

WHEN SOMEONE DIES:

What to Do Before, During, and After the Death of a Loved One

Judaism regards death as part of the cycle of life. At Shirat HaNefesh we think it is important to incorporate end-of-life planning while we are still in good health and, hopefully, far from death. When someone dies, we hope you and your loved ones will be empowered to walk through difficult times with information at your fingertips. And we hope you will be comforted knowing that your community and clergy are available to help you with practical assistance and to sustain you in your grief.

Dying involves both the body and the soul in the greatest transition we are ever called upon to make. Death may be inevitable but dying alone or in fear does not have to be. In Western society, many have lost touch with the spiritual aspect of death and dying. Medicine and technology valiantly (and wonderfully) save lives yet treat death as a failure or an embarrassment. Our ancient Jewish traditions offer a different approach: an emphasis on the dignity and needs of the dying, showing honor to the dead, enveloping the deceased's loved ones in a caring community, and allowing mourners the time and respect to walk through the period of mourning at their own pace.

This Guidance is intended to help Shirat HaNefesh members plan for the end of life, now and when the time comes. Feel free to make use of, and share, the information below:

- I. **Advance Planning for End-of-Life** -- includes making wills, ethical wills, medical directives, purchasing cemetery plots, and more.
- II. **SHN's Cemetery Section** -- information on Shirat HaNefesh's cemetery section at Garden of Remembrance in Clarksburg, MD.
- III. **When Someone Dies** -- what to do in the moment, whom to call, first steps and next steps, the funeral and shiva and beyond.
- IV. **Resources** -- websites, background information, poems, prayers, and more.



Shirat HaNefesh is grateful to Temple Solel in California for their thoughtful and helpful guidance. Much of the material in this document is taken from [*The Jewish Path in Death and Mourning*](#).

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I. ADVANCE PLANNING



CHECKLIST FOR ADVANCED PLANNING

This page is a checklist you may wish to use in order to prepare in advance for a death in your immediate family.

- Create a "When I Die" folder, including everything listed below. Make sure your close family members know where it is, or give them a copy of it.
- Write a Will and have it properly notarized
- Create a Medical Directive and have a conversation with family about end-of-life preferences
- Give copies to your loved ones and primary caregiver/physician
- Make arrangements to purchase a plot in a cemetery
- If there are travel issues, contact the funeral homes at both locations to discuss procedures.
- Write an Ethical Will
- Decide whether you would like taharah performed (the traditional ritual washing and preparation of your body for burial)
- If you do not want taharah, decide what clothing would be appropriate for burial
- Decide whether or not you want shomrim to stay with the body until burial
- Decide whether and where the family would sit shiva
- Write down the name(s) of the organization(s) (such as Shirat HaNefesh, the American Cancer Society, etc.) to which you would like donations to be made in your honor after your death.
- Have a family discussion about shiva, shmira, funeral, etc.

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| IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS: |
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I. Advance Planning

1. Creating a “When I Die” Folder

The hours and days immediately following the death of a loved one are a particularly stressful time for immediate family and friends. You can make this time a little easier for them by creating a “When I Die” folder with all the necessary information about your wishes. It is important to let family members know in advance where this folder is, or to make a copy and share it with them. Click [HERE](#) for a checklist of information to include in such a folder.

Below are some things you may want to include in your “When I Die” folder:

- A copy of your Last Will and Testament, and instructions regarding where to find the original
- Documents concerning any arrangements you have made in advance, including your desires regarding the disposition of your remains
- Whether you would like to have shmirah, which means there will be a person with your body at all times, day and night, until the burial
- Whether you would like to have taharah (ritual washing) performed on your body
- Your Ethical Will
- A copy of other pertinent documents, such as life insurance policies, financial documents, etc.
- Contact information of those people whom you would like to have notified of your death
- Any wishes regarding funeral arrangements, your obituary, or your gravestone (if applicable)

The appendix contains a Jewish Directive which summarizes some of this information.

2. Writing an Ethical Will

An Ethical Will is a document that offers you a final opportunity to tell your family and friends what really matters to you. It helps organize your thoughts and communicate the most essential things you have learned in life. Of all the things you leave your family and friends, this may be the most important.

While a Last Will and Testament enables us to pass on our material wealth, an ethical will, or tzava'ah, allows us to transmit something infinitely more valuable than that: our spiritual wealth - our ethics, our principles, and the meaning we have derived from our lives. An ethical will can speak for us long after we die . . . it speaks from us, in our own words.

Rabbi Stacy Friedman, Rosh Hashanah 1996

For more information about writing an ethical will, see the book, *So That Your Values Live On: Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them*, by Nathaniel Stampfer and Jack Riemer. The authors suggest six steps to writing the will, including how to communicate with your loved ones about

your values, your history, and your wishes for the future as well as practical steps about deciding when to present your ethical will and how best to preserve it.

Either of our clergy will be happy to meet with you if you would like to discuss your Ethical Will.

3. Creating an Advance Medical Directive / Having the Conversation

An advance medical directive becomes important in the event that you or your loved one is unable to make medical decisions. This document will instruct family members, friends, and health care providers what the patient's wishes are. This document will go into effect only when it is determined that the person can no longer make decisions on his or her own; if a patient regains the ability to make decisions, the document would no longer be in effect.

Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST)

When you are seriously ill, making sure your loved ones and doctors know what kinds of medical treatment you want as you approach the end of your life is very important. Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST) can help do that.

MOLST is a form that clearly states what kinds of medical treatment patients want toward the end of their lives. Signed by both a doctor and patient, MOLST helps give seriously ill patients more control over their care.

The MOLST also helps you talk with your healthcare team and your loved ones about your choices. In this way, the MOLST can help reduce patient and family suffering, and make sure that your wishes are known and honored. You can find more information and download the form at <http://marylandmolst.org/>.

Even if you are not comfortable signing a MOLST, having a conversation with near ones about your end-of-life goals, fears, and wishes is highly advised. It gives family members the reassurance that they are following your directives, and lessens any guilt they might feel should they not know what your wishes are. We recommend consulting the [Conversation Project](#)'s website and using their sample questions and discussion prompts. Understanding the nuances and basis for your loved one's desires provides the most opportunity for a supportive decision at the end of their life.

4. Organ and Tissue Donation

From Reform to Orthodox, all movements in Judaism support the donation of organs and tissue after death. A 1968 Reform responsum commented that the use of organs and tissues of the deceased to heal or save a life is in keeping with Jewish tradition and a positive act of holiness. In fact, the value of *pikuach nefesh* (the saving of a life) underscores this belief within our entire community. In the Orthodox community, the Halakhic Organ Donation Society (HODS) has as its mission to educate Jews around the world about halachic support for organ donation from Jews to the general public. HODS also offers a unique donor card that allows a person to specify under which circumstances (brainstem death or cardiac death) the donor permits organ donation to take place. See the Appendix for more background on Jewish views on organ donation and click [HERE](#) for more resources.

More commonly, organ donation can be indicated by signing the section on your driver's license application or renewal that indicates you want to be a donor. Be sure to discuss your wishes with your family and your healthcare providers. Please note that you can still request *taharah* (ritual washing) for a loved one even if he or she donated organs or tissue.

Donating one's body to science: Information to come.

5. Arranging for a Burial Spot

We recommend that families make decisions about where to be buried well in advance of need. Doing so removes the burden from your family at a time when time is short and decisions are fraught with emotions; it also allows for your wishes to be followed. Shirat HaNefesh has a section at the Garden of Remembrance cemetery in Clarksburg, Maryland. Plots are still available for purchase; please see Section II below for details. Other Jewish cemeteries in the Washington area are listed [HERE](#).

6. Learning about Funeral Homes

There is no need to enter into a contract in advance with a funeral home, but it is helpful to know about the options available. Funeral homes handle the preparations for burial and a host of other tasks; they do not handle cemetery plots or the opening and closing of a grave.

Shirat HaNefesh is a member of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington. We highly recommend using the contract negotiated by the committee on behalf of over 50 congregations in the area. The contract sets a very reasonable, fixed price for all the funeral arrangements, including picking up the body and storing it, a plain pine coffin, use of the chapel at the funeral home, rental of a hearse, and listing of a death notice. (Not included is the cost of the cemetery plot or the opening and closing of the grave, or marker.)

The [JFPCGW contract](#) is available to any Jew in the Washington area by calling one of two funeral homes: Hines Rinaldi in Maryland (301-622-2290) or Cunningham Turch in Virginia. You must ask for the JFPCGW contract.

Other Jewish funeral homes in our area include

- o Torchinsky Hebrew Funeral Home
- o Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care
- o Donald Borgwardt Funeral Home (held a previous Funeral Contract with JFPCGW, and has its own Jewish Funeral contract, similarly priced, which is available to non-Jewish family members)

- **Choosing a coffin**

For generations Jews have been buried in a plain pine box or even just white shrouds. Local laws require that the deceased be buried in a coffin; our tradition of burial in a plain wood box fulfills this requirement. These coffins can be purchased at the funeral home. The tradition emphasizes the simplicity and equality of the casket -- that both rich and poor are buried in the same type of coffin, and that no attempt is made to adorn the casket or mask the reality of death.

- **Cremation**

One of the reasons a plain box is used for burial is the body will become one with the earth again, fulfilling God's decree to Adam in Genesis, "By the sweat of your face, you will eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken; you are dust and unto dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Cremation has long been discouraged in Jewish tradition; in our own day, the environmental harm caused by cremation greatly outweighs that associated with burial. That being said, if you choose cremation, the Garden of Remembrance does accept burial of the ashes. Please consult with our clergy on options.

7. Planning for a Gravestone

Some people make arrangements for a gravestone well in advance; others wait until after the funeral takes place. A marker or monument on the burial site is a very ancient tradition. It serves a number of purposes, but its most essential purpose is to honor the dead. It is possible for you to decide what you want on your marker as you pre-arrange your needs. The custom in our area is for the gravestone to be unveiled at a ceremony about a year after the death of a loved one, but the unveiling can take place any time after the shiva week.

The Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington has negotiated contracts with a local monument dealer that apply to five cemeteries in the local area. Details on the contracts are available [HERE](#).

In designing the monument, we encourage you to choose a quote from the Tanach/Hebrew Bible on the marker, in addition to the Hebrew name and dates of the person's life. The clergy is available to help you find a quote that is meaningful to you. Some people also write the Hebrew letters Tav Nun Tsade Bet Hey on the gravestone, which is an acronym of Samuel 25:29: "May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life."

8. Considering Shmirah and Taharah

Jewish tradition explains that when a person dies, the spirit clings to what was most familiar to him or her, namely, the body. Some people believe a person's spirit remains close to the body until burial, so it is important to treat the body with respect and with the awareness that the person's spirit is able to observe all that is happening to him or her. Shirat HaNefesh does not have a formal Chevra Kadisha, but our Chesed Committee and clergy can be helpful in explaining these customs and making available the following services.

a. Shmirah (watching over the deceased)

This word comes from the Hebrew word meaning to guard or to watch over, and refers to the practice of sitting with the body of the deceased between the time of death and burial. This comes down to us from ancient times when there was fear of harm to the body from a number of sources. There is also a mystical tradition that the soul is reluctant to leave the body; thus, shmirah is a community's way of showing honor to the deceased that it is being accompanied at all times until burial. In our

own time, *shmirah* can be an enormous comfort to the family of the deceased, as well as a loving farewell tribute on the part of relatives, friends, and the community. Typically, a shomer (male) or shomeret (female) sits with the casket, day and night, and reads psalms, poems, or other appropriate texts. Usually, people will sign up for 1 or 2 hour shifts throughout the day and night until shortly before the funeral. Shmirah usually takes place in an adjoining room where the shomer can see the casket; the body of the deceased is never visible during this time.

b. Taharah (ritual washing of the body)

Taharah means purity, and it is the act of ritually washing the body. Members of the Chevra Kadisha /Sacred Society will wash the body, read prayers, pour ritual water over the body as an act of spiritual purification, dress the body for burial, and place the body in the coffin. Female members perform taharah for a female deceased; male members perform taharah for a male deceased. Members of the Chevra Kadisha act anonymously and never discuss the details of their holy work. Shirat HaNefesh does not have its own Chevra Kadisha but taharah is available through several avenues in the community.

c. Tachrichim

Traditionally, the deceased are dressed in natural linen shrouds; these differ slightly depending on the gender of the deceased. Not everyone wishes to be buried in these shrouds; please discuss with the clergy what your wishes are.

If you would like either *shmirah* or *taharah* for a loved one who dies, inform the clergy about your wishes as soon after the death as possible. The clergy will notify either the Chesed Committee Coordinator to help arrange for *taharah* through Orthodox congregations or contact the community-wide effort to arrange for *shmirah* and *taharah* for people using the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee contract. If you choose a Jewish funeral home (Torchinsky's or Sagel), they will provide these services for your loved one.

9. Thinking about Shiva

The word "shiva" means "seven," and it refers to the seven days mourners traditionally observe after the death of a close relative. During this time, friends and family come to the house of the mourner to comfort them, and to participate in a prayer service, usually once per day. This is the time to bring food and beverages to the home of those in mourning. During the service we sing, share stories about the person who died, and recite the Mourner's Kaddish. Shiva is not observed during Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

In many American Jewish communities, shiva is often shortened to 3 days, or to 1 day. Also, in a departure from traditional practice, mourners often feel that they must entertain and feed the people who come to visit them. This is directly opposite of the intention of shiva, which is for the community to show its caring for the mourners, not the other way around. To avoid burdening the family, Shirat HaNefesh is committed to taking care of at least one evening of shiva, including setup and cleanup, so that the family is properly cared for.

We strongly encourage members to sit shiva for relatives and to speak to their loved ones about their wishes for sitting shiva. Shiva is not only for the living, but also a tribute and final honor to the dead. It is a time to reconnect with community and to weave together the fabric of a family's life that has been torn asunder.

10. Designating Tzedakah

Advance planning gives you an opportunity to consider which organizations you would like to contribute to so as to benefit those who are still living. Write down the name(s) of the organization(s) (such as Shirat HaNefesh, the American Cancer Society, etc.) to which you would like donations to be made after death.

11. When Death is Imminent

Jewish rituals before and after death address the psychological needs of the dying and articulate Jewish values regarding deep philosophical issues. A long-standing practice of Judaism is the recitation by the dying person (or one who says it on his/her behalf) of the Vidui, a confessional prayer (see Section IV, Resources, for a two versions). This prayer asks God to forgive the dying person's sins and to protect his/her family. It ends with an affirmation of faith in God and the Shema. (Some people choose just to recite the Shema.) Reciting the Vidui on the deathbed is an act of teshuva (turning or returning). It is like cleaning one's slate; one returns to, or affirms behavior appropriate to one created in God's image.

In the best of situations, the dying person recites the Vidui at home in a lucid state, surrounded by loved ones. More often, however, this is not possible. The patient may be in a hospital setting or other medical facility and may not be conscious. In such cases, family or friends may recite the Vidui on the patient's behalf. Praying with/for a loved one who is dying is considered a mitzvah and a way of saying good-bye.

In the last moments of a person's life, family should surround him or her if possible. When death comes, the family or whoever is present should close the eyes and mouth of the deceased and cover the body with a sheet. Those present may want to say a prayer, such as Psalm 23, which affirms the goodness of life, seeks the comfort of God, and connects the family to the generations of our people who have gone before.

II. SHN'S CEMETERY SECTION



II. SHN's Cemetery Section

After two rounds of community searches (in 2011 and 2016-17), Shirat HaNefesh is pleased to select a cemetery section at the Garden of Remembrance Memorial Park in Clarksburg, Maryland. <http://www.gardenofremembrance.org>

The Garden of Remembrance (Gan Zikaron) is a not-for-profit cemetery created by Jews for Jews in the entire greater Washington, D.C. community. Opened in 2000, it “offers comprehensive services in accordance with all branches of Judaism, reflecting the full range of Jewish practices and honoring personal preferences.”

Our choice of Garden of Remembrance was guided by several important concerns to our members:

- finding a cemetery that is reasonably-priced and not too distant
- allowing interfaith families to be buried together and with the community
- offering the option of not having a concrete liner for the grave (liners are environmentally harmful, impede the natural process of decomposition, and make it difficult to fill the grave during the funeral)
- allowing for upright monuments
- identifying the section with a sign for Shirat HaNefesh and identifying us as one of the (now) 25 participating congregations at the entrance of the cemetery

Uniquely, the Garden of Remembrance is redefining what it means to be a Jewish cemetery. The entire cemetery is Jewish; at the same time, it is uniquely respectful of the diversity of traditions within the Jewish community. At Shirat Hanefesh, which has a diverse membership as well, this means that we are able to allow intermarried couples and their relatives to be buried next to one another in a Jewish space; at the same time, we are able to reserve some plots for those who prefer a traditional Jewish-only area.

Going forward, we hope that the Shirat HaNefesh community will continue to embrace the selection we have made at the Garden of Remembrance. The cost of purchasing a plot is \$2500, which is lower than one would conventionally find at any nearby cemetery, and also includes a contribution to sustain our community. (Additional costs for the closing and opening of the grave are not included.) Please be in touch with Ira Zukerman (zukerman.family@comcast.net) and/or clergy if you are interested in considering a purchase.

III. WHEN SOMEONE DIES



III. When Someone Dies

1. Immediate Steps

The following steps are most relevant if the funeral will be held in this area. If the funeral will be held out of town, you may still want to follow some of the steps below. Our clergy are available for consultation, and will want to know the situation to provide comfort for your family and assistance with practical efforts when your return.

1. If possible, locate your loved one's "**When I Die**" folder, so you know what s/he wanted.
2. **Funeral Home:** Decide on a funeral home and arrange for the funeral home to pick up the body.

If you wish to make use of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee contract, call Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home at 301-622-2290. Hines-Rinaldi will arrange for pick-up of the body. Otherwise, call the funeral home you will be using.

3. **Date and Time of Funeral:** Arrange for the day and time of the funeral in consultation with the clergy and funeral home (see under Funeral, below). Purchase a coffin (usually this is included in the funeral home contract). Provide the cemetery plot information to the funeral home, or if needed, purchase a cemetery plot.

4. **Contact Shirat HaNefesh:** Please contact our clergy directly, or leave a message at info@shirathanefesh.org or on our emergency number at 240-292-9450. .

The clergy will provide you with direction and walk you through the process of mourning, burial, funeral, and shiva. Consider who in your family might want to give a eulogy or offer a reading. Often it is helpful to bring the family together to meet with the clergy and discuss the funeral service as well as the details of the loved one's life.

5. Preparing the Body:

Be sure to tell the clergy right away if you want shomrim to watch over the body until the time of burial and if you want taharah. We can request that congregants sign up to watch over the body; if we do not get enough volunteers, Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home has shomrim available for pay.

If you request taharah, the Chesed Committee Coordinator or our clergy will arrange through the Jewish community to make that happen. The traditional burial shroud is included in this service, so you do not need to pick out any clothes for the deceased. If you do not choose taharah, then you will need to provide the funeral home with clothing for the deceased.

There is a tradition of burying a Jewish man in his tallit, with at least one of the tzitzit cut. If that is the preference, you will need to provide the tallit to the funeral home as well. If the tallit can be handed down to a member of the family, we think that is an

even higher use for this ritual item. A man (or woman) can be buried in a simple tallit that they did not own, if that is desired.

6. **Calls to Friends and Family.** You may want to enlist friends and relatives to help make calls or let people know about the death.

7. **Notifying the community.** If the funeral or shiva will be held locally, Shirat HaNefesh will send out an email to the congregation inviting them to perform the mitzvah of attending. If not, the staff will let the congregation know through the weekly Shirat HaNefesh email.

8. **Death Notice:** Having a death notice published in a local newspaper is usually handled by the funeral home, sometimes for an additional fee. It is customary to give tzedakah (donate to charity) in memory and honor of a loved one. Beyond Shirat HaNefesh, you may want to think about other organizations your loved one respected and include those in the death notice.

9. **Note to the Community:** Only if you are a particularly close friend of the deceased and/or family should you call or visit the house of the bereaved during the period between the death and the funeral. Save the visits and calls for after the funeral.

2. The Funeral

a. Timing

Jewish tradition encourages the burial of the dead as soon as possible after death. The reason for a speedy burial is based upon respect for the person who has died, to avoid any signs of decomposition of the body becoming evident to the living. Also, for the family that has lost a loved one, to delay burial only prolongs the mental and physical strain of the initial loss. All that said, there may be reasons for the delay of burial, such as if relatives must travel a great distance, or if it is Shabbat or a major Jewish festival. Please discuss your needs with the clergy who will be assisting you. The funeral home will also assist you in determining the time of the funeral.

The funeral service generally lasts from thirty minutes to an hour. Usually, the officiating clergy will give a eulogy based on information that the family has provided. Friends and family members may also want to speak briefly. No one should feel pressured to speak at the funeral if that would be uncomfortable. (It may be more comfortable to talk at Shiva services, in a more intimate home setting.) The funeral usually also includes readings from Psalms and the El Malei prayer for the soul of the deceased. At the graveside, additional words of comfort and the Kaddish are recited.

b. Location

Most funeral services are held in the chapel of the funeral home. Sometimes the entire service is conducted at the grave; this is often weather-dependent. The Garden of Remembrance is working on building a chapel onsite.

c. Kriah

The ceremony of *Kriah* at the beginning of the funeral —the rending (tearing) of clothing by the mourners—symbolizes the family’s grief and loss. Originally, the *Kriah* practice took the form of tearing an article of clothing (on the left side for a parent, on the right side for other relatives). More recently a practice has developed of cutting a small black ribbon, which can then be attached to one’s clothing. In either event, the clergy officiates at the actual tearing or cutting. The funeral home provides *Kriah* ribbons.

The clergy encourages mourners to wear this ribbon throughout the shiva period as a reminder to others that their lives have been forever altered.

d. Interment

At graveside, the coffin is physically lowered into the grave. It is traditional that this be done in the presence of the mourners. The sight of the actual interment emphasizes the reality of death without fantasy or illusion. The family and persons attending the funeral each place some dirt into the grave, onto the coffin. This is usually done with a shovel. We use the shovel in a manner different from usual shoveling, to symbolize that this is not a normal everyday task. Our usual custom is to cover the casket; among Orthodox communities, the custom is to completely fill the grave, as if to tuck the loved one into the earth. At the end of the interment, those present form two lines, allowing the mourners to walk between them and sense the comfort of the community. It is customary to say to the mourners, “May you be comforted among all the mourners of Zion.”

3. The Mourning Process: Shiva

a. Sitting Shiva

The initial portion of the formal mourning period is called shiva (seven in Hebrew), and is essentially a period of time, approximately seven days from the day of the funeral (not including Shabbat), which is set aside for intensive mourning by the family. Some people choose to observe the full seven days of shiva and some only a few days. Sitting shiva is intended not only to comfort the mourners but also to show honor to the deceased.

During shiva, people generally gather in the evening in someone’s home for a short service that includes the Mourner’s Kaddish, followed by the sharing of stories and memories by the bereaved. Following this, the community usually partakes of a potluck or arranged food.

To a large extent, the choice about shiva in American communities today will be guided by the nature of the death and the geographic circumstances. The death of a 90-year-old parent after years of suffering from Alzheimer’s is not experienced the same as the death of a child or a fatal car accident. Many people in our community have family members in distant locations, so sitting shiva in our area might be limited to only a day or two. As with many of the choices, we encourage you to consult with the clergy -- both about the length of shiva and the type of services held. You can let the clergy or volunteer service leader know your preference about length of service and whether you prefer it to be mostly in Hebrew or include a lot of English, whether you

would like the traditional liturgy or to supplement it with poems and readings. We encourage you to leave time to reflect on the deceased and to help those present understand the life that has been lost. Generally, the shiva service runs 30-45 minutes.

The clergy and/or the Coordinator will ensure that shiva information is emailed to the congregation, that someone is available to lead the service, and that prayer books are brought to the services.

b. How to Make a Shiva Call

It is a mitzvah to make a shiva call, even if you did not know the deceased or family very well. The presence of the community is of great comfort at a time when mourners may feel isolated and alone in their grief. The custom during the hours of shiva is to keep the door to the mourner's home unlocked. Visitors should enter without knocking and make their way over to the mourner.

Shiva visits should be kept short; about thirty to forty-five minutes is sufficient. Often people feel unsure about just what to say and how to approach the mourner. Visitors often believe it is their job to lighten the mourner's sadness. This is not the case. There are no words that can remove grief after the loss of a loved one. Jewish tradition actually encourages visitors to remain silent and to wait for the mourner to speak. This allows the mourner to express grief, including tears.

Visitors can provide comfort just by their presence. Sitting with, holding hands, and just listening are often the best things visitors can do. A simple "I'm sorry" or a hug can communicate one's caring and sympathy. Listening, sharing, accepting feelings and offering help as needed are all gifts given by the comforter. In general, it is important not to minimize the loss. Instead, visitors should ask questions that allow the mourner to talk about his or her grief and his/her memories of the deceased. They should accept the mourner's emotions and follow his or her lead in sharing memories and reminiscences. Visitors should not hesitate to share their own stories about the deceased. When making a shiva visit, it is appropriate to bring a gift of food. It is customary to say to the mourners on your way out, "May you be comforted among all the mourners of Zion."

Some suggestions on comforting the mourner:

Things You Might Want to Say to Someone in Grief

What you say, or whether you say anything, is less important than the fact that you showed up to be with the person who is in grief. Below are some things you might say.

1. May you be comforted among the mourners of Jerusalem and Zion.
2. May his memory be a blessing.
3. I wish I had the right words. Just know I care.
4. I am here to help in any way I can.
5. You and your loved one are in my thoughts and prayers.
6. Tell me about the person who died.
7. My favorite memory of your loved one is...
8. I am always just a phone call away.
9. I am usually up early (or I stay up late); call me if you need anything.
10. Don't say anything – just hug the person and be there for them.

Things You Should Never Say to Someone in Grief

Some of these things may sound comforting to you, but they are not. The last thing you want to do is imply that a mourner's pain should be less than it is.

1. At least she lived a long life. Many people die young.
2. He is in a better place.
3. She brought this on herself.
4. He wouldn't want you to be sad.
5. There is a reason for everything.
6. Aren't you over it yet? He has been dead for a while now.
7. You can still have another child.
8. She was such a good person. God wanted her to be with him.
9. I know how you feel.
10. She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go.
11. Be strong.

Adapted from: <http://connectingdirectors.com/articles/41612-the-11-worst-and-best-things-to-say-to-someone-in-grief>

c. Chesed and Bereavement Committee

Shirat HaNefesh will handle the shiva arrangements for at least one evening of shiva for the community. This includes: set up in the home before the evening minyan, arranging for potluck food to be brought for after the service, bringing kippot and shiva minyan booklets to the home, cleanup in the home after the evening minyan, ensuring there is a minyan for services, and bringing a meal to the mourners themselves. Please contact the chair of our Chesed and Bereavement Committee for assistance. Our clergy will lead services or arrange for one or more services to be led. Shirat HaNefesh members will also endeavor to make a minyan for additional nights of shiva, as requested.

A one-page guidance is being developed to assist volunteers with the Chesed and Bereavement Committee in helping out with shiva minyanim.

d. Other Shiva Practices

Some of the practices associated with shiva have significant psychological value, whatever their origin or mystical significance. We encourage you to read about and consider adopting one or more of these rituals, which can also be very comforting as you move from stage to stage in the mourning process.

- **Meal of consolation:** The end of the funeral service and the beginning of the formal shiva period of mourning are marked by the "*Seudat Havra'ah*"—the Meal of Consolation. The family and those attending the funeral service return to the home (preferably the home of the deceased or the closest related family member). It is traditional for the friends and family of the mourners to prepare this meal. This is the time to allow your community to take care of you. Food is so basic a sign of life; this first meal reminds the survivors of the need to carry on

with their lives, however deep the loss. It is customary to have round foods, such as eggs or chickpeas, to symbolize the cycle of life.

- **Daytime shiva:** In traditional communities, the practice of shiva has always included visits during the daytime. Members of the community come and sit with the mourners and allow them to talk and share as they wish. This allows the mourners the opportunity to work through grief in an intimate setting, as different memories arise and the different facets of their relationship with the deceased can be reflected on repeatedly and in greater depth. We encourage mourners to stay home from work and refrain from regular pursuits during the shiva period. Mourners should feel comfortable inviting friends to spend time with them during the day.
- **Ending shiva with a walk and prayer:** Traditionally, shiva ends with mourners taking a walk to the end of the block in the company of loved ones, a symbol of leaving the deceased behind and returning to the land of the living. Rabbi Mel Glazer z"l suggested inviting friends to accompany you in this ritual in recognition of the difficulty of this transition.

4. The Mourning Process: Kaddish and Beyond

a. Saying Kaddish

Following the death of a parent, child, spouse, or sibling it is customary to recite the Mourner's Kaddish in the presence of a minyan (10 people) every day for 30 days, or in the case of a parent, for 11 months. Kaddish is also recited on every anniversary (yahrzeit) of the death, and at the four holiday Yizkor services during the year (Passover, Shavuot, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot).

The Kaddish prayer makes no mention of death or mourning; instead it is an affirmation of God's greatness even in the face of loss, and a reminder that God's Great Name holds the memories of all who have ever lived. Saying Kaddish with a minyan goes well beyond the words on the page, however. It encourages the mourner to be part of the ongoing rhythm of Jewish life, to engage with a community of mourners and others on a regular basis, and to designate time to hold the loss of the loved one. Not only symbolically but in practice, the mourner must leave his or her home and join a community of fellows. Over time, saying Kaddish serves as a measure of how the experience of grief changes and softens.

We strongly encourage mourners to come to services at least once a week on Shabbat to say Kaddish and to allow the community to acknowledge their loss. If a daily minyan is possible, we recommend that as well. Although the 11-month period of saying Kaddish is traditionally reserved for parents, we encourage mourners who have suffered the intense loss of a friend or relative other than a parent, to continue saying Kaddish past the 30-day mark if they find it comforting to do so. We also encourage people suffering the loss of a beloved friend or relative, whether Jewish or not, to say Kaddish and partake of this deeply comforting, grounding ritual.

b. Sheloshim

Jewish tradition mandates a gradual set of transitions as one moves through the stages of mourning. After the shiva and until the end of 30 (sheloshim) days from the funeral, it is customary to refrain from parties and entertainment. Some people who were unable to be home

during the shiva period might choose to have a “Sheloshim” gathering -- essentially like a shiva evening -- to mark the 30th day from the funeral and to share reflections of their loved one.

c. Yahrzeit

The anniversary of the death (yahrzeit) is commemorated each year on the day of the death (not the day of the funeral) with remembrances. At Shirat HaNefesh we commonly use the Hebrew date, which can vary considerably from the secular date; some people commemorate both dates. Traditionally, one would attend services and recite the Mourner’s Kaddish, as well as lighting a yahrzeit candle at home in memory of the loved one’s soul. (The 24-hour candle is lit beginning on the evening before the yahrzeit day). In addition, it is a standard part of Jewish practice to offer tzedakah (charity) as a way to remember and honor the memory of a loved one on his or her yahrzeit. Jewish tradition regards gift giving to others and our community as a holy act.

d. Yizkor

Yizkor services are held four times during the year: on the last day of Passover, the second day of Shavuot, the last day of Sukkot, and on Yom Kippur. Traditionally, those who have lost a parent, sibling, child, or spouse participate in this service, but all are welcome. There is a custom of making a donation to tzedakah in memory of one’s loved one, and as a way of continuing to associate the name of one’s loved one with blessings.

e. Unveiling

A grave marker (*matzevah* in Hebrew) is customarily erected within the first year after death. In our area, it is customary to hold an unveiling of the monument around the first yahrzeit, but it may be held any time after shiva, as it is considered a sign of honor to the deceased. Family, friends, and clergy may be consulted, as appropriate, about the inscription. Rabbi Mel Glazer has written that the time to schedule an unveiling is when the mourner can say, with fullness of heart, the following two statements:

We miss you and we love you.
We are all right.

There is no set service for the unveiling; typically, it involves a psalm or poem, a few words in remarks, the removal of a cloth covering the monument and reading of the inscription, an El Malei prayer, and Kaddish. This can also be an occasion for the family to share their remembrances. Clergy are not needed to officiate but are available to discuss and plan the unveiling, and to officiate if desired.

f. Grief

Although Judaism offers a framework for mourning, such as shiva and sheloshim, everyone’s grieving process is different. Depending on your relationship with the person who died and other factors, your mourning process is unlikely to fit neatly into pre-defined time frames.

It is not unusual for a mourner to think his or her life is getting back to normal, only to have a sight, sound, smell, or other trigger suddenly bring back strong feelings of loss and pain. Just because a yahrzeit has occurred doesn't mean the grieving process is over.

There is no right time to "get over" the loss of a close relative or friend. Unfortunately, our society often pushes people to cut short the grieving process or to mask the ups and downs of one's mourning. Jewish tradition takes a different approach. It is through experiencing loss directly and grieving it fully that the healing process is able to function. And through a series of milestones -- shiva, sheloshim, and yahrzeit -- the mourner is gently encouraged to return to regular life.

Nevertheless, there are losses that are so intense, or accompanied by so many additional issues, that mourners can feel stuck in intense grief for a long time afterwards. Some families also suffer conflict during the last weeks or months of a parent's life over treatment and end-of-life issues, and/or subsequently over the inheritance. If you are experiencing these difficulties and the impact is ongoing, or if the grief does not seem to be lessening, please contact our clergy to discuss, and allow us to recommend bereavement counselors who can help you move forward through this difficult time.

IV. RESOURCES

Vidui / Final Confessional Prayer -- Traditional

(May be read on another's behalf)

My God and God of all who have gone before me, Author of life and death, I turn to You in trust. Although I pray for life and health, I know that I am mortal. If my life must soon come to an end, let me die, I pray; at peace. If only my hands were clean and my heart pure! I confess that I have committed sins and left much undone, yet I know also the good that I did or tried to do. May my acts of goodness give meaning to my life, and may my errors be forgiven.

Protector of the bereaved and the helpless, watch over my loved ones. Into Your hand I commit my spirit. Redeem it, O God of mercy and truth.

Adonai melech, Adonai malach, Adonai yimloch l'olam va-ed. God reigns; God has reigned; God will reign for ever and ever.

Baruch shem kvod malchuto l'olam va-ed. Blessed be God's name whose glorious dominion is for ever and ever.

Adonai Hu Ha Elohim. Adonai is God.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.

(Those who are present repeat) *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad.* Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.

(After the moment of death) *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, dayan ha-emet.*

Blessed is the Eternal our God, Sovereign of the Universe, the Righteous Judge.

Adonai natan, vadonai lakach, y'hi shem Adonai m'vo-rach. God has given and God has taken away. Blessed be the name of God.

—from *A Time to Prepare/Revised Edition*, pp. 49–50

Alternative Vidui

I acknowledge before the Source of all That life and death are not in my hands.

Just as I did not choose to be born, so I do not choose to die.

May it come to pass that I may be healed but if death is my fate, then I accept it with dignity and the loving calm of one who knows the way of all things.

May my death be honorable, and may my life be a healing memory for those who know me.

May my loved ones think well of me and may my memory bring them joy.

From all those I may have hurt, I ask forgiveness. Upon all who have hurt me, I bestow forgiveness.

As a wave returns to the ocean,

So I return to the Source from which I came.
Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Hear O Israel, that which we call God is Oneness itself.

Blessed is the Way of God
The Way of Life and Death,
of coming and going,
of meeting and loving,
now and forever.
As I was blessed with the one,
So now am I blessed with the other.
Shalom. Shalom. Shalom.

—Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Supplemental Readings

When I Die **adapted from Merrit Malloy**

When I die give what is left of me away
to children and old men that wait to die.
And if you need to cry,
cry for your brother walking the street beside you.
And when you need me, put your arms around anyone
and give them what you need to give me.

I want to leave you something,
something better than words or sounds.
Look for me in the people I've known or loved,
and if you cannot give me away,
at least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind.

You can love me best by letting hands touch hands,
and by letting go of children that need to be free.
Love doesn't die, people do.
So, when all that's left of me is love,
give me away.

A Man in His Life **by Yehuda Amichai**

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
Was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.
And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.

And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.
Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures
and its pains.

He will die as figs die in autumn,
Shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

In Many Houses

In many houses
all at once
I see my mother and father
and they are young
as they walk in.

Why should my
tears come,
to see them laughing?

That they cannot
see me
is of no matter:

I was once
their dream:
now

they are mine.

[Author unknown]

We Remember Them

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember them.
In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.
In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.
In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.
In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.
In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.
When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.
When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.
When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.
So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as
we remember them.

-- **Roland B. Gittelsohn**
adapted by Sylvia Kamens and Jack Riemer

Stars Up Above

There are stars up above,
so far away we only see their light
long, long after the star itself is gone.
And so it is with people that 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.

-- **Hannah Senesh**

Books

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Gillman, Neil. *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997.

James, John W. and Russell Friedman. *The Grief Recovery Handbook Revised Edition: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce and Other Losses*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1988.

Lamm, Maurice. *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1981.

Levy, Naomi. *To Begin Again*. New York: Ballantine Publishing, 1998.

Light, Richard A. *Jewish Rites of Death, Stories of Beauty and Transformation*. Photography by Thea Rose Light. Santa Fe, NM, Terra Nova Books, 2016.

Raphael, Rabbi Simcha Paull. *The Grief Journey and the Afterlife: Jewish Pastoral Care for Bereavement*. Boulder, CO, Albion-Andalus, 2015.

Reimer, Jack, ed. *Jewish Reflections on Death*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.

Sonsino, Rifat and Daniel B. Syme. *What Happens After I Die? Jewish Views of Life After Death*. New York: UAHC Press, 1990.

Stern, Chaim, ed. *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978.

Washofsky, Mark. *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*. New York: UAHC Press, 2001

Online

A wealth of information is available online on all the topics covered in this guidebook. We particularly recommend the website of Kavod v'Nichum: Jewish Funerals, Burial, and Mourning <https://www.jewish-funerals.org/> for a compilation of links and information.

Appendix: Jewish Directive

Similar to the form letting your physicians and family know your medical wishes, we also recommend making your wishes known pertaining to your Jewish needs. Filling this form out in advance gives your mourning loved ones valuable information about which Jewish rituals you would like observed. We recommend providing copies for loved ones and your synagogue clergy.

Name: _____ **circle one** congregant/couple/family

Hebrew Name: _____ DOB: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Next of kin/Family Contacts

Spouse/Partner Name: _____ Phone: _____

Children Names: _____ Phone: _____

Friends: _____ Phone: _____

Friends: _____ Phone: _____

Friends: _____ Phone: _____

Burial Desires:

Would you like Tahara (Ritual of washing the body) YES _____ NO _____

Would you like Shmirah (Sitting with the deceased) YES _____ NO _____

Would you like Shiva observed (7 days of mourning) YES _____ NO _____

If availability permits, please list clergy choice for funeral:

Choice one _____

Choice two _____

Burial arrangements made with the following cemetery: _____

Organizations for donations to be made in your memory:

1.

2.

3.

Please list any special quotes, poems or prayers you would like read at your service: