



# GUIDE TO DEATH, DYING, & JEWISH MOURNING

B'nai Israel Bereavement Committee  
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The death of a loved one can be overwhelming. This booklet has been prepared for use by members of B'nai Israel Congregation to help you navigate the process of preparation, burial, and mourning. Its purpose is to explain the Jewish approach to death and mourning, and to serve as a practical guide. Whether you are reading this in advance or in the immediate aftermath of a death, we hope that you will find it helpful.

The central theme of Jewish practice is that everyone is equal before God, and therefore, everyone is treated with equal dignity and respect. Even after death, the body retains its sanctity. A comparison can be made between the treatment of the deceased and the treatment of a Torah scroll that is no longer usable. Both are still holy and must be handled with care and respect.

We have organized this booklet in chronological sequence, beginning with initial considerations and preparations that you can make in advance, and going through the year following a death. It is written in a question-and-answer format, which we hope will make it easy to follow. We have included appendices with information on area funeral homes, a glossary of terms, and a reading list.

We believe that the community has the responsibility to aid mourners during this difficult time. The Bereavement Committee of B'nai Israel is a group of volunteers who are willing and able to assist with all aspects of the bereavement process. We can help prepare a home for *shiva*, provide people to form a *minyan*, and assist with other functions as necessary. One of the most important aspects of our work is the *Chevra Kadisha*, a group of volunteers who prepare the deceased for burial. If you are interested in finding out more about our work or the issues discussed in this booklet, please contact one of our rabbis or chairs of the Bereavement Committee.

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**"THE MEMORY OF THE  
RIGHTEOUS IS A BLESSING"**  
—PROVERBS 10:7

Making  
preparations  
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## **BEFORE A DEATH OCCURS**

Even though you may be in good health, there are a number of steps you can take now to prepare for the future. Making preparations in advance will ease the burden on you and your loved ones at a stressful and emotional time.

### **What documents should I prepare?**

Well before the need arises, every adult should prepare the following documents:

- A will, to specify the distribution of your estate.
- A living will (also called an advance medical directive), which specifies what medical treatments you want in a variety of circumstances.
- A durable power of attorney, to appoint someone to handle your affairs if you become incapacitated. Keep in mind that many banks have their own forms.
- A medical power of attorney (also called a health care proxy), to pick someone to make medical decisions for you.
- A complete list of all assets, including bank and brokerage accounts (including institution names, account numbers, and contact information), income sources, safe deposit boxes (including location of keys), life insurance policies, and real estate.
- Maintain a list of online accounts and passwords. This will allow your heirs to shut down unnecessary accounts with minimal effort.

Preparing these documents in advance will ensure that your wishes are met and will reduce the anxiety of your loved ones. Make sure that these documents are easily accessible, and that your designated representatives in these matters either have copies or know where to locate them.

### **Should I purchase a burial plot? How do I do this?**

Purchasing a burial plot in advance relieves your family of the burden at the time of your death. B'nai Israel has three options available:

- B'nai Israel Congregation Cemetery at Oxon Hill in Oxon Hill, MD. Contact our Executive Director, Hal Ossman, at [hossman@bnaiisraelcong.org](mailto:hossman@bnaiisraelcong.org) for more information.
- B'nai Israel Congregation section at Judean Memorial Gardens, located in Norbeck Memorial Park in Olney, MD. More information is available at <http://www.judeangardens.com/>.
- B'nai Israel Congregation section at Garden of Remembrance, Gan Zikaron Memorial Park in Clarksburg, MD. More information is available at <http://www.gardenofremembrance.org/>.

Cemetery plots can be purchased directly from the synagogue. A member of our Cemetery committee can also arrange to take you around each location. Contact Laurie Pfeifer (240-221-2512, [laurie@bnaiisraelcong.org](mailto:laurie@bnaiisraelcong.org)) for detailed information.

### **My spouse is not Jewish. Can we be buried together?**

The B'nai Israel cemetery and sections do not permit non-Jewish burials. However, we do make arrangements at Judean Memorial Gardens and Garden of Remembrance to enable individuals who are not Jewish to be buried next to their Jewish spouses in other areas of the cemetery.

## **WHEN DEATH IS IMMINENT**

Each person's journey to death is distinctive. Some people have a very gradual decline while others will fade quickly. As death approaches, your role is to be present, provide comfort, and reassure your loved one with calming words and actions to help maintain their comfort and dignity.

**Why is it important to visit the person with a terminal illness?** A visit may serve to make the patient more comfortable, cheer him or her and pray for their recovery. Your presence affirms the essential humanity and dignity of the individual, reminding the person that he/she is loved and will be remembered. Follow the lead of the person in determining what is talked about. Some people may want to talk openly about the seriousness of their illness and feelings about death while others may want to reminisce about happy times. In addition, the person may want to share wishes regarding medical decisions and treatments, about personal belonging, choosing the place they will die, and their wishes for funeral arrangements.

### **What is hospice, and what options are available?**

It is important to consider that hospice is a standard of care, as opposed to a place; and that entering hospice does not mean giving up hope or bringing about an immediate death. Whereas ordinary medical care aims to treat the disease through surgery, chemotherapy, and other means, hospice care aims to treat the symptoms and control pain. The decision to enter hospice is ultimately a question about what one is willing to give up: does one wish to sacrifice the current moment, exchanging the pains and risks of treatment now for the possibility of a pain-free or disease-free future; or would one prefer to exchange the possibility of a disease-free future for the possibility of a comfortable and pain-free present? In many cases, patients actually do better or live longer in the hospice setting; once it is understood that the illness is terminal, many individuals thrive in being able to concentrate on the moment with loved ones. Hospice services generally include regular care by a nurse who is empowered to regulate pain and other medications, as well as visits by social workers, volunteers, and rabbis. The frequency of these visits depends on the needs of particular individuals and the nature of their disease.

In most cases, hospice services are provided in the home or residence. There are some instances where a person may receive hospice services in the hospital or nursing home. Casey House, run by Montgomery Hospice, is the only in-patient hospice facility in Montgomery County. The following are the most prominent providers in Montgomery County:

- JSSA Hospice Care: <https://www.jssa.org/get-help/hospice/>
- Montgomery Hospice: <https://www.montgomeryhospice.org/>

**What should I do when I know the death of a loved one is approaching?**

When death is imminent, notify a clergy member at B'nai Israel. Clergy are able to counsel family members, visit the sick or infirm, and offer practical advice about how to prepare for death or funerals. Pastoral counseling reminds those experiencing pain, illness, or loss that they are not alone; and it uses religious wisdom to help individuals contextualize grief and suffering while forming a connection to the divine.

Outside of regular office hours, this can be done by dialing the synagogue's main number and selecting the "Family Emergency" option (option 1). This prompt will page a member of the clergy who will call back as soon as possible. If a death occurs in the middle of the night, it is usually not necessary to make this call until morning. If at all possible, the dying person should not be left alone.

**What is the Viddui?**

The word "*Viddui*" means "confession." Traditionally, it is recited by the dying person, but in the case when the dying person is incapacitated or otherwise unable to recite the prayer, it can be recited by a clergy member or friend. It can be recited on any day, including Shabbat and holidays. Because it is impossible to know for sure when death is near, the prayer begins with an expression of hope that healing may yet come. But then, acknowledging the reality that death is likely imminent, the prayer admits the imperfections of the individual and seeks atonement from God. The central element is the *Shema*, which states faith that God is unique and eternal. A clergy member can assist the dying person in saying the *Viddui*; when recited in the presence of family and loved ones, *Viddui* becomes an opportunity to reflect on sacred values that live on after a loved one's demise.

**When should others say goodbye?**

One of the hardest decisions is when to call in people to say goodbye. Let family members and close friends know as soon as it's obvious that death is near. Being together allows family members to support each other, too. Even though you've gathered, don't assume you will be there at the final moment. Often the person doesn't die until those who sat with them for hours have left, as if he or she was unable to let go while the ones they loved were there. Even when the situation is exceedingly dire, as when assistance from artificial life-support is removed, death does not necessarily follow immediately; the final moments of every life are unique.

**How can I recognize when death is near?\***

There are changes you can expect to see as an adult body stops working. These are a normal part of dying. Breathing trouble can be distressing for family members, but often isn't painful for the patient and can be managed. Pain can be treated too, but your loved one may have difficulty taking medicine by mouth. Hallucinations and visions, especially of long-gone loved ones, can be comforting. If seeing and talking to someone who isn't there makes the person who is dying happier, you don't need to try to convince them that they aren't real. Pain management is inexact; if your loved one is having trouble finding the balance between undue pain and lack of awareness, you should encourage your healthcare professional to modify medications and dosage.

When death is within days or hours, your loved one may: not want food or drink, stop urinating and having bowel movements, and grimace or groan from pain. They may become restless and confused and they may cry out, strike out, or try to climb out of bed. Stay with them. Try to keep them calm with soothing music and gentle touch. Sometimes medication helps. The room should be well lit, but not bright. Keep it as quiet and peaceful as possible. Constantly assure them that you're there. You may notice their eyes tear or glaze over, pulse and heartbeat are irregular or hard to feel or hear, body temperature drops, skin on their knees, feet, and hands turns a mottled bluish-purple (often in the last 24 hours), breathing is interrupted by gasping and slows until it stops entirely. If they are not already unconscious, your loved one may drift in and out, but they probably can still hear and feel. Sometimes a loved one may also become clear-headed in their final hours.

*\*This section was adapted from [webmd.com/palliative-care/journeys-end-active-dying](http://webmd.com/palliative-care/journeys-end-active-dying)*

*Baruch Dayan  
Ha'emet*

ברוך דין האמת

Blessed is the one  
true Judge

## AT THE TIME OF DEATH

### What should I do in the moments after death has occurred?

When death occurs in the home, there are three calls to make. These three calls will set the rest of the preparations in motion. The exact order can depend on circumstances:

1. If the deceased was in hospice care, contact the hospice nurse to certify the death. If the deceased was not enrolled in hospice, call 911. The deceased cannot be removed from the home until the death has been certified.
2. Contact the funeral home to arrange for removal of the deceased from the home. If the funeral home has not been selected, the B'nai Israel clergy can assist you in making the selection. Funeral homes have 24-hour answering services and can be contacted at any time.
3. Contact the rabbi or clergy member on call. The easiest way to do this is by calling B'nai Israel's main number, 301-881-6550. After hours, select Option 1 and leave a message; the clergy will be paged and return the call as soon as possible. When it is truly the middle of the night, it is usually not necessary to make this call until morning. When the death occurs on a Shabbat or Festival, there may be a delay before a member of the synagogue staff will return a phone call; family or friends can meet the rabbi directly at the synagogue during scheduled services.

When death occurs in the hospital, the nurse on call will make arrangements to certify the death. Contact the funeral home as soon as possible to arrange for removal so that it will not be necessary to transport the deceased to the hospital morgue.

Rituals at the moment of death include the following:

- It is traditional for those present at the time of death to recite *Baruch dayan ha'emet* (Praised is the true judge).
- The eyes and mouth of the deceased should be closed. The body should be oriented so that feet are facing the doorway.
- Open the windows in the room where the deceased is located. (If weather is an issue, the windows may be closed as needed.) Many believe that this allows the soul to depart from the body.
- If it is not Shabbat, place a lighted candle near the head of the deceased (on holidays, a candle can be lit from a pre-existing flame). The flame is a reminder of God's eternal presence.
- Cover the mirrors in the room where the deceased is lying. If at home, cover all the mirrors in the home.
- People in the room should conduct themselves with utmost respect for the deceased. Discussion should be limited to memories of the deceased and arrangements for his or her care and funeral.
- A healthcare professional should remove any needles or tubes from the body.
- At no point should the deceased be left alone.

### **How should I select a funeral home?**

There are several funeral homes in Montgomery County that can provide a Jewish burial. Each of the homes listed below has on-site facilities to conduct traditional preparation (*tahara*) and understands the requirements of traditional Jewish burial. (If the funeral is to take place outside of Montgomery County, one of the rabbis can discuss options with you.)

- Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care: (301) 340-1400, <https://www.sagelbloomfield.com/> is a privately owned Jewish funeral home, offering a full range of options and services.
- Shomrei Neshama of Greater Washington: (301) 296-6835, <http://www.shomreineshama.com>, is a subsidiary company of Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg that only offers traditional (Orthodox) services.
- Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home: (202) 541-1001, <http://www.torchinsky.com> is a privately owned Jewish funeral home offering a full range of options and services.
- Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home: (301) 622-2290, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/funeral-homes/silver-spring-md/hines-rinaldi-funeral-home/9738> is not Jewishly-owned, but offers Jewish funeral services under the contract of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington.

### **Where does a funeral take place?**

Traditionally, funeral services are not held in the synagogue except for leaders of the congregation. At B'nai Israel, this permission is granted to any member of the synagogue or his or her immediate family. For those who desire a chapel service outside the synagogue, Hines-Rinaldi and Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home have chapels on their premises. There is also a chapel on the grounds of Judean Memorial Gardens. Many funerals in our community are conducted graveside. For these services, eulogies and prayers are recited by the grave just as they would be in a chapel. Those who choose a chapel service often cite among their reasons the weather, number of people expected to attend, or the expectation that there will be many elderly people in attendance for whom it might be difficult to navigate the cemetery grounds.

### **Is there a difference between funeral homes?**

There are numerous reasons why individual consumers might choose a particular funeral home. All of the funeral homes listed above will provide a traditional Jewish funeral. As with any business, the consumer will want to balance between cost, level of service, and the general feeling he or she gets in a particular place. One of the benefits of advance planning is that it affords the consumer the opportunity to interview and visit different funeral homes before making a choice. Appendix B of this booklet provides a comparison with information provided by each of our area funeral homes.

## **CARE FOR THE DECEASED**

The deceased is to be treated in accordance with the value of *kavod ha-met*, honoring the deceased. Burial should take place as soon as possible, in order to prevent the deceased from having to lie in wait. The body is treated with utmost care and should not be left alone. The opposite of *kavod ha-met* is called *nivul ha-met*, degradation of the deceased.

### **Are autopsies permitted?**

Generally, autopsies are not permitted by Jewish law, as it can lead to desecration of the body. In situations where an autopsy might be required by law or might yield information in a particular circumstance that might save another life, the autopsy is permitted. Our rabbis can assist families in making the decision about whether an autopsy is merited.

### **What about organ donation?**

It was once thought that organ donation should not be permitted on the grounds that it requires alteration to the body, but this position has changed. The Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has ruled that organ donation is not only permitted, but it should be encouraged under the principle that saving a life is the highest form of *mitzvah*. Most Orthodox authorities today agree that organ donation is permitted by Jewish law. Donating the body to medical science, however, is generally not permitted on the grounds that there is no direct connection between the desecration of the body that will ensue and the lives that might be saved in the future through the furtherance of scientific knowledge.

### **What about embalming or cremation?**

Embalming is usually not permitted under Jewish law, since viewing of the body is not part of a Jewish funeral. In very rare cases where the funeral is unavoidably delayed, it may be permitted.

Cremation is not permitted by Jewish law; for some, the taboo against cremation is heightened by the experience of the Holocaust. Some authorities, including Maimonides, suggest that even if the deceased requests to be cremated, we do not accede to the request. However, when people do choose to be cremated and family members are faced with the desire to honor their wishes, there are certain things we can do within the framework of our Jewish tradition and the norms of our community. B'nai Israel clergy will officiate at any funeral service where the deceased is present, even if it is known that the body will be cremated at a later time. While burial of cremated remains is permitted in each of our cemetery locations, the rules vary as to how and where this can be done. If requested, B'nai Israel clergy will officiate at a private interment ceremony for the cremated remains.

### **What is the Jewish attitude towards suicide?**

The outdated belief that individuals who commit suicide are not permitted burial in a Jewish cemetery is based on a misunderstanding of what suicide is. The *halakhic* term for a person who commits suicide is *anus*, which literally means a person who is compelled to act in an irrational or undesirable manner. A person who commits suicide is considered to have succumbed to depression, which is a mental illness. Such a person must be buried in a Jewish cemetery just as any other person who succumbs to any other disease. The grieving family must be supported and comforted by the entire community.

### **What is *shmira*?**

*Shmira*, which means “guarding,” refers to the tradition that the deceased should not be left alone from the time of death until burial. The person who performs this *mitzvah* is called *shomer* (m) or *shomeret* (f). The funeral home can hire someone to serve as *shomer* or *shomeret*, and these individuals are paid at an hourly rate. *Shmira* can also be performed by friends or relatives. The *shomer/shomeret* reads psalms or prayers while sitting near the body. The B’nai Israel Bereavement Committee performs *shmira* before any funeral in the synagogue from the moment the body is brought into the building until the service begins.

### **What is an *onen*?**

The word *onen*, which literally means “grieving” or “pressed,” refers to the mourner of an immediate relative (parent, spouse, sibling, or child). The period between death and the funeral is called *aninut*. During this period, the *onen* is free from the responsibility to perform any positive time-bound commandments other than those associated with the preparations for the funeral. To provide time for the family to grieve privately and make necessary arrangements, condolence calls are not done during this time; such visits should begin after the funeral during *shiva*.

### **What is *tahara*? Who performs it?**

*Tahara* is the Hebrew word for purification. It refers to the ritual washing of the body and dressing it in white shrouds called *takhrikhim*. Just as a baby is washed and wrapped in a white blanket when it enters the world, we leave the world cleansed by *tahara*. Performing a *tahara* is considered the highest form of *mitzvah*, as the deceased can never repay the individuals who perform this final act of love and respect. *Tahara* is performed by a *Chevra Kadisha*, or Jewish Burial Society. To preserve modesty even in death, men prepare male bodies and women prepare female bodies. B’nai Israel has a women’s *Chevra Kadisha* that, when possible, performs *tahara* when the deceased is a woman who was a member of the congregation. A *tahara* for a man or for an individual who was not a member of the synagogue is performed by a community *Chevra Kadisha*. The funeral home will make the necessary calls to arrange *tahara* when it is requested by the family.

### **What type of casket is used? Is the casket open or closed?**

The Jewish practice of burial in white shrouds and a plain pine box has its origin in an edict by the great 1<sup>st</sup>-century sage Rabban Gamliel. Determining that the opulence of the funerals in his day had gotten out of hand, Rabban Gamliel insisted that he would be buried in simple white shrouds; it became the practice that all funerals should be essentially the same. If one chooses to “upgrade” from the plain pine box, the casket should still be made entirely of plain wood with no ornamentation or lining. Wooden pegs are used in place of metal screws and small holes are sometimes drilled in the bottom, in accordance with the verse, “For dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Once the *tahara* has been completed, the casket is left closed.

### **When should the funeral be held?**

The funeral should be held as soon as possible after death. While it is considered disrespectful to the deceased to delay the burial unnecessarily, it is permissible to wait a few days for family who must travel a great distance. Funerals are not conducted on Shabbat or Festivals.

### **What should I expect at the funeral service?**

The Jewish funeral service is very simple. It begins with *kri’ah*, a ritual tearing of garments, to express one’s grief. There are several references to this in Jewish texts, including when Jacob, believing that Joseph was dead, tore his garments. Most mourners in our community perform this *mitzvah* by cutting a black ribbon, which is then worn by each mourner for the *shiva* period, with the exception of Shabbat. If the deceased was a parent, the ribbon is worn over the mourner’s heart. Other mourners wear it on the right side. Before tearing the garment or ribbon, the mourners recite the following: “*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam dayyan ha-emet*, Praised are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, the judge of truth.”

The Hebrew term for a funeral service is *levayat ha-met*, accompanying the deceased to the final resting place. The service may include psalms, readings and eulogies. It concludes with the chanting of *El Malei Rachamim*, a memorial prayer asking God to grant peace to the soul of the departed. It is traditional to recite Psalm 91 as the casket is carried out of the chapel, and also on the walk from the hearse to the gravesite. In deference to the difficulty of the moment, it is customary for the procession to stop seven times before reaching the final destination.

At the gravesite, the coffin is lowered into the grave. At a graveside service, this is done after the eulogies are recited. The immediate family and others begin to fill in the grave using shovels. Traditionally, each mourner uses the reverse side of the shovel for the first pile of dirt, to symbolize the difficulty of the task at hand. As each individual completes a turn, he or she places the shovel back into the earth, symbolizing the hope that tragedy will not pass from one person to the next. Out of respect for the deceased, it is customary to remain at the gravesite until the coffin is completely covered.

When it is time to leave, mourners pass through two rows of friends and family, who recite the traditional expression of consolation, “*HaMakom yi-naḥem etkhem b’tokh she’ar aveilei tziyyon viy-rushalayyim*, May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” This marks the beginning of the formal mourning period (*shiva*).

#### **Why aren’t there flowers at Jewish funerals?**

Although flowers are not prohibited, they are generally not used at Jewish funerals. Flowers were customarily used to mask the smell of the remains as the body decayed. Since Jewish funerals are expected to be held as soon as possible after death, flowers were not necessary. Friends and family who wish to offer a concrete expression of condolence are encouraged to contribute to a charity that was important to the deceased. The family may designate one or more charities for this purpose.

#### **I am a *Kohen*. What am I permitted to do?**

Jewish law prohibits *Kohanim* from being in the presence of a dead body except for the seven close relatives (parent, sibling, child, or spouse). They cannot perform *shmira* or *tahara*, and generally do not attend funerals and burials. Arrangements can be made for individuals who wish to listen to the service from outside the chapel. Individuals with concerns should contact one of our rabbis for guidance.

## **OBSERVANCE OF *SHIVA* (for mourners)**

#### **How long should *shiva* be observed?**

*Shiva* is the Hebrew word for seven and refers to the seven-day mourning period that begins immediately after the funeral (with the day of the funeral counting as the first day). A part of a day counts as a full day, and there is no public mourning on Shabbat. For example, if a funeral is held on Wednesday, Wednesday is the first day of *shiva* and the following Tuesday is the last. If the funeral is on a Sunday, Sunday is the first day, and *shiva* ends on Friday afternoon (because there is no public mourning on Shabbat).

The period of *shiva* can be divided into three time periods: the first day (the day of the funeral), the first three days (the days of intense mourning) and the rest of the week. Many bereavement professionals recognize the seven days as the period of the most intense grief, with the first few days being days of shock and the days following to begin processing loss with the support of friends and family.

#### **Where can *shiva* be held?**

*Shiva* is traditionally held in the home of the deceased. When this is not feasible, *shiva* can be observed in the home of another relative. In some cases, *shiva* might be held in a community center, synagogue hall, or other location. When relatives live out of town, they may choose to observe part of *shiva* in the home of the deceased and then continue the observance of *shiva* in their own community.

#### **What about services?**

Services are traditionally held in the home where *shiva* is observed so that the mourners don’t have to leave. This is one of the things the community does as an act of comfort. Ten Jews over the age of bar or bat mitzvah (*minyan*) are needed so that the mourners can recite the *Kaddish* prayer. Our bereavement committee has volunteers who are willing to attend *shiva* services if there is concern that there might not be enough people for a *minyan*. Those who worry about the feasibility of having a *minyan* in their home are permitted to attend the morning or evening services at the synagogue. Many who wish to recite *Kaddish* in the morning choose to attend morning services at B’nai Israel. Those who would like to hold a morning *minyan* in the *shiva* house should inform the rabbi. Prayer books are provided by the synagogue or funeral home.

Most synagogue members who are mourners choose to hold an evening service in the *shiva* home. During the winter months, when it gets dark early, this is the *Ma’ariv* (evening) service; during summer months, the *Mincha* (afternoon) service is included as well. The service is led by a member of our synagogue clergy or a capable synagogue member. If one is capable, it is considered an honor to the deceased for a member of the bereaved family to lead services. On Shabbat, when private mourning is suspended, mourners are encouraged to attend services and recite *Kaddish* in the synagogue.

### **What about meals?**

Mourners who observe *shiva* according to tradition do not leave their home during this period, so meals are typically prepared or provided by family and friends. Although it is common to have light refreshments for people making condolence calls, the intended recipients of these meals are the mourners. It is particularly meaningful for friends to provide *se'udat havra-ah*, the Meal of Consolation that mourners eat upon returning from the cemetery. Symbolic of the circle of life, it is traditional for the meal to include eggs, beans, and other round foods.

### **Who sets the tone in the home where *shiva* is held?**

While it is customary that the community provide the meals for the mourners during *shiva*, the social milieu of the Shiva home is set by the mourners. The mourners will determine if they want to welcome those making condolence calls throughout the day or set specific hours, providing them with more privacy. Visitors should keep in mind that the *shiva* home is not a social gathering. At a traditional *shiva*, comforters do not speak unless first addressed by the mourners.

### **What do you talk about during a *shiva* call?**

Visitors to a *shiva* home should remember that their primary function is to be present, thereby expressing sympathy and concern. They should listen and take cues from the mourners. Conversation should be focused on the mourner. Tell the mourner that you are sorry for his or her loss. Encourage the mourner to share photos or stories, or to ask others to share stories about the deceased. Do not offer advice on how to feel or express emotions. Comforters must recognize that individuals express grief differently and in stages.

### **Do you sit *shiva* on Shabbat?**

Public expressions of mourning are suspended on Shabbat. Mourners are encouraged to join the community at synagogue, where they can recite the Mourner's *Kaddish*. *Shiva* resume after Shabbat.

### **How do holidays affect the timing of *shiva*?**

If *shiva* begins even a moment before a festival day—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesah, or Shavuot—it concludes with the onset of the festival. For example, if a funeral takes place on the day before Rosh Hashanah, *shiva* ends when Rosh Hashanah begins, even though only one day has elapsed. *Shiva* continues as usual during Hanukkah, Purim, and other minor holidays. When the funeral takes place during the intermediate days of Pesah or Sukkot, *shiva* does not begin until after the conclusion of the holiday. In some cases, this can elongate the experience of *shiva* to the point that it is unnecessarily burdensome. Consult the rabbi for guidance on how the Conservative movement deals with this issue.

Our Bereavement Committee is available to assist in setting up the home for *shiva*. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact one of the committee chairs or one of our rabbis.

### **How does one prepare a house for *shiva*?**

- **Water Pitcher** – It is customary to wash your hands upon leaving the cemetery. Often, this custom is observed just before entering the *shiva* house.
- **Unlocked Door** – The custom of visiting a *shiva* home is viewed as a community obligation. Because the mourner(s) are not acting as hosts, they are not expected to take on the task of greeting guests. Traditionally, the door of the home is left unlocked so that visitors can let themselves in.
- ***Shiva* Candle** – It is customary to light a *shiva* candle (usually provided by the funeral home) designed to last for 7 days. The flickering flame represents the presence of our loved one's immortal soul. No blessing is recited when lighting the candle.
- **Covered Mirrors** – The most common explanation for why mirrors are covered is that mourners should not be concerned with their appearance during this period of mourning. During *shiva*, personal grooming is kept to a minimum.

### **What are the most common customs for mourners?**

- **Low Chair or Stool** – The low chair represents the dejected status of mourners during their period of grief, but it need not be uncomfortable. Padded “*shiva* chairs” can be provided by B'nai Israel by request.
- **Staying Home** - Mourners typically stay home to enable them to focus on their grief. Generally, the mourner does not go to work or school. Food and provisions are provided by the community, and services are held in the *shiva* home. Jewish law allows those whose livelihood would be threatened to return to work after the third day of mourning.
- **Limit Activities of Enjoyment** – The *shiva* home is a place for reflection, where ordinary enjoyments are curtailed. Television should be avoided, with the possible exception of news programming. Slide shows with pictures of the deceased are permitted and even encouraged during the *shiva*.

### **What is *shloshim*?**

*Shloshim*, which means thirty, is the next phase of bereavement. The mourner begins to slowly re-enter normal life by going outside, sitting in standard chairs and returning to work or school. In some communities, restrictions continue regarding participating in pleasurable activities. However, most Conservative Jews consider these prohibitions severe, and it is up to each individual to determine what activities are appropriate. During *shloshim*, many mourners continue the practice of saying *Kaddish* by attending synagogue services. The traditional practice is to attend morning and evening services daily, although many Jews determine how to best adapt this practice to meet their needs.

The thirty-day count begins on the day of the funeral (which means that the days of *shiva* are also part of *shloshim*), and a part of a day counts as a whole day. As an example of the count, if the funeral is held on a Monday, one counts four Mondays, and that Tuesday is the thirtieth day. When a person is mourning for any relative who is not a parent, the official mourning period concludes after the *shloshim* period. When mourning the loss of a parent, the restrictions of *shloshim* continue for the balance of 12 months.

Many people find that attending a daily service to recite *Kaddish* provides an avenue to building relationships with other members of the synagogue. Participating in morning and/or evening services with congregants who have recently experienced the death of a loved one can support your own grieving process and increase your connection to the B'nai Israel community.

## **SAYING KADDISH**

### **What is the *Kaddish* prayer and how long is it recited?**

*Kaddish* literally means “sanctified” and is a statement of faith in God. There is no mention of death in the prayer. The *Kaddish* prayer is said many times during services to divide sections of the service. Mourners who can do so are encouraged to lead the service, giving them the opportunity to recite all forms of the *Kaddish*. There are some recitations of the *Kaddish* prayer that are recited by all mourners (child, spouse, sibling, or parent of the deceased ) throughout the mourning period and on the Yahrzeit, whenever there is a minyan.

There is a tradition that the soul of the deceased ascends higher in the heavens every time the *Kaddish* prayer is recited. When mourning for a spouse, sibling, or child, the *Kaddish* is recited for thirty days. When mourning for a parent, the *Kaddish* is recited for eleven months, according to most traditions. Even though the mourning period is twelve months, the idea is that the deceased can ascend “one month’s worth” of the way to heaven on his or her own, without the benefit of having the *Kaddish* recited. Another interpretation is that the wicked are judged for twelve months after death. Because we don’t want to give the impression that our parents fall into this category, we stop saying *Kaddish* after eleven months.

### **Can someone else say *Kaddish* for me?**

In some communities, there is a custom to pay other individuals to make the commitment to say *Kaddish* every day in place of the mourner. This practice likely originated in communities where women were not permitted to recite *Kaddish*; if there was no male relative, a family might pay a man to recite *Kaddish* on behalf of this individual. While this practice is generally discouraged in our egalitarian context, there are respected charitable organizations who will make these arrangements. Our rabbis can help make connections with the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem; it is appropriate to make a *tzedakah* contribution to the Yeshiva in appreciation of their support.

# MOURNER'S KADDISH

תגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. בעלמא די ברא כרעותה  
ויתברך מלכותה בתיכון  
וביומיו ובחיי דכל בית ישראל  
בעגלא ובזמן קריב ואמרו אמן

יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא

יתברך וישתבח, ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא  
ויתעדר ויתעלה ויתקלל שמה דקדשא בריה הוא  
\*לעלא מן כל ברכתא ושירתא, תשבחתא ונתמתא  
דאמרו בעלמא, ואמרו אמן

*\*Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*  
לעלא לעלא מן כל ברכתא ושירתא

יהא שלמא רבא מן שמיא  
וחיים עלינו ועל כל ישראל, ואמרו אמן  
עשה שלום במרומו הוא יעשה שלום  
עלינו ועל כל ישראל, ואמרו אמן

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world  
which He has created according to His will.

May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days,  
and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon;  
and say, Amen.

May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored,  
adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,  
beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations  
that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us  
and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights,  
may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

## UNVEILING

### What is an Unveiling?

The Unveiling (*hakamat matzevah*) is a ceremony to dedicate the marker or monument at the grave. There are few official guidelines for this ceremony, but it is a meaningful way to mark the passage of time from formal mourning to remembering. The ceremony typically begins with readings from Psalms, other prayers or readings, and a prayer for the dedication of the monument. There is generally no formal eulogy, but family members or friends may choose to share a few memories of the deceased. The ceremony concludes with the *El Maleh* memorial prayer; *Kaddish* can be recited if a *minyan* is present. As the ceremony concludes, it is appropriate to place stones on the monument to represent that loved ones have visited the gravesite. (Some cemeteries provide woodchips for this purpose.)

### When does the Unveiling take place?

Traditions vary in regard to the timing for the unveiling, which can take place anytime after the conclusion of *shloshim*. In our community, it is most common to schedule the unveiling approximately a year after the death, to roughly coincide with the conclusion of reciting the *Kaddish* and the mourning period. Those who wish to move the date to increase the chances for favorable weather or accommodate out-of-town family are encouraged to do so.

### Who attends an unveiling? Does a rabbi need to officiate?

Unveilings are typically smaller and more intimate than funerals. Family members should invite the attendees who they feel will provide the level of support and comfort that they seek. Because the Unveiling ceremony is so simple, many families choose to conduct the service themselves. Our rabbis can provide the appropriate prayers and offer guidance on how to conduct the ceremony. Our rabbis are also available to conduct the service for those families who wish.

## THE GIFT OF MEMORY

We thank You, O God of life and love,  
For the resurrecting gift of memory  
Which endows Your children, fashioned in Your image,  
With the Godlike sovereign power  
To give immortality through love,  
Praised be You, O God,  
Who enables Your children to remember.

## AFTER THE MOURNING PERIOD

### **What is *Yahrtzeit*?**

The word “*yahrtzeit*” is Yiddish for “year’s time.” This is the anniversary of the death according to the Jewish calendar. It is customary to light a special 24-hour candle on the evening when *yahrtzeit* begins, and to recite *Kaddish* in the synagogue at the evening and/or morning service. At B’nai Israel, we recite the names of those individuals for whom *yahrtzeit* is being observed before the *Kaddish* prayer. Several weeks before the *yahrtzeit*, the synagogue sends a notification alerting you to the specific date when this will occur. Those unable to attend services on the actual day of the *yahrtzeit* should attend on the Shabbat immediately before or after, or on another day. Please alert the clergy office or service leader if you would like a name recited on a day other than the actual *yahrtzeit* date.

### **What is *Yizkor*?**

The word “*yizkor*” means “God remembers.” This is the name for the special memorial service that is recited on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret (the conclusion of Sukkot), the eighth day of Passover, and the second day of Shavuot. It is customary on the evening before *Yizkor*, at the time when Festival candles are lit, to light a 24-hour candle in memory of all deceased loved ones. The *Yizkor* service itself is recited during the morning service just after the Torah is read. At B’nai Israel, members may memorialize their loved ones in a special *Yizkor* booklet, which is produced each year before Yom Kippur. These booklets are distributed each time the *Yizkor* service is recited.

## Appendix A - Important Phone Numbers

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**When a death occurs, please call the B'nai Israel office as soon as possible:**

**301-881-6550**

Choose the prompt for pastoral emergencies and leave a message to page the rabbi. The rabbi will guide you through all arrangements for the funeral and *shiva*.

### **Hospice**

Jewish Social Service Agency (JSSA) Hospice: 301-816-2676

Montgomery Hospice: 301-921-4400

### **Funeral Homes**

Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home: 301-622-2290

Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care: 301-340-1400

Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home: 202-541-1001

## Appendix B – Funeral Home Comparison

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The U.S. Federal Trade Commission requires that all funeral homes provide price lists to representatives of any religious group, burial society, or memorial society when they inquire about funeral arrangements on behalf of their members. In addition, these lists must be provided to individual group members inquiring about funeral arrangements.

There are many factors that might go into the selection of a funeral home. The three funeral homes in our area who provide Jewish Funerals (Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care, and Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home) can each provide special pricing arrangements for B’nai Israel members. Beyond the basic funeral practice, each has its own price structure for such additional services as limousines, upgraded caskets, and “shiva concierge.”

Our Bereavement Committee asked each funeral home to share whatever information they thought might be helpful for consumers who might want to choose them. This is what they shared. While our synagogue does not endorse or recommend funeral homes, our rabbis are available to discuss the different options and help you make the best choices for your family.

### **Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, Inc.**

(Under the auspices of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington\*  
David Zinner, Executive Director, [www.jewish-funerals.org](http://www.jewish-funerals.org))

11800 New Hampshire Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
301-622-2290

- Cost-effective traditional funeral practice (approximately \$2,500 in 2021, with slight increases expected each year).
- Hines-Rinaldi does move bodies on the Sabbath and its premises are available for use 24 hours per day, including Sundays.
- A dedicated tahara room with supplies and a Shmira room are available 24/7, including Sundays.
- A memorial package (register book, shiva candle, acknowledgement cards) is included as part of the funeral package.
- The funeral home does not provide books, chairs, or yarmulkas.
- Fees for newspaper notices and Social Security and veterans claims are charged at cost.

\*The Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington is comprised of area synagogues and other Jewish organizations. The contract price includes picking up the body at the place of death, transportation to the funeral home, refrigeration, a simple casket, and use of the funeral home chapel for the service, if desired.

### **Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care**

Edward Sagel, Director ([ed@sagelbloomfield.com](mailto:ed@sagelbloomfield.com))  
1091 Rockville Pike  
Rockville, MD 20852  
301-340-1400

- Sagel-Bloomfield does have a discounted package for B’nai Israel members but prefers to discuss actual pricing in person with bereaved family.
- Transfers of the deceased occur 24/7/365.
- “Kosher” funerals are available and the funeral home has an orthodox subsection (Shomrei Neshama)
- This is the only funeral home with *shiva* catering as an option.
- Aftercare and grief sessions are also an option.
- Free burials are provided based on need.

### **Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home, Joyce Torchinsky, Owner and Funeral Director**

254 Carroll Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20012  
202-541-1001

- Torchinsky is the only one of the three funeral homes that is Jewish owned and has been operating since March 2001.
- Special negotiated pricing is available for B’nai Israel members.
- All caskets are “kosher” – using only wood pegs and kosher glue -no metal.
- No viewing, visitations, or embalming are allowed.
- Chairs and books for shiva are available on loan.
- A *tahara* room and supplies are included in the package.
- The memorial package includes candles, register book, acknowledgement cards, and a newspaper death notice.
- Torchinsky conducts follow-up calls to bereaved families and works with counselors and clergy throughout the area.
- Free burials are provided based on need.
- The funeral home will coordinate with off-duty police for traffic egress after services at B’nai Israel at cost.

## Appendix C – Recommended Reading

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### Jewish Ritual and Practice

Diamant, Anita. *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew*. New York: Schocken Books, 1999.

Goldman, Ari. *Living a Year of Kaddish*. New York: Schocken Books, 2006.

Kaye, Terry. *The Jewish Mourner's Handbook*. Millburn, NJ: Behrman House, 1992.

Kolatch, Alfred J. *The Jewish Mourner's Book of Why*. New York: Jonathan David, 1993.

Lamm, Maurice. *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. New York: Jonathan David, 2000.

Olitzky, Kerry. *Grief in Our Seasons: A Mourner's Kaddish Companion*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Riemer, Jack, ed. *Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Riemer, Jack, ed. *Jewish Reflections on Death*. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

### Grief and Sorrow

Brener, Anne. *Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path through Grief to Healing*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993.

Grollman, Earl. *Living with Loss, Healing with Hope: A Jewish Perspective*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Schocken Books, 1981 (rev. 2004).

Levy, Naomi. *To Begin Again: Journey toward Comfort, Strength, and Faith in Difficult Times*. New York: Ballantine, 1999.

Olitzky, Kerry. *Jewish Paths toward Healing and Wholeness: A Personal Guide to Dealing with Suffering*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.

Wolfson, Ron. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

### Death of a Parent

Angel, Marc. *The Orphaned Adult: Confronting the Death of a Parent*. Human Sciences Press, 1997.

Fein, Leonard. *Against the Dying of the Light: A Parent's Story of Love, Loss, and Hope*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.

### Explaining Death to Children

Goldman, Linda. *Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Grollman, Earl. *Explaining Death to Children*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Kushner, Harold. *When Children Ask About God: A Guide for Parents Who Don't Always Have All the Answers*. New York: Schocken Books, 1971 (rev. 1989).

Wolpe, David J. *Teaching Your Children About God*. New York, Holt, 1993.

### For Children Ages 4-8

Barron, T.A. *Where is Grandpa?* New York: Philomel Books, 2000.

Buscaglia, Leo. *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack Incorporated, 1982.

Lanton, Sandy. *Daddy's Chair*. Seattle: Lantern Press, 2013.

Spero, Moshe. *Saying Goodbye to Grandma*. New York: Pitspopany Press, 1997. Ages 5-8

Spero, Moshe. *Saying Goodbye to Grandpa*. New York: Pitspopany Press, 1997. Ages 5-8

Techner, David, and Judith Hirt-Manheimer. *A Candle for Grandpa: A Guide to the Jewish Funeral for Children and Parents*. New York: UAHC Press, 1994. Ages 4-8

### For Children Ages 8-12

Fassler, Joan. *My Grandpa Died Today*. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1971.

Gellman, Marc. *And God Cried, Too: A Kid's Book of Healing and Hope*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.

Liss-Levinson, Nechama. *When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1995.

Mundy, Michaelene. *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss*. Abbey Press, 2014.

## Appendix D – Web Resources

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### **Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington**

<https://dc.jewish-funerals.org/>

A group of more than 40 synagogues and Jewish organizations in the Washington area that provides education and training for Chevra Kadisha groups and bereavement committees.

### **Kavod v’Nichum/Gamliel Institute**

<https://www.jewish-funerals.org/>

Kavod v’Nichum (Honor and Comfort) provides training and support for Chevra Kadisha groups and bereavement committees. The Gamliel Institute is a center for study, training, and advocacy concerning Jewish end-of-life practices.

### **My Jewish Learning**

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/category/mourn/>

Comprehensive website with information on end of life planning, mourning rituals, and Jewish views on the afterlife. Geared towards learners of all religious and educational backgrounds.

### **Shiva.com**

<https://www.shiva.com/learning-center/death-and-mourning/>

General information, as well as links to send shiva platters and to plant a tree in Israel.

## Appendix E – Glossary

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*Aninut* – the period of acute mourning between death and burial.

*Aron* – casket

*Chevra Kadisha* – literally, “holy society,” a group of people entrusted with preparing the body for burial.

*El Maleh Rahamim* – literally, “God full of compassion,” the memorial prayer requesting God’s compassion for the deceased, recited at the funeral, the unveiling, *yahrtzeit*, and *yizkor*.

*Hakamat matzevah* – the Hebrew term for the unveiling of the grave marker.

*Halakha* – Jewish law or practice.

*Kavod ha-met* – literally, “honor of the deceased.” Judaism treats the body with the utmost respect.

*Kaddish* – a prayer that affirms our faith in God. There are several versions; one is recited by the mourners during the period of mourning.

*Kohen* – a member of the priestly tribe. A *kohen* is not permitted to be in the presence of a dead body except for close relatives (parents, children, siblings, spouse).

*Kri’ah* – a ritual tearing of the garments as an expression and visible sign of grief by an *onen*.

*Levayat ha-met* – the Hebrew term for the funeral service.

*Ma’ariv* – The evening service. At B’nai Israel, it is held every evening except Saturdays at 8:00 PM.

*Mincha* – The afternoon service. At B’nai Israel, this is typically paired with *Ma’ariv* during the summer.

*Minyan* – A quorum of ten Jews over the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah, required to say certain prayers, including the *Kaddish*.

*Nivul ha-met* – literally, “degradation of the deceased.” This is the opposite of *kavod ha-met* and is not permitted under Jewish law.

*Onen* – the mourner of an immediate relative (parent, spouse, sibling, or child).

*Se'udat havra-ah* – “meal of consolation,” the first meal for the mourners returning from the cemetery.

*Shiva* – the Hebrew word for seven, this refers to the seven-day period of mourning immediately following the funeral.

*Shiva minyan* – service conducted during the shiva period.

*Shloshim* – the Hebrew word for thirty, this refers to the 30-day period immediately following the funeral.

*Shmira* – literally, “guarding.” Refers to the tradition that the deceased should not be left alone from the time of death until burial. An individual who performs this *mitzvah* is a *shomer/shomeret*.

*Shomer/Shomeret* – literally, “guard,” this is the person who watches over the deceased until burial. *Shomer* is the masculine term; *shomeret* is the feminine term.

*Takhrikhim* – the white linen shrouds used to dress the body in preparation for burial.

*Tahara* – literally, “purification.” Refers to the ritual washing and dressing of the body in preparation for burial.

*Vidui* – confession before death, recited by the dying person or by a family member or friend.

*Yahrtzeit* – Yiddish for “year’s time,” this is the anniversary of the death according to the Hebrew calendar.

*Yizkor* – Hebrew for “God remembers.” This is the name for the special memorial services recited on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret (the conclusion of Sukkot), the last day of Passover, and the second day of Shavuot.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMMITMENT TO B'NAI ISRAEL

Our beautiful Synagogue provides many meaningful opportunities to arrange dedications **In Memory Of** or **In Honor Of** loved ones.

Memorial plaques, endowments, scholarships, capital gifts, fine arts, and educational programs are among the possibilities available at B'nai Israel Congregation.

For further information, please contact Allison Karasik (240-221-2507, [allison@bnaiisraelcong.org](mailto:allison@bnaiisraelcong.org)).



6301 Montrose Road, Rockville, Maryland 20852

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[www.bnaiisraelcong.org](http://www.bnaiisraelcong.org)