrew	
Father		Father	
Mother		Mother	
		Location	Acct #
Social Security		Bank Accounts	
Numbers		Checking	
Cards are kept		Savings	
		Other	
Birth Certificate		Investments	
Date of birth		Company	
Location of birth		Securities	
Certificate is kept		Name	
Legal Advisor		Real Estate	
Name		Located at	
Contact		Documents	
Phone			
Will is kept		Military Service	
Life Insurance		Branch	
Company		Dates	
Agent		Service no.	
Phone		VA Claim no.	
Policy Numbers		Government Insurance No	
Policies are kept		Discharge kept at	
Health and Accident		Cemetery Property	
Company		Name	
Agent		Deed Number	
Phone		Location	
Policy Numbers		No. of spaces	
Policies are kept		Funeral Home	
Safe Deposit Box:		Funeral Practices Comm. Contract	
Location		Other choice	
Number		Letter on file	

