

## Attending a Jewish funeral (burial)

Those attending a Jewish funeral might find the following notes useful. These notes refer to the practice of Progressive (Reform or Liberal) Jews, which is different in some respects from the customs of the Orthodox community.

On arrival at the cemetery men are expected to cover their heads. The traditional head covering (*kippah*) is fine for indoors but often needs securing (with a hair clip) for outside. A suitable hat or cap (not a baseball cap) is preferred by some men, especially on a windy day. Women are not obligated to wear anything on their heads, but some will choose to do so.

Jewish cemeteries can be quite muddy in wet weather and some people change from shoes to boots before leaving the car park. This is quite acceptable, but if you prefer, it is a good idea to bring a second pair of shoes and a bag to contain any muddy shoes.

Everyone gathers outside the prayer hall until the service is about to begin. The coffin should already be in the prayer hall. Jewish tradition requires a plain, simple closed coffin, usually covered with a black cloth.

The service is short, mostly in Hebrew, with the congregation standing. If you need to sit for health reasons please use the seats. The service includes a eulogy for the deceased. In the Orthodox tradition men and women stand separately, but at a Progressive funeral all stand together.

After the service the coffin is transported to the grave and everyone follows, pausing briefly at the entrance to the 'grounds' for a short prayer.

The coffin is lowered into the grave with an accompanying prayer. All may then help to fill the grave – a sign of respect for the deceased – and it is traditional to place your spade back in the earth rather than hand it to the next person. Participation in this part of the proceedings is not mandatory.

Everyone returns to the prayer hall, washing hands before re-entering the hall.

Once back in the hall there may be an announcement about returning to the house family home after the service and details of any evening prayers that may be held during *shiva* (the first week of mourning). The service concludes with a few more prayers including *kaddish* (the mourners' prayer) and then everyone lines up to offer condolences to the mourners\* (customarily seated on low chairs) with one of two traditional phrases. Most people use the expression 'I wish you long life'. The Rabbi (or lay person leading the service) will use the more formal, 'May God comfort you amongst all who mourn.'

If you have questions, please ask the Rabbi or service leader. They will be happy to explain and interpret.

Flowers are not part of a Jewish funeral. In recent years they have started to appear at cremations, but are almost never seen at a funeral. Charitable donations are also not requested at this time. A memorial fund may be started at a later date.

\*Mourners, in Jewish tradition, include parents, spouse, children and siblings of the deceased who have Jewish status.

[With thanks to Philip Barnett for drafting these notes].