

Judaism 101

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Death

As Death Approaches

- Shema
 - Jews are obligated to recite the Shema twice a day
 - It is also traditionally recited right before one's death
- Vidui
 - Confession
 - Jews often feel obligated to confess sins if they feel death is approaching
- Rabbis do not need to be present for both Shema and Vidui, though Rabbis try to be available during this time of need.
- Some Jews recite a blessing upon witnessing or hearing about someone passing away
 - Baruch Dayan Ha-Emet - Blessed is the Judge of Truth.

Preparing for the Funeral

- In Judaism we have a maximum of 3 days to bury the body
 - It's preferable to have the funeral sooner.
- Shmira
 - The body is ceremonially watched from when it enters the funeral home and until the burial. The Jewish community take shifts mostly at night to make sure this happens
- Taharah
 - This is the ritualistic washing of the body. It means make pure.
- Chevra Kaddisha
 - Also referred to as Burial Society
 - This is the group of people who wash the body
 - This is considered one of the greatest Mitzvah in Judaism
- Democracy in Death
 - Everyone is always treated the very same

Aron - The casket

- No Metal
- Simple wooden box
- Supposed to “breakdown” soon



The Funeral and Burial

- Ceremony is often in two parts - The Funeral and Burial
 - The Funeral is often the synagogue or chapel
 - The Burial is at the gravesite
- No embalming and always closed caskets
- The Rabbi usually officiates and offers a Eulogy, also called a Chespid
- There are lots of readings and bible passages offered during funeral and burial
- The casket is lowered into the gravesite during the middle of the service
- Loved ones and community members are the first to shovel dirt onto the casket
- Gravestone is not set up until a 11 months or more after the burial

El Malei Rachamim

- This means fully compassionate God
- It's unique in that it is only recited at a funeral
- It's both haunting and beautiful

Translation:

God of abundant mercy, God Most High, may the soul of our loved ones, who has gone into eternity, find the gift of perfect peace in Your Embrace - together with the holy and pure, whose light shines like the radiance of heaven.

Compassionate God hold () close to you forever, so that () soul may be bound up in the bond of life eternal.

May () find a home with you; and may () rest in peace. Together we say Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdY5FSVbIC0>

How Jews Mourn part 1

Kriah and the Shiva the Yartzeit Candle



How Jews Mourn part 2 - Shiva

- The first seven days after the burial
- Jews used to sit on the floor or low stools which is why it's often called "Sitting Shiva"
- Traditional Jews will hold a special worship service called a Shiva service each night for the seven nights - minus shabbat. It's called a Shiva Minyan.
- In Reform Judaism, most families hold the shiva worship service from 3 to 1 nights
- Traditionally mourners do not work and guests are often invited to come and bring food and company.
 - Often in Reform Judaism the synagogue makes an announcement about appropriate times to visit the family

How Jews Mourn part 3

- Sheloshim - 30 days after the burial
- Yahrzeit - Anniversary of the death of a loved one
- Unveiling - The gravestone is revealed
- Kaddish - Every Jewish service includes a Mourner's Kaddish
 - The names of loved ones who are in a period of Shiva, Sheloshim, or Yahrzeit are mentioned

Jewish Gravestones



Jewish Gravestone resource:
<https://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/tombstones.html>



Samuel, 25:29, “May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life”.

Judaism and the Afterlife

- Tikkun Olam - we repair the world, not for a better afterlife, but to make the world a better place!
- Lots of answers
 - Standard Reform response - I haven't been there, how would I know?
 - Bible - Sheol
 - Talmud - Gan Eden/Gehina
 - Talmud/Liturgy - Resurrection - Look at page 246 in our prayer books
 - Mysticism/Kabbalah - Reincarnation
 - Immortality of the Soul

Judaism and Euthanasia

- The Jewish response is that while it is not allowed to hasten a death, neither is it necessary to prevent death from coming
- *“Rabbi Meir used to compare a dying man to a flickering lamp: The moment one touches it, he puts it out. So, too, whoever closes the eyes of a dying man is accounted as though he has snuffed out his life.”* (Semachot 44a)
- *“If there is something that causes a delay to the departure of the soul, e.g., [if] near that house there is a knocking sound, viz., a wood-cutter, or there is salt on his tongue, and these hinder the departure of the soul, it is permitted to remove it, for there is no direct act involved in this, since he merely removes an obstacle that prevents death”* (Mapa of Yoreh De’ah 339:1)

Funeral readings part 1:

Birth is a beginning, And death a destination And life is a journey: From childhood to maturity And youth to age;

From innocence to awareness, And ignorance to knowing; From foolishness to discretion, And then perhaps to wisdom.

From weakness to strength or From strength to weakness, And often back again; From health to sickness, And we pray to health again.

From offence to forgiveness, From loneliness to love, From joy to gratitude, From pain to compassion, From grief to understanding, From fear to faith.

From defeat to defeat to defeat Until, not looking backwards or ahead, We see that victory lies not, At some high point along the way, But in having made the journey, Step by step, A sacred pilgrimage. Birth is a beginning, And death a destination And life is a journey.

--Rabbi Alvin Fine

Funeral Readings part 2

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven:

A time for being born and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;

A time for slaying and a time for healing, A time for tearing down and a time for building up;

A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing;

A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;

A time for seeking and a time for losing, A time for keeping and a time for discarding;

A time for ripping and a time for sewing, A time for silence and a time for speaking;

A time for loving and a time for hating; A time for war and a time for peace.

-Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Funeral Readings part 3

A psalm of David. Adonai is my shepherd; I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures; leads me beside still waters;

Restores my soul. You guide me in right paths for the sake of your name.

Though I walk through a valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

You set a table for me in full view of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my drink overflows.

Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of God for many long years.

Psalm 23