

CONGREGATION OR ATID
Connecting community with spirituality



Congregation Or Atid Guide to Death and Mourning Rituals

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Mourning the loss of a loved one can be a complicated time, filled with feelings of loss and pain. This booklet hopes to guide you through Jewish rituals, laws, and customs that a mourner experiences, in an effort to prepare you for this process and begin to heal the wounds of grief. Throughout this process, it is important to remember that one does not “get over” the death of a loved one. Rather, a person gets used to it and learns how to live with the loss.

You are an integral part of our synagogue family. If you or a family member are seriously ill or actively dying, please be directly in touch with the synagogue and the Rabbi. In these moments of loss and pain, the Rabbi, Ritual Committee, and congregation are here to support you.

FIRST STEPS

If death occurs in the hospital, please follow the hospital procedures. If death occurs at home, call 9-1-1, unless the person has been in hospice care, in which case the hospice provider should be called. After official pronouncement, contact the funeral home of your choice. Funeral homes in the area that are equipped to do a Jewish funeral are:

Bliley's – 804-355-3800 Woody's – 804-288-3013
Bennett – 804-359-4481

If prior arrangements have not been made regarding a cemetery plot, please contact Congregation Or Atid's Cemetery Chairperson through the synagogue office at 804-740-4747. Our staff can help you with a plot at Or Atid Memorial Gardens.

Call Rabbi Hal Schevitz in order to set up a meeting and the date and the time of service. The Rabbi can be reached through the office at 804-740-4747 or personally at 410-804-6540. If death occurs on Shabbat or Yom Tov, you may still contact the Rabbi immediately. Leave a message and the Rabbi will return your call.

You may also reach out to the following Ritual Committee members, who will help you:

Rick Wiener 804-914-0263

Fran Todras 757-692-4263

You should also contact your lawyer and/or accountant as soon as is practical. Your loved one may have left instructions that you will want to honor. In addition, there may be certain steps that your legal and financial advisors will want you to take right away and they are the best ones to advise you during this time. Please refer to the appendix of this Manual for important pre-planning information. The Jewish practices that follow revolve around two basic concepts: honoring the dead and the mourner coming to terms with the loss so that one's life might resume, having healed through the mourning process.

HEVRA KADDISHA

Hevra Kaddisha means “holy society.” Upon the notification of someone’s death, the members of this group will gather at the funeral home to carry out the task of preparing the deceased for burial. The body is cared for through the process of *tahara* (ritual washing) and upon request, the body can be watched over at the funeral home by members of the congregation.

GARMENTS: TAKHRIKH AND TALLIT

The body is dressed in a *takhrikh*, a specially prepared linen shroud. Every person returns to God in the same fashion. We were all born humbly into this world. Possessions are ephemeral, and we return to the Holy Blessed One with hands open as if to say, "See I take nothing with me." In addition, wealthy, poor, learned, and unlearned have no distinction in death. We exit this world with the same care, dignity, and simplicity. All are interred in the same white *takhrikh*. If the deceased owned a *tallit*, it is draped over the body before the body is placed in the burial coffin. Because the *tzitzit* represent God's mitzvot (commandments) to the living, one of the *tzitzit* is cut off before it is placed upon the deceased to show that he or she no longer carries these responsibilities.

COFFIN

As we are all equal in death, Jewish tradition recommends a simple wooden coffin. Metal-based coffins are forbidden in Jewish law as it is not in consonance with the simple nature of Jewish burial. While all kinds of wooden coffins are acceptable, simplicity is urged.

EMBALMING

Unnatural preservation of the body relies upon the age-old art of embalming. This entails added chemicals to the body, draining the blood, adding preservatives, and the removal of certain organs. Embalming is strongly forbidden by Jewish law, and should be considered only if civil law demands that it be done for health reasons. The only exception is when the funeral will have an extensive delay, as when the body must travel a long distance.

CREMATION

Jewish practice requires that we return to God in the same way we entered the world: whole and complete. While there is no explicit law that forbids cremation, it is highly discouraged in Jewish legal tradition. There are several reasons for this. One tradition considers our physical forms to be in the image of God, and we may not damage or desecrate that image, even in death. We may not hasten the process of the body returning to the elements. Tradition considers in-ground burial a positive mitzvah that should be fulfilled. Furthermore, cremation is not more environmentally friendly than burial, nor is it much more

cost-effective. Finally, after the Shoah, contemporary Jews should recoil at the notion of burning Jewish remains. Even so, the Rabbi will officiate at a funeral of one whose wishes are to be cremated, although some of the traditional practices will be adapted.

AUTOPSY

There may be circumstances where autopsy is required by law. Examples where the Medical Examiner may demand an autopsy are: when death comes as a result of suspicious origin (i.e. murder or suicide) or when death occurred because of some medical wrongdoing. If this is the case, civil law is respected.

MEET WITH THE RABBI

Between a loved one's death and the funeral, it is necessary that you meet with the Rabbi. This meeting will consist of gathering information about the deceased, telling their life story, planning the details of the funeral and Shiva, and an explanation of the funeral and mourning process. Amidst all of the arrangements and running around to prepare for a funeral, this meeting can be therapeutic, and a helpful release from the tension and stress of mourning.

SETTING A DATE AND TIME FOR THE FUNERAL

Jewish law requires a swift burial. Burial should occur soon after death, within 24-48 hours if possible. In some cases, extenuating circumstances will delay the burial, such as when the death falls on a Holy Day or waiting for relatives from a

great distance to arrive. Delays may also be due to the need for an autopsy, or when arrangements have to be made for the body to travel a great distance for the burial to take place.

OBITUARY

The choice to write and publish an obituary is a very personal one. Often it is the most efficient way to disseminate important information about funeral arrangements, the family's wishes for charitable donations, the location of Shiva, and other details that are challenging to provide individually. The funeral director can assist you with content and arrange for placement, or you can call the Richmond Times-Dispatch directly at 804-643-4414.

CONGREGATIONAL DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT

Congregation Or Atid will send a "Sad Loss" notice to the congregation, informing the community of the death of a congregant or immediate relative, some biographical information, and the date and time of the funeral and Shiva services.

FLOWERS vs. TZEDAKAH (charitable contributions)

While flowers appear regularly at Christian funerals, they are not part of Jewish tradition. In keeping with the tenor of our past, acts of *Tzedakah* are to be strongly encouraged. Honoring the deceased through contributions to the synagogue, hospital, or needy organization gives a more lasting and meaningful impression. Or Atid has several funds where donations can be made.

WHO IS A MOURNER?

A person is a mourner upon the death of a father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, or spouse. Only these seven persons are responsible for carrying out the full service and obligations of funeral rites, as well as Shiva (7 days), Shloshim (30 days), and saying Kaddish for the 11-month period following the death (see below). Only the children of the deceased are obligated to say Kaddish.

ONEN

One whose immediate relative has died, but has not yet buried their loved one is called an *Onen*. An *Onen* must not attend a party, have their hair cut/shave, conduct business, study Torah, recite *Kaddish*, attend services, or put on *tefillin*.

MIRRORS

It is a tradition to cover the mirrors from the moment of death until the end of the Shiva. One explanation tells us that the mirror would cause us to be concerned with our appearances, which is not appropriate while we mourn. Another is that the image of the deceased is said to be visible at times through the reflection we perceive.

VIEWING

Displaying the body in public is not part of Jewish tradition, and is highly discouraged. However, if the immediate family so chooses, they may view the deceased in private at the funeral home.

PALLBEARERS

Family members and/or friends are encouraged to serve as pallbearers escorting the descendant to the hearse. In the Jewish tradition, it is always preferable to honor the dead ourselves and not to leave the tasks to “professionals.”

THE CEMETERY

Upon arrival at the cemetery the pallbearers carry the coffin to the gravesite, stopping seven times on the way, as Psalm 91 is recited.

K'RIYAH

The funeral commences just prior to the service, usually in an adjacent room to the main chapel in the funeral home, or in a private corner at a graveside service. Under the direction of the Rabbi, *K'riyah* (rending of clothes) is performed.

Traditionally, one tears a garment to outwardly display how his or her soul is torn at this moment of loss. The garment is torn on the left side of the child of the deceased, and on the right side for other relatives. In many cases today, a black ribbon worn and cut in the same manner. A blessing is recited as the cloth is torn. The garment for *K'riyah* is worn for the 7 days of Shiva, but is removed on Friday evening at the beginning of Shabbat and replaced on Saturday evening at the end of Shabbat. After Shiva, the garment is discarded, as we transition out of the deepest stage of mourning.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

A Jewish funeral service consists of an introduction, traditional prayers and words of comfort, and a eulogy delivered by the Rabbi. Family and friends may also deliver prepared remarks. As the coffin is lowered, *Tzidduk Ha'Din* (Justification of the Divine Decree) and other Psalms are recited. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Rabbi will offer brief prayers and recite the *El Malei Rachamim* (God, full of compassion), the memorial prayer, followed by the recitation of the Kaddish.

THE BURIAL

It is the duty of the mourners, relatives, and friends to assist in filling the grave. Each participant places earth into the grave one at a time. Traditionally, the shovel is not passed from person to person but placed down so that the next individual picks it up. Tradition also dictates that the first shovelful for each person is placed into the grave holding the shovel upside down to show that we are hesitant to let the deceased go.

SHOULD CHILDREN ATTEND?

The presence of children at a funeral is ultimately a family decision. Children may be more frightened by what they imagine occurs at funerals than what actually happens. Please consult the Rabbi.

AFTER THE FUNERAL: WATER

Upon returning home, a pitcher of water is placed outside the front door of the house so that the mourners may wash their hands of the ritual impurity of death. The water is poured alternately on both hands. It is helpful to place a roll of paper towels or a cloth towel to dry hands.

FOOD

The Meal of Condolence, taken upon arrival from the cemetery is traditionally a light meal. It is customary for it to be a dairy meal and the mourner should begin by eating hard-boiled eggs (symbolic of the circular nature of life) and some bread. It is traditional for members of the community to prepare and bring food to the house of mourning.

CANDLE

A Yahrzeit candle is lit for the deceased upon return from the cemetery. In most cases, you will be provided with a candle by the funeral home. The candle will last for 7 days, the period of Shiva.

SHIVA

Shiva means “seven.” It is the seven-day period that begins immediately following the funeral and internment. The day of the funeral is counted as the first day, and Shiva ends the

morning of the seventh day. If a major Jewish holiday (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, or Yom Kippur) falls during Shiva, it immediately cancels Shiva before the full seven-day period is over.

PRACTICES DURING SHIVA

In traditional practice, the mourner observes the following during the period of Shiva:

- Remaining at home, unless to attend Shabbat services with the community
- Refraining from conducting regular business
- Refraining from sexual relations
- Refraining from wearing leather or other fancy clothes
- Refraining from beautifying one's self beyond basic personal hygiene
- Refraining from shaving or trimming hair, including facial hair/beards

A minor (under 13) is not obligated to observe the rituals of mourning.

COMFORTING MOURNERS

Comforting mourners is one of the most important mitzvot that we can do. At a Shiva house, it is customary for the front door to be left open or unlocked, since all are invited to comfort mourners. It is also a custom not to speak to a mourner until they have spoken first. Offering a hug, kiss, handshake, or arm around the shoulder can speak volumes. If you want to open a conversation, "I'm so sorry" or "I don't know what to say. This must be so difficult for you" or "I am so sorry to hear about ____" are the best ways to begin.

Recalling a personal anecdote is also powerful. One of the most important ways to comfort mourners is to encourage them to remember the deceased.

The purpose of Shiva is to focus on the life of the deceased and his or her relationship to their living family and friends. It is a natural instinct to ask about them, share jokes, and make small talk about sports, entertainment, or politics. However, we should be careful to avoid raucous humor, tasteless jokes, loud talk, and gossip. A visit to a Shiva house should be no more than an hour. If a service is held (see below), come a few minutes before and stay a few minutes after. Mourners are exhausted by the Shiva experience, so visitors should not overstay their welcome. The traditional Jewish words of comfort said to a mourner upon leaving the Shiva house are, “May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

It is customary for friends and relatives to visit the mourner and help them prepare meals and keep the house clean, even though a mourner is not forbidden from doing these things.

LOW CHAIRS

In traditional practice, mourners sit on the floor or low to the ground. Stools or low chairs may be used for this purpose in houses of mourning. Pregnant women and the elderly and infirm are exempt from this practice.

SERVICES/KADDISH

The Rabbi and ritual committee will arrange for services to take place at the house of mourning where Shiva is taking

place, for as many days of Shiva as the mourner requests. This is to ensure that the mourner recites Kaddish with a *minyan* (quorum of 10 adult Jews) as often as possible (morning, afternoon, and evening), while still observing the restriction to remain at home. *Siddurim* (prayer books) and *kippot* (skullcaps) will be provided. On Friday night and Saturday morning of Shiva, the mourner is expected to attend services at synagogue with the community. Many mourners today opt for a lesser period of Shiva – 3 days. Please consult the Rabbi during your initial meeting (see above) when choosing how many days to observe Shiva.

CONCLUSION OF SHIVA

On the morning of the seventh day, Shiva ends with the mourner leaving the house to take a walk around the block. This literal leaving of the home symbolically demonstrates the mourner's reemergence into the world. Upon returning to the house, the mourner throws water onto the street (which was kept at the front door throughout the Shiva), and the *k'ryiah* garment or ribbon is discarded. Both of these are final acts of closure.

SHLOSHIM

Shloshim means "thirty." These are the thirty days after the funeral and internment, a far less intensive period of mourning than Shiva. The mourner may return to work, bathe for pleasure, and leave the house to meet friends. Traditionally, mourners do not play musical instruments or attend concerts or theater unless their livelihood depends upon it. The mourner can again wear leather, have sexual

relations and study Torah. In traditional practice, the mourner still recites Kaddish three times a day. At the end of the thirty days, the mourner can shave, an outward symbol of leaving this stage of mourning, as well as attend public entertainment (such as concerts or movies).

THE FIRST YEAR – YAHRZEIT

After Shloshim, the mourner becomes even more reintegrated to their normal life. He or she says Kaddish three times a day for a full eleven months. At the yahrzeit, or one-year anniversary of the death of the loved one on the Hebrew calendar, the mourner recites Kaddish once, and will do so annually on that date for the rest of his or her life.

UNVEILING

The unveiling of the tombstone or grave marker takes place any time after the period of Shiva and before the end of the first year, depending on customs and/or conditions. It is not a ritual required by Jewish law, but a custom by which we honor the dead. The unveiling ceremony consists of a few brief readings and/or psalms, the removal of the cloth from the tombstone or marker, and the reading of the inscription. The memorial prayer *El Malei Rachamim* is recited, and if there are 10 Jews, Kaddish can be recited. It is the practice to leave stones on the tombstone at this visit, and all future visits to the cemetery as a marker of eternal love and fidelity. While other religious traditions leave flowers, Jews leave stones, as they are permanent reminders of our love which does not die.

NON-JEWISH RELATIVES AND INTERFAITH FAMILIES

In the reality of today's Jewish experience, there are increasing numbers of Jews who have spouses or close relatives who are not Jewish due to conversion and intermarriage. These matters will be treated with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

When a Jewish member dies and leaves behind a non-Jewish spouse or relatives, it is our goal to provide assistance and support to the living non-Jewish mourner. Likewise, when a non-Jewish member or relative dies, we want to help the living Jewish mourner.

The Rabbi can obviously officiate at the funeral of a Jew, providing guidance to the non-Jewish family. Likewise, the Rabbi can also officiate at the funeral of non-Jews, adapting the service and omitting prayers that are exclusive to the Jewish funeral service.

It is fully appropriate for a Jew to say Kaddish for a non-Jewish spouse or relative. It is also permitted for a non-Jewish mourner to be supported by Jews who will say Kaddish for Jewish family member who has died. We can also ensure that someone takes upon themselves the responsibility of saying Kaddish for a convert who has died and has no other family who are Jewish. This person should have Kaddish recited for him or her for the 11 months following death, as would be the case for any other Jew. In all cases, Congregation Or Atid can arrange for Shiva, whether the mourner is Jewish or not.

The Rabbi, Ritual Committee, and Caring Committee will provide assistance to make this process as easy and comfortable as possible. As in all other cases, please be in touch with the Rabbi so that all questions and concerns may be properly addressed.

Appendix

Pre-planning Questionnaire

In the minutes, hours, days and weeks leading up to and/or following the death of a loved one, the distraction of medical, financial and legal issues are often unwelcome. Planning ahead will make that stressful time less difficult to navigate.

This appendix is for the living and is intended to provide a roadmap for your loved ones to follow after your demise. This will help make mourning your loss their only priority, not worrying about searching the house for documents, or hunting for phone numbers, or wondering if you wanted something special done at your funeral. You may find it useful to complete and let your love ones know you have done so.

Full Legal Name:

Full Hebrew Name:

Full Date of Birth:

Do you have a Living Will or other written instructions about end of life decisions? If yes, where is the original copy of your Living Will being kept?

_____ Y _____ N Location: _____

Do you have copies at home? _____ Y _____ N

In your office? _____ Y _____ N

If you do not have a Living Will, please consider contacting an attorney to prepare one. This will take the guesswork out of some very challenging and personal decisions about which your loved ones will agonize in the absence of specific instructions from you.

Do you have a Last Will and Testament?

_____ Y _____ N

If yes, who is the Executor of your estate?

If no, please consider contacting an attorney to prepare one. A will is the only way to be sure your wishes are honored. This is an opportunity to create a lasting legacy to Congregation Or Atid or another designated charity, and to pass a meaningful item to a specific person, or create specific bequests.

Where is the original copy of your Will kept?

Do you have copies at home? _____ Y _____ N

In your office? _____ Y _____ N

Name, email address, phone # of your attorney:

Name, email address, phone # of your accountant:

Name, email address, phone # of your insurance agent:

Name, email address, phone # of your investment broker:

Do you own a cemetery plot? If yes, where is it?

_____ Y _____ N

Physical location:

Where is the deed to the plot?

If no, please consider the plots that are available at Or Atid Gardens, located at Greenwood Memorial Gardens, 12609 Patterson Avenue, Henrico, Virginia 23238.

Please contact David Jaffe at 804-297-7093 or email him at drdjaffe@gmail.com if you would like more information or to purchase a plot which includes 2 gravesites.

Do you have a pre-planned funeral? _____ Y _____ N

If yes, with what funeral home?

Additional helpful information:

Social Security Number, location of Birth Certificate, dates and/or paperwork of Military Service; Branch of Service; ID cards, VA #'s or cards; Government Insurance information.

- List of Life Insurance policies with policy numbers and their location.
- List of Bank Accounts, branch locations, safety deposit boxes, location of keys, passbooks, checkbooks, safe location with combination, etc.
- List of Real Estate and location of deeds, titles, mortgages, etc.
- List of credit card numbers
- List of log in and passwords for online banking, bill payments, auto-withdrawal payments, and email access.
- List of Securities or Bonds with mature dates.
- List of family members, friends, business associates that you want notified.
- Specific requests for your funeral