



CONGREGATION  
**BETH AHABAH**

## **A JEWISH GUIDE TO FUNERAL AND MOURNING CUSTOMS**

### INTRODUCTION

At no other time do we reach out more for wisdom, comfort and guidance from Jewish tradition than when we are confronted by death. So many emotions, some predictable, others unexpected, well up inside of us with a disorienting intensity. Even when the arrival of death is a relief from prolonged suffering or we thought we had prepared ourselves for the inevitable, we discover that the well of grief is deeper than we imagined.

We Jews have a very distinctive approach to death, dying and bereavement. Judaism teaches that death is a natural part of life and something that reveals the preciousness of life. With its customs and practices, it helps us accept the finality of death in a healthy way. It encourages us to confront the reality of death and provides a structure with which to heal and find wholeness again. It gives us space to experience the full brunt of our grief and then nudges us carefully, patiently back into our everyday world. It shows us how to honor the memory of our loved one and how to act in the shadow of our loss when we feel so alone and so many eyes are watching us.

This booklet is designed to help us answer questions and provide information about Jewish customs, practices and beliefs. The booklet is meant as a guide, not as the final word. It will not make death or coping with death easier. It will provide knowledge, which can be very helpful when the time comes for us to face this difficult period in life.

We also hope it will encourage thoughtful conversation with family and loved ones. Our doors are always open, too.

## PLANNING AHEAD

### WILLS

It is critical for people to prepare a will. It provides for the orderly distribution of one's assets and other special arrangements for one's family. It also assists one's loved ones in making important decisions at a difficult, painful and confusing time in their lives. The absence of a will can unnecessarily complicate their lives and may undermine one's plans and intentions. The size of one's estate has little bearing on the need for a will, and the advice of an attorney can provide guidance for making sure all of the details are properly considered.

In addition to making a will, one should prepare a list with the location of important documents and information about other essential matters.

It is preferable to make requests about funeral arrangements in a separate document and to make the existence and location of such requests known to a family member or lawyer. People may deposit their requests at the Temple, which will keep them on file and open them only at the appropriate time. When information about funeral requests is contained in a will, it may go unheeded because wills are often read after the funeral.

### ETHICAL WILLS

Besides bequeathing a material legacy, some people also pass on a spiritual and moral legacy in the form of an ethical will. In Judaism, the custom of expressing a lifetime of accumulated wisdom and ethical values, especially to one's children, dates to the early Middle Ages.

### LIVING WILLS AND ADVANCED MEDICAL DIRECTIVES

Jewish tradition encourages people to make known to their family, physician, lawyer and Rabbi their wishes concerning medical decisions in situations when they are unable to make them for themselves. At the same time Judaism insists that we actively pursue medical treatment, it also recognizes the challenges which can arise, especially at the end of life and with the use of modern medical technology. Most states have laws governing these situations so it is worthwhile to express one's wishes with the advice of an attorney.

In general, Judaism does not insist on prolonging life by artificial means when there is no hope for a cure and when it is interfering with the natural course of life and death. Judaism also prohibits actively hastening death by euthanasia. Balancing these two positions can be difficult, and the advice of one's physician and Rabbi can be helpful in finding the best course of action.

## **PLANNING AHEAD** *continued*

### PREARRANGEMENTS FOR FUNERAL AND BURIAL

While the conversation may be difficult, it is a good idea to discuss one's wishes concerning funeral and burial arrangements in advance. Many family members want to follow the wishes of their deceased loved ones, and prior discussion makes that possible. Discussions may include preferences about funeral homes, location of the funeral, burial site, and even the contents of the funeral service.

It is not unusual for people to purchase cemetery plots in advance. Most Beth Ahabah members are buried at the Hebrew Cemetery, the Temple's historic cemetery at 5th and Hospital Streets. Information about plots at Hebrew Cemetery is available from the Temple's Executive Director. There is no objection if burials occur in other cemeteries, but it is customary for Jews to be buried in Jewish cemeteries or sections of other cemeteries consecrated to Jewish burials.

Above ground burial, i.e. in a mausoleum, while not common, is permitted in Reform Judaism.

Some people also make funeral arrangements with a funeral home and pre-pay in advance. This may relieve some of the stress on family members at the time of death and ensures that most details will be carried out in accordance with the wishes of the deceased.

The Rabbi is available to discuss funeral arrangements as well, especially the funeral service.

### ORGAN DONATION

*Pekuach nefesh*, saving life, is the greatest mitzvah in Judaism. In keeping with that, Reform Judaism encourages organ donation. Some people choose to make arrangements about organ donation in advance, e.g. with a designation on one's driver's license; others make their wishes known to family members and let them make the decisions at the appropriate time.

### AUTOPSIES

While Jewish tradition objects, Reform Judaism permits autopsies. Autopsies may provide important medical information to surviving family members as well as add to the body of medical knowledge. Autopsies should be done when there is a legitimate medical reason.

### CREMATION

While Jewish law prohibits it, Reform Judaism permits cremation. Reform Judaism encourages the burial of cremated remains either in a cemetery or mausoleum with an appropriate committal ceremony.

## WHEN DEATH OCCURS

In Judaism, it is a mitzvah, called *bikkur cholim*, to visit and show kindness toward the sick. Families may understandably prefer greater privacy when a loved one approaches death, and people should honor their wishes. Even when visiting is difficult or impossible, people may express their feelings of support through messages of caring.

## UPON LEARNING OF DEATH

Judaism refers to this earliest stage of mourning, the period between death and the funeral, as “the time of tenderness” or *aninut* in Hebrew. The name suggests the distress felt by the family of the deceased and hints at the manner in which they should be treated. There is so much to do during this period and so little time in which to accomplish it that Judaism removes the family from all social obligations. It is one of the reasons why a viewing or organized visiting period are not Jewish customs and are strongly discouraged.

## PREPARING FOR THE FUNERAL

After notifying family members, the next step is planning the funeral. One begins this process by notifying both the funeral home, which arranges for the deceased to be transported to the funeral home, and the Temple. Often a hospital staff person will contact the funeral home. The funeral director or a family member contacts the Temple to arrange the day, time and location of the funeral. The Rabbi disseminates the information to the Executive Director. When the burial is at Hebrew Cemetery, the Temple office works with the funeral director to make the necessary arrangements.

The funeral and burial should take place quickly. Jewish tradition teaches that they should occur within one day although two and sometimes three days are customary. The reason for the delay is to permit distant relatives to arrive.

Jewish funerals are not held on Shabbat or Holy Days.

Most funerals consist of a service at the funeral home or, if the deceased is a Temple member, in the sanctuary or chapel at Beth Ahabah followed by an interment service at the cemetery. In some cases the entire funeral is held at the graveside.

## THE FUNERAL HOME

Planning the funeral usually involves a visit to the funeral home, which handles all of the funeral and burial arrangements except for the actual service. The person who is the next-of-kin and who is responsible for making the arrangements should always be accompanied by a family member or friend. The funeral home leads the family step-by-step through all of the details, including how to place an obituary in the newspaper. By law, the funeral home must explain all its services and charges.

## THE FUNERAL HOME *continued*

The funeral home prepares the body for most Reform funerals. Clothing should be simple and dignified. Some people wish to be buried in a *tallit*, or prayer shawl, and *kippah*, yarmulke or head covering, and with a pouch of earth from Israel. Upon request, the funeral director will instead contact the Jewish burial society, called the *chevra kadisha*, to arrange a traditional preparation that includes washing the body, wrapping it in a linen shroud, and staying with the body until the time of the funeral.

One of the more difficult tasks at the funeral home is choosing a casket. The most traditional casket is one made of pine without any metal, including nails. In any event, the casket should be plain and unadorned. Judaism teaches that we are all equal in death and the casket should facilitate, not hinder, our return to the earth.

Another Jewish teaching is that we are created in God's image. Altering the body by embalming or displaying it at a viewing or with an open casket at the funeral is considered disrespectful and therefore strongly discouraged.

A visitation before the funeral is also strongly discouraged. In Judaism, the time for people to express their condolences is after the funeral, during shiva.

## THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY

The Rabbi is available to assist family members with any of these decisions, explain Jewish practices and customs, and help family members decide how best to use Jewish tradition.

It is customary for the Rabbi to visit the family prior to the funeral to offer support and guidance, bring comfort, explain and plan the funeral service and interment, and answer questions.

The Rabbi is available to assist and provide support after the funeral as well.

## THE ROLE OF FRIENDS

Close friends may bring food and provide other assistance in accordance with the wishes of the family. The family should be able to spend their time preparing for the funeral and not be concerned with daily responsibilities. Friends should also be sensitive to the family's need for privacy and not impose any additional obligations on them.

## TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

Deaths affects everybody in the family, including children. It is important, therefore, to give children an opportunity to experience and express their grief in a healthy, safe manner. There is no single, right way to tell children about death. Much depends upon their age and maturity. The best course of action is usually for someone as close to them as possible, and in a familiar setting, to tell them about the death. The words should be gentle and honest. Remember that one's tone and attitude can communicate a great deal. It is good to be straightforward and use words like "dead" or "died." This will help children understand the reality of death. Avoid euphemisms like "Grandpa went away" or "Grandma is sleeping." Don't say things you, yourself, don't believe. Be a patient and good listener. Encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings; leave time for questions at this initial conversation, during the funeral and shiva periods, and even later.

In general, it is perfectly all right for children to attend the funeral. They shouldn't be forced but instead given an opportunity to hear what is involved so they can make their own decision. At all times during the funeral a very close family member, preferably a parent or grandparent, should be right next to them. At the cemetery it is permissible for children, if they are curious, to get a close-up look at the casket and grave.

The Rabbi, while not a substitute for a family member, is always willing to give advice and guidance to the adult who needs to talk with a child or to the children themselves.

## THE FUNERAL SERVICE

The funeral service is designed to honor the memory of the deceased and give comfort to those who are mourning. Through Psalms, prayers, poems, readings and a eulogy, the funeral affirms the holiness and meaningfulness of life. The *El Malei Rachamim* (see the Glossary at the end), recited or sung in Hebrew and English, is offered on behalf of the deceased. It is customary to recite the *Kaddish* only at the cemetery.

## THE EULOGY

It is a mitzvah to speak well of the dead. While not required, it is customary to include a eulogy, hesped in Hebrew, at the funeral. It is most often delivered by the Rabbi but anyone may give a eulogy. The Rabbi meets with the family prior to the funeral to plan the service and the eulogy. If the family wants someone in addition to or besides the Rabbi to give the eulogy, they should seek the Rabbi's advice at that meeting.

## MUSIC

Except for those prayers that are chanted, it is not customary to have music at a funeral.

## FLOWERS

Judaism teaches that everybody is equal in death. Because flowers were once seen as a symbol of wealth, Jewish tradition discouraged flowers at funerals. In keeping with the spirit of this custom, families who wish to have flowers should keep them simple and modest. They should encourage others who ask about sending flowers to make contributions of *tsedakah* instead.

## K'RIAH

Tearing one's clothing upon learning of someone's death is an ancient custom mentioned in the Bible. It symbolizes the pain and sadness of grief, the "tearing" of one's heart, as it were. Today, many people observe this tradition by wearing a black ribbon and putting a tear in it. In a private, brief ceremony before the funeral, the Rabbi places the ribbon on the outer garment of members of the deceased's immediate family, puts a tear in the ribbon, k'riah means "tearing" in Hebrew, and leads the family in a short prayer. Mourners wear the ribbon for different lengths of time, typically during shiva or for one month after the funeral. The ribbon is not worn on Shabbat.

## PALLBEARERS

It is a mitzvah to accompany or escort the casket. The family usually chooses six people to serve as pallbearers. Reform Judaism permits men and women to be pallbearers. Because the pallbearers actually carry the casket at certain times, they should be capable of bearing the weight. It is sensible to ask older friends or relatives to serve as honorary pallbearers. This allows them the honor of serving as pallbearers without endangering their health.

## CEMETERIES

Jewish cemeteries are consecrated ground where we are “gathered to our ancestors.” As such it is traditional for Jews to be buried in Jewish cemeteries or the Jewish section of community cemeteries. While not common, above ground burial in a mausoleum is acceptable. In the case of cremation, the ashes may be buried in a Jewish cemetery or placed in a niche in a Jewish mausoleum.

Beth Ahabah permits the burial of non-Jewish members of Jewish families at the Hebrew Cemetery as long as non-Jewish prayers are not recited and non-Jewish symbols are not displayed.

## THE INTERMENT SERVICE

The interment service includes a few prayers and the *Kaddish*. It is customary to lower the casket into the ground after the *Kaddish* and for the family and friends to place earth on the casket. This fulfills the *mitzvah* of burying the dead. Most people do this symbolically with one or two handfuls or shovelfuls of earth. Sometimes relatives or friends stay after the family has left the cemetery and either put in enough earth to cover the casket, fill the grave entirely, or wait until the cemetery workers have filled the grave.

## JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES

### RETURNING HOME FROM THE CEMETERY

It is customary for the mourners to return home after the funeral and share a meal of consolation together. Often the meal is prepared or arranged by friends as an act of love and caring for the mourners who now must face the future without the physical presence of their loved one.

There is a custom to wash one’s hands after leaving the cemetery, reflecting the practical need to wash away the earth from the cemetery and the symbolic awareness that the mourners have started a new phase of their lives. Some cemeteries have faucets for this purpose. More often there is a pitcher of water at the door of the family’s home for those who wish to observe this tradition.

### MEMORIAL CANDLE

Many families light a seven-day candle, provided by the funeral director, when they arrive home. There is no required liturgy or prayer associated with lighting the candle; it is lit simply as a tangible sign of mourning and left to burn until it goes out by itself. Some people recite a Psalm or even the *Kaddish* at the time of the lighting. The candle’s light is symbolic of many things. It symbolizes God’s presence in our lives at a time of spiritual darkness and loneliness. It symbolizes the life and joy that the deceased brought into the world while he or she was alive. Finally, it symbolizes hope that the deceased is free of pain and suffering and that we may come to healing from our sadness.

## SHIVA

Grieving is a process with many stages. Some are more intense than others, and they do not necessarily lead smoothly and predictably from one to the next. To help people through this difficult time in their lives, Judaism establishes several periods of mourning, each with its own traditions and expectations. In general, grief is felt most strongly in the immediate period following a loved one's death and eases with the passage of time. Judaism recognizes this progression and encourages a healthy expression of grief throughout the process.

The first period of mourning is called *shiva*. It takes its name, which in Hebrew means seven, from the length of time it is traditionally observed. While some families follow this tradition closely, most observe *shiva* for a shorter period, often three days. During *shiva*, the family is exempted from the usual daily responsibilities of life and spends time at home with one another and friends who come to express their condolences.

It is customary and encouraged for the family to come to Temple on the Shabbat during *shiva*. The prospect of being around others in public can be daunting so soon after the funeral but there is something important and valuable about hearing the name of the deceased read aloud, standing to say *Kaddish* with the congregation, and allowing the members of the congregation to express their condolences. As personal and private as coping with death is, it is also a loss felt by the entire congregation.

## MINYAN

It is common to memorialize the deceased by saying *Kaddish* in their memory. Traditionally, Jews gathered for organized prayer three times daily, requiring a quorum, or *minyan* in Hebrew, each time. During *shiva* the *minyan* comes to the family's home to spare them the obligation of going to the synagogue.

Among traditional Jews, there are *shiva minyans* each day. It is more typical of Reform Jews to have evening minyans for one, two or three days. The Temple provides the prayer books, and the short service may be led by the Rabbi or any knowledgeable lay person. The Temple frequently arranges for trained members of the congregation to come to the home to lead the *minyan*.

## COMFORTING THE MOURNERS

It is a *mitzvah* to comfort those in mourning. In Judaism, the time to express condolences and be with the family is after the funeral, not before as it is in other traditions. There are many opportunities for people to express their condolences, starting at the funeral itself and continuing that same day at the family's home following the interment.

It is sometimes heard that the atmosphere at the family's home after the interment felt like a party. Appearances can be deceiving. There are many ways of honoring the dead, comforting the mourners, and expressing sadness. Laughter and tears often go together at a house of mourning.

Another way to comfort the mourners is by attending the *minyán* in their home and by spending time with the family during *shiva*. The tradition of speaking well of the dead forms the basis of a condolence call but the mere presence of friends provides a great deal of comfort. Much of the grieving process is personal and internal and sometimes gives rise to loneliness. Company and conversation can be both a welcome distraction and source of solace to those in mourning.

Teenagers in a house of mourning often feel left out and isolated. At the same time, their friends often feel awkward at the prospect of a condolence call and at a loss for words. It will not be what they say but their physical presence that gives comfort to their friends.

Younger children will need their parents and close relatives to help them through the mourning process. Adults should be mindful that children, especially, may express their feelings in a variety of ways, some of which may be surprising and unexpected.

Another traditional way to honor the dead is by *tsedakah*, a contribution, usually to the synagogue, in memory of the deceased.

As the days turn into weeks and then to months, friends should make a special effort to continue their support. Phone calls, low-key dinners, meeting at Temple for Shabbat services, and doing errands and favors are just some of the ways people can show they continue to remember and care.

## SHELOSHIM

The second period of mourning in Judaism starts after *shiva* is completed and ends a month after the funeral. *Sheloshim* means 30 in Hebrew. By now relatives have returned home and condolence calls have stopped. People start to return to their daily routines and obligations. It is customary to avoid group gathering and social events during *Sheloshim*.

At Beth Ahabah we read the names of those who have died for four consecutive weeks at Shabbat services, i.e. until the completion of *Sheloshim*, and it is customary for the family to attend Shabbat services throughout this period.

## VISITING THE CEMETERY

It is not customary to visit the cemetery during *shiva* or, according to some traditions, until *sheloshim* ends. Many people visit the graves of their loved ones on Holy Days. Since most cemeteries are gated, people should check to make sure when they are open for visitors. People should call the Temple office for information regarding visiting the Hebrew Cemetery.

## YIZKOR

Traditional Judaism includes a memorial service, *yizkor* in Hebrew, on various holidays throughout the year, the most well known of which is Yom Kippur. At Beth Ahabah, during the *Yizkor* service on Yom Kippur afternoon, we read the names of Temple members, relatives of Temple members and friends of the Temple who have died during the last 12 months.

In addition, the Temple, each year for Yom Kippur, compiles a Book of Memory in which members can honor the memories of their deceased relatives and friends by making a modest contribution to the Temple and listing their names in the book.

## AFTER ONE YEAR

The full, traditional period of Jewish mourning extends for 11 more months after *Sheloshim*, ending at one year after the funeral. It is customary to say *Kaddish* regularly during this period, and many people come to Shabbat services in Temple for this purpose. By the end of the year, all restrictions placed on the mourners are lifted and they are expected to resume normal life completely. Returning to life does not mean that mourners no longer have feelings of sadness and loss. They do, but Judaism reminds us that we honor the memories of our deceased loved ones the most by living our own lives fully.

## Yahrzeit

It is a Jewish practice to say *Kaddish* in memory of the deceased every year at the anniversary, the *yahrzeit*, of their death. Some people light a candle at home on the *yahrzeit* and say *Kaddish*. The candle can be purchased at the Temple and in many supermarkets.

It is customary to come to Shabbat services to say *Kaddish* also. At Beth Ahabah, we observe *yahrzeits* on the Shabbat following the anniversary of the death. After we read the *yahrzeit* list, the entire congregation stands to recite the *Kaddish* together. Members can request that relatives' name be added to our files and read each year. The Temple will honor the preference of the family and follow either the Hebrew or regular, secular calendar for determining the *yahrzeit*.

Many people use a *yahrzeit* as an opportunity for doing *tsedakah* and make a contribution to the Temple in memory of one's loved one.

## UNVEILING

It is customary, but not a requirement in Judaism, to erect a stone monument at the graveside and dedicate the marker with a brief ceremony called an unveiling. While this may be done any time after 30 days, it occurs most often at about one year after the death. In this sense it often marks the end of the official period of Jewish mourning and provides an opportunity to express respect for the deceased. An unveiling is not another funeral and usually only the immediate family and very close friends attend.

The family decides what information to put on the marker and engages the services of a monument maker to make the stone and engrave it. Like the choice of a casket, the marker should be plain and dignified. Typically, the marker includes at minimum the name of the deceased and the date of death, often in Hebrew and English. The monument maker will be able to provide assistance about other information that may be engraved on the marker. Families may ask the monument maker to consult with the Rabbi about the Hebrew on the marker.

Many cemeteries have rules about the size of the marker, the material it can be made from, and, less often, what may be engraved on it. It is a good idea for families to inquire about this in advance. Families erecting a monument at Hebrew Cemetery, the Temple's cemetery, should contact the Executive Director for more information.

The Rabbi usually conducts the unveiling service though, like all religious services in Judaism, the unveiling may be led by any capable layperson. The loved ones, often parents, of many members of the Temple are buried out of town. It is quite common for family members to conduct those unveilings, and the Rabbi can provide them with an unveiling service.

## MEMORIALIZING LOVED ONES AT BETH AHABAH

There are many ways to memorialize a loved one at the Temple. The Executive Director can provide information about creating a lasting, fitting memorial for your loved ones. Many people purchase memorial plaques in memory of their loved ones for the large tablets arranged on the walls of the sanctuary. The small light bulb next to the plaque is lit on the person's *yahrzeit* and on *Yom Kippur*.

## OTHER JEWISH MOURNING CUSTOMS

There are many more Jewish customs about death and mourning than those mentioned in this booklet. Some, like covering mirrors and sitting on low, wooden benches, are observed mostly by Orthodox Jews, and some are family practices handed down from one generation to the next. Certain customs prevail in different sections of the country. Grief is experienced and people receive comfort in many different ways. Members should not hesitate to call upon the Rabbi for advice and guidance about other customs not included in the booklet.

## HEBREW CEMETERY

Members of Beth Ahabah may purchase burial plots for themselves and their family at Hebrew Cemetery, the Temple's cemetery. Located at 5th and Hospital Streets, just north of downtown Richmond, Hebrew Cemetery is a beautiful and historic burial ground. Established in 1816, it is on the National Register of Historic Places. In the original part of the cemetery, on the north side of Hospital Street, there is a section enclosed by an iron fence in the form of muskets, swords and sabers, with the graves of 30 Jewish Confederate soldiers killed in the Civil War. We believe it is the oldest specifically Jewish military burial ground outside the State of Israel.

## SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

### INFANT DEATHS

In traditional Judaism, funeral and mourning practices are not observed unless an infant lives for 30 days. When an infant dies after one month of age it is customary in traditional Judaism to observe regular funeral and mourning practices.

We recognize that the death of an infant is a traumatic and difficult event. Reform Jewish practice suggests that any infant who survives birth be buried with a simple graveside service.

### MISCARRIAGES AND STILLBIRTHS

Reform Judaism recognizes the strong feelings that buffet parents when these events occur. There are no required practices to follow but Jewish ritual may provide a degree of comfort to help parents, grandparents and other family members cope with their loss. Parents should consult with the Rabbi about an appropriate ceremony.

### DEATH OF A CHILD

Few things in life are worse than the death of a child. It violates every idea we have about how life should take its normal course. It places enormous strain on parents on top of the sadness and pain that accompany every death. It obligates friends, relatives and members of the Congregation to be especially sensitive to the needs and feelings of the child's parents and immediate family.

In the case of an adult child who dies, the customary funeral and mourning practices would apply.

When the child is young, a youth, or even a young adult, special sensitivity is called for. The family should consult with the Rabbi on the appropriate funeral arrangements.

### SUICIDE

Reform Judaism follows the teaching that all people are equal in death regardless of the style of their life or the manner of their death. This applies fully to people who take their own lives. In Reform Judaism, people who commit suicide receive the dignity of a complete funeral and burial with their loved ones.

## DEATH AFTER A PROLONGED ILLNESS

Death after a long illness can challenge our ideas about what are appropriate responses to death. In the face of death, most people expect and understand sadness, loss and grief. There are other emotions, like fear about the future, confusion and anger, which might surprise us at first but which are natural and commonly felt. When someone dies after a long illness, family members often feel, in addition to these, relief. This, too, is natural and very understandable. No one likes to see a loved one suffer and experience the indignities which often accompany a long illness. At times, we might even find our hope for a loved one's recovery mixed with the observation that they have gone through enough. From there it is a short step to the wish that they might die already and be out of their misery. None of this is wrong or selfish. At the same time, a long illness gives us the opportunity to express our love through words and acts of caring.

Many people comment on how difficult it is to get out of their minds the images of their loved one who was suffering. The inexorable passage of time usually accomplishes this for us. Gradually we are able to replace the sad images with happier memories. This is what our loved ones would prefer that we remember, and it is an important step in the healing process.

## GLOSSARY

**ANINUT** – the period of time between someone’s death and the funeral. Pronounced ah-knee-noot.

**BIKKUR CHOLIM** – the mitzvah of visiting the sick. Pronounced bee-koor cho-leem.

**CHEVRA KADISHA** – the group of people who prepare a body for burial in the traditional Jewish manner. Their duties include washing, dressing and watching over the deceased. The literal meaning of the term is “Holy Fellowship.” Pronounced chev-ra ka-deesh-a.

**EL MALEI RACHAMIM** – the name of a traditional Jewish memorial prayer usually recited at funerals and on other memorial occasions. The name comes from the first three words of the prayer, “O God full of mercy...” It is addressed to God and said on behalf of the deceased. Pronounced el ma-lay ra-cha-mim.

**HESPED** – the Hebrew word for eulogy. Pronounced hess-pid.

**KADDISH** – the name of a traditional Jewish memorial prayer. Technically, it is not a prayer at all but a doxology, an expression of praise to God for life. There are actually several different versions of the Kaddish but most Jews are familiar with the one called the Mourners’ Kaddish, said in memory of the dead. Ironically, it does not mention the word “death” at all. Pronounced kah-dish.

**KIPPAH** – a Jewish skullcap used to show respect for God. Pronounced key-pa. Many Jews are more familiar with its Yiddish name, yarmulke. It is traditionally worn only by men but now occasionally worn by women also. In Reform Judaism, its use is optional. Pronounced kee pah

**K’RIAH** – the ceremony in which mourners put on a black ribbon, put a tear in it, and say a short accompanying prayer. It is usually led by the Rabbi and done before the funeral starts. In traditional Judaism, mourners tear an actual article of clothing. Pronounced kree-a.

**MINYAN** – the Hebrew word for a prayer quorum, which traditionally is 10 Jewish males over the age of 13. Reform Jewish practice does not require the presence of a minyan for a service. The word is also used to refer to the service done at a house of mourning during shiva, as in “there will be a minyan tonight at 7 p.m.” Usually pronounced min-yin.

**MITZVAH** – the word for a commandment from the Torah. Popularly, though incorrectly, used to mean a good deed. Pronunciation ‘mitz-va.

**PEKUACH NEFESH** – the mitzvah, or commandment, to save life. Considered the greatest mitzvah in Judaism. Pronounced pee-koo-ach ne-fesh.

**SHELOSHIM** – the second and less intense stage of Jewish mourning beginning at the end of shiva and ending 30 days after the funeral. It means “thirty” and is pronounced shi-low-sheem.

## **GLOSSARY** *continued*

**SHIVA** – the initial and most intense period of mourning. It means “seven,” indicating the number of days which it is traditionally observed. Many Jews observe shiva for fewer than seven days. In common usage, people are said to “sit shiva.” Pronounced shi-va

**TALLIT** – a prayer shawl. One often hears the word pronounced “tallis.”

**TSEDAKAH** – the mitzvah of contributing, usually monetarily, to improve the lot of those less fortunate. Pronounced tsi-da-kah. In common usage, people are said to “give tzedakah.”

**Yahrzeit** – the anniversary of someone’s death. From the Yiddish and German. Pronounced yar-tzite.

**Yizkor** – the name of a Jewish memorial service inserted into the regular service on certain holidays throughout the year. Usually pronounced yis-ker.