



Judea Reform Congregation

גמילות חסדים
Caring Community

Kavod V'nichum – Honor and Comfort

When a death is impending or has occurred, please call the synagogue as soon as possible. Our office number is 919-489-7062; press extension 231 to reach Rabbi Matt Soffer or 227 to reach Julie Fishkin our Life Cycle and Pastoral Care Coordinator. For notification after hours, please call our answering service at 855-483-7566.

Contacting us near the end-of-life (or when death is imminent) will allow us to be most helpful to you when you need us most.

For Judea members who are facing the death of a loved one, there are no distinctions based on faith of choice with respect to congregational resources available. In general, these resources apply to the seven relatives for whom a Jewish person is required to mourn: spouse, daughter, son, sister, brother, mother, father. Many of us choose to adopt some Jewish mourning practices for more distant relatives and friends as well. More information about these resources are provided in this brochure. Additional contact information may be found on the back of this brochure.

Kavod V'nichum are the twin principles that guide the Jewish approach to death and mourning in general and at Judea Reform Congregation in particular. *Kavod* means “honor;” *Nichum* means “comfort.”

Halakhah (the Hebrew word for Jewish law) refers frequently to **k'vod hamet**, that is, “honor/dignity for the deceased.” At Judea Reform Congregation, *k'vod hamet* leads us to bury as soon as is practical, and to use the *Chevrá Kadisha* to prepare the body for burial. We understand the *met* (“corpse”) to be a recently abandoned vessel for a living soul, worthy of all honor and respect.

Nichum is the stance we take toward the living; *halakhah* is concerned with *nichum avelim*, that is, comforting the mourners. The embrace of a caring community

through support and accommodations of a grieving family's special needs are examples of this principle.

Most decisions that need to be made in terms of funerals and burials can be viewed through the lens of these twin values and the demands they make. Traditionally, burial takes place as soon as possible – within 24 hours. This is not always possible and, given the fact that many modern Jewish families are spread out around the country, it sometimes becomes necessary to wait a day or two until all of the mourners can arrive. Jewish funerals cannot take place on Shabbat or on most Jewish holidays. What if a loved one expressed a desire to be cremated, but surviving family are troubled by the request? What do we do? We let *kavod v'nichum* guide us as we carefully, and prayerfully, make our decisions.

What is Halakhah? What is Reform Halakhah?

Halakhah, which is translated as “the path” or “the way,” is the Hebrew word for Jewish law. Transmitted in written and oral forms for thousands of years, *halakhah* speaks to the daily life of the Jew. Reform Judaism has never understood itself to be entirely ruled by *halakhah*. It is “our guidance but not our governance.” The Reform approach to *halakhah* in times of loss and grief is to provide comfort.

Jewish tradition and *halakhah* have a great

deal to offer during the period of mourning, and it is not uncommon to see people who have not been concerned with doing it the “Jewish way” suddenly wanting to make sure that a funeral or burial is done “right.” At Judea Reform Congregation, our members have the option of a traditional burial, but other options are also available and supported. In the spirit of *kavod v'nichum*, our priority is respect of the deceased and support to grieving loved ones.

Calendar of Mourning

Shiva, Shloshim, and Shanah are the three periods of mourning in the Jewish calendar. Shiva (“seven”) are the seven days following the burial. Shloshim (“thirty”) is the month following death. After shloshim, the rest of the year (*shanah*) brings the formal mourning period to a close. It is important to stress that these periods are not meant to dictate the mourner’s feelings, but only to offer guidance with regard to actions.

Yizkor and Yahrzeit. During the year following a death, it is Jewish custom for the name of the deceased to be said aloud at a *Yizkor* service. *Yizkor* (“remembrance”) is a liturgy generally recited on the three pilgrimage festivals of *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (the Feast of Weeks) and *Sukkot* (the Festival of Booths), as well as on *Yom Kippur*. At Judea Reform, *Yizkor* services are held on the Seventh Day of *Pesach* and on *Yom Kippur*, and mourners will be invited to these services in the year following the loss. The name of the deceased is also announced each year on the Shabbat following the anniversary of the death, called a *yahrzeit* (“year time”). After names are read, the mourner rises and kaddish is recited by the community.

A note about Kaddish. *Kaddish* is a prayer that praises the God of life and affirms our belief in the ultimate redemption of the world. Mourners first recite kaddish for the deceased at the funeral and then weekly at Shabbat services through *Shloshim*. Thereafter, customs vary about how long to recite *Kaddish* and for whom. It may be a matter of personal choice.

What our community offers

Throughout the time of loss . . .

Pastoral Care. Care of those who are dying and of those who are bereaved is a priority of Judea Reform Congregation. Whenever possible, please be in touch with our office as the time of death approaches so that we are able to be a part of those difficult but sacred moments with you.

Support from the Congregation. The entire congregation can be notified via special email upon the death of a congregant or a congregant’s first-degree relative (spouse, mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son) if there is to be a local memorial service and/or the relative is to be buried at the Judea Reform Cemetery. These and all other deaths can also be shared with the congregation in Judea Reform’s weekly e-Notices and printed Bulletin. In this way, members of the congregation are made aware that their compassion and support are needed.

Chevra Kadisha (“Sacred Society”) This group can help prepare the body of a Jew for burial. The *Chevra Kadisha* is made up of (anonymous) volunteers from Judea Reform who have been trained in the ritual preparation of a body for burial. (See column to the right for more information about the *Chevra Kadisha*.)

Funerals and Memorial Services. Because the services of the *Chevra Kadisha* can only be offered at Hudson Funeral Home, Hudson is the designated funeral home for Judea Reform Congregation. However, we will work with other funeral homes to provide the funeral or memorial service if this is the choice of the bereaved.

Se’udat Havra’ah (“Meal of Consolation”). Through our Caring Community, we will work with the family and circle of friends to ensure that food is brought to the house of mourning on the day of the burial and/or in the days thereafter as needed.

Shiva Minyan (a home-based worship service for the mourners). As part of recognizing the mourning periods of *Shiva* and *Shloshim*, many mourners choose to have one or more services in the home. These may be scheduled in the evening(s) following the funeral (usually within the first week) and/or to mark the end of the first month of mourning. Our *Nechamah* (“Comfort”) Committee will help you schedule and arrange these services at your convenience, and lay members of our community will often lead them. Some mourners also choose to hold a *shiva minyan* upon returning from an out-of-town funeral. Contact the office or Megan Valentine if you have questions.

Unveilings. When you are ready to set a marker stone over the grave, be in touch with the office to arrange for a ceremony of dedication (“unveiling”). While there is no one “proper” time to hold the dedication ceremony (different Jewish communities schedule them as early as a week following death and as late as a year), many mourners prefer to schedule them around the first anniversary of the death. These brief services may be led by Rabbi Soffer, by a lay congregational leader, or by members of the family. Unveilings are not scheduled on Shabbat or holidays.

At the time of death...

Judea Reform Congregation can be a source of help and support when a death occurs. We, along with the funeral home of your choice, will help you navigate many of the details that need to be resolved. (We most often work with Hudson Funeral Home, 919-596-8269.)

Setting a date and time for the funeral and having an obituary placed in the newspaper are usually the first things that are done. More extensive visits with both the funeral home and the Rabbi usually take place before the funeral.

Chevra Kadisha

The *Chevra Kadisha*, “the Sacred Society,” is aptly named as the work they do is truly holy. The *Chevra* is responsible for preparing the body of a Jew for burial.

How does this happen and what’s involved? When a death occurs, mourners will be asked if they would like the *Chevra Kadisha* to prepare the body for burial. If the answer is ‘yes,’ the (anonymous) volunteers of the *Chevra* will take over and will make arrangements with Hudson Funeral Home for them to appropriately prepare the body of the deceased. The family need not worry about the arrangements.

What does the *Chevra Kadisha* actually do? The members of the *Chevra Kadisha* wash the body, say traditional prayers, perform a ritual of purification, and then dress the body in simple white shrouds before placing the body in a plain wooden casket with earth from the land of Israel.

Why would a family choose to avail themselves of the *Chevra Kadisha*? In some cases, the choice was expressed by the deceased prior to death. If so, the family is respecting the wishes of the deceased. In other cases, the choice is made simply to ensure that a loved one is prepared for burial according to Jewish tradition, with due regard for modesty and dignity, by men or women who perform the act for no reason other than a sense of Jewish obligation.

At the funeral . . .

The wisdom of the Jewish funeral lies in the fact that it demands confrontation with the reality of death—an essential fact to healthy mourning. At the same time, the liturgy of the funeral affirms the immortality of the soul.

K’riah (tearing [of cloth]). Close family members (traditionally parents, children, siblings and spouse, though we often extend the circle to allow others to participate) place black ribbons on the clothing before the funeral begins. By reciting a blessing and tearing the ribbons, they acknowledge their pain and affirm God’s presence even in our most difficult times.

Tehillim (Psalms). The recitation of Psalms or other inspirational passages from the Bible, Jewish literature, or general literature, is an important component of the service. Some of the passages we read often are included in a small pamphlet, which will be available to those attending the funeral.

Hespeid (Eulogy). The purpose of the *hespeid* is to both honor the deceased and comfort the mourners. Delivered by the Rabbi and/or by family/friends, the purpose of the eulogy is to reflect on the

loss and on the lessons that we can learn from the life of the deceased.

El Malei Rachamim/Kaddish. Two prayers conclude the funeral liturgy. *El Malei Rachamim* (“God, full of compassion...”) is a prayer asking that the soul of the deceased will be received by a loving God. *Kaddish* is a prayer recited by mourners at the funeral and at regular religious services.

L’viyat Hamet (Accompanying the Dead). Perhaps the most direct confrontation with the reality of death comes at the very end of the burial service. In contrast with other cultures, at a Jewish funeral the coffin is lowered in the presence of the mourners, and we fulfill the mitzvah of *l’viyat hamet* by shoveling earth into the open grave. We use the back side of the shovel to indicate our reticence to say goodbye.

Honoring through Tzedakah . . .

There are many ways to honor your loved one’s legacy through *tzedakah*, from dedicating a prayer book or memorial plaque to sponsoring an Oneg Shabbat or a Shabbat luncheon to identifying an existing fund to which contributions may be made. If you have questions about opportunities for *tzedakah* in memory of your loved one, contact Julie Fishkin, our Life Cycle & Pastoral Care Coordinator, at 919-489-7062, ext. 227.

Yeish Kokavim, by Hanah Senesh, translated by Jeffrey Klepper

There are stars up above,
so far away that we only see their light
long, long after the star itself is gone.
And so it is with people we loved –
their memories keep shining ever brightly
though their time with us is done.
But the stars that light up the darkest night,
these are the lights that guide us.
As we live our days, these are the ways we remember.

Resources

Contact Us

JUDEA REFORM CONGREGATION

1933 West Cornwallis Road
Durham, NC 27705
Main: 919-489-7062
After hours: 855-483-7566
www.judeareform.org

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RabbiSoffer@judeareform.org

JULIE FISHKIN

Life Cycle & Pastoral Care
Coordinator
919-489-7062, ext 227
jfishkin@judeareform.org

MEGAN VALENTINE

Nechamah Committee
919-542-7498
919-656-0370
mvalentine@hvrc.org

HEIDI TYSON

Caring Community
847-494-8552
jrccaringcommunity@gmail.com

ED HOLLAND

Judea Reform Cemetery Board
919-451-6085
edholland@hotmail.com

HUDSON FUNERAL HOME

919-596-8269
www.hudsonfuneralhome.com

The Judea Reform Congregation Cemetery

The Judea Reform Congregation Cemetery is located at 2560 Jones Ferry Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516, near the intersection with Damascus Church Road.

More information about our cemetery can be found on the JRC website:

<https://www.judeareform.org/jrc-cemetery.html>



A word about costs . . .

Many of the services described in this brochure are included with a congregational membership. Some fixed costs (e.g. cemetery plots or the opening and closing of a grave) must be passed along to members. *In no case will anyone be denied a proper burial due to financial circumstances.*

Judea Reform Congregation exists because of the commitment of our community members. Without that ongoing commitment, we would not be here to offer these services to anyone. Accordingly, non-members will be charged special fees for the services described in this brochure.

A complete schedule of fees is available from Julie Fishkin, Life Cycle & Pastoral Care Coordinator.