



*Jewish Ritual Wishes  
at End of Life*

An Assessment Tool

# Contact Information

Whose wishes are being recorded here?

Does that person (we'll call them "the Recipient") have a Hebrew Name?\*

Recipient Mailing Address

Contact Name (if different from the Recipient)

Recipient or Contact Phone & E-mail

Contact Mailing Address

\* A Hebrew Name is used in Jewish ceremonies, and can be in Hebrew, Yiddish, or another Jewish language. It consists of the person's Hebrew first name, the word *ben* (son of) or *bat* (daughter of), and the Hebrew first names of their Jewish parents. If a Hebrew name is not known, use the English name. Converts to Judaism usually use Abraham and Sarah as their Jewish parents. A non-binary alternative to *ben/bat* is *mibeit* (from the house of).

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**A**mong Judaism's sacred practices, those related to end of life are considered the holiest: easing the suffering of the ill, honoring the dying, treating the dead with kindness, and comforting those who mourn.

Judaism's ways of honoring death are simple and dignified, ancient and beautiful. Anyone for whom Jewish teachings or identity has value may find them comforting. No particular background or level of observance is required. To quote the 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish philosopher Maimonides,

"He who performs a single *mitzvah* (sacred duty) inclines himself and the entire world towards merit, causing its deliverance and salvation."

*Jewish Ritual Wishes at End of Life: An Assessment Tool* has been developed to assist those who wish to consider end-of-life ritual options, for themselves or for a loved one. Terms and concepts are explained so that decision-makers can weigh their options in light of strict Jewish tradition as well as contemporary approaches.

Once this document is completed, copies should be given to everyone who will be part of the Recipient's care community, including health and financial decision-makers; caregivers, friends and family; clergy; and legal and medical professionals.

**Please note: This is not a legal document** and has no legally binding effect. It is our hope that it helps put all parties on the same page as to how they can be in accord and bring solace at a crucial and sensitive time.

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*Before Death*

# The Final Prayer (*Viddui*)

The prayer said before death is called the *Viddui*, meaning “confession.” It is a fixed prayer recited by individuals for themselves, or for them by someone else. It seeks to give dying people and their families peace of mind by releasing conflicts and asking forgiveness, from each other and from The Divine.

The *Viddui* can be said whenever one is seriously ill, such as at each hospitalization, or saved until the last days of life. Anyone who can read can lead it for themselves or another, but families may want to ask a rabbi or Jewish chaplain for help. Two versions appear here: the traditional prayer at right, and a modern version on page 5.

The *Sh'ma*, the statement of monotheism at the center of Jewish worship, may also be said in one's last hours. According to tradition, Jewish people ideally should say this as they die, so that the Hebrew name for God is on their lips.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד.

*Sh'ma Yisra-el, Adonai Elohaynu, Adonai Echaḏ.*

Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.

## Prayer Wishes

*Check Here If Wished*

We wish to have the *Viddui* said for Recipient,  
when the time is right.

Contact a rabbi or Jewish chaplain about this.

Who will ensure that the *Viddui* is said?

Before reciting the Viddui, ask forgiveness from those you may have caused pain or trouble in your life, whether they are alive or deceased. Ritually wash hands. Stand if you are able..  
 If it is your custom when you pray, wear a head covering and a prayer shawl.  
 As on Yom Kippur, tap the right fist on the breastbone with each phrase of the third paragraph.

## Traditional Viddui

Modeh (male) Modah (female) ani lifanecha, Adonai Elohai veylohei avotai, she-r'fuati b'yadecha u-mitati b'yadecha. Y'hi ratzon milfanecha, shetirpa-eini r'fu-ah shlemah. V'im amut, t'hi mitati chapara al kol chatati v'avonot u-f'sha-im shechatati, v'sh'aviti v'shepashati lifanecha, b'ten chelki b'gan eden, v'zakeini l'olam habah hatzafun l'tzadikim.	מוֹדֵה/מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, יי אֱלֹהֵי, וְלֵהִי אָבוֹתַי, שֶׁרְפוּאָתִי בְיָדְךָ וּמִיַּתְּתִי בְיָדְךָ. יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, שֶׁתִּרְפָּאֵנִי רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה. וְאִם אָמוּת, תְּהִי מִתְּתִי כַּפְרָה עַל כָּל חַטָּאתִי וְעֲוֹנוֹת וּפְשָׁעִים שֶׁחַטָּאתִי וְשָׁעוּיִתִי וְשִׁפְשָׁעֵתִי לְפָנֶיךָ, וְתוֹ חֶלְקִי בְּגַן עֵדֶן, וְזָכֵנִי לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא הַצָּפוֹן לְצַדִּיקִים.
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Eloheinu v'Elohei avoteinu, tavo lifanecha t'filateinu, v'al titalem mit-chinateinu, she-ain anu azei fanim uk'shei oref, lomar l'faneicha Adonai Eloheinu v'Elohei avoteinu, tzadikim anachnu v'lo chatanu, aval anachnu v'avoteinu chatanu.	אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אָבוֹתֵינוּ, תָּבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ, וְאַל תִּתְעַלֵּם מִתְּחִנָּתֵנוּ, שֶׁאִין אָנוּ עֲזֵי פָנִים וְקִשֵׁי עֶרֶף, לומר לְפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אָבוֹתֵינוּ, צַדִּיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא חַטָּאנוּ, אָבֵל אֲנַחְנוּ וְאָבוֹתֵינוּ חַטָּאנוּ.
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Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, dibarnu dofi. He-evinu, v'hirshanu, zadnu, khamasnu, tafalnu sheker. Ya-atznu ra, kizavnu, latznu, maradnu, ni-atznu, sararnu, avinu, pashanu, tzararnu, kishinu oref. Rashanu, shikhatnu, ti-avnu, ta-inu, tita'nu.	אֲשָׁמְנוּ, בָּגַדְנוּ, גָּזַלְנוּ, דִּבְרַנּוּ דָּפִי. הִעָוִינוּ, וְהִרְשָׁעְנוּ, זָדְנוּ, חֲמָסְנוּ, טָפְלְנוּ שֶׁקֶר. יַעֲצֵנוּ רָע, כִּזְבָּנוּ, לָצְנוּ, מָרְדְנוּ, נִאֲצָנוּ, סָרְרְנוּ, עֹוִינוּ, פָּשָׁעְנוּ, צָרָרְנוּ, קִשֵׁינוּ עֶרֶף. רָשָׁעְנוּ, שִׁחַתְנוּ, תַּעֲבָנוּ, תַּעֲוִינוּ, תַּעֲתָעְנוּ.
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Sarnu mimitzvotcha u-mimishpatecha hatovim, v'lo shavah lanu. V'Atah tzadik al kol haba aleinu, ki emet asitah v'anachnu hirshanu.	סָרְנוּ מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וּמִמִּשְׁפָּטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים, וְלֹא שָׁוָה לָנוּ. וְאַתָּה צַדִּיק עַל כָּל הַבָּא עֲלֵינוּ, כִּי אֱמֶת עֲשִׂיתָ וְאֲנַחְנוּ הִרְשָׁעְנוּ.
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## *Viddui, The Final Confession*

An interpretive translation by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

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 Elohenu, 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.*

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*As Death Approaches*

# The Quiet Time

Judaism teaches that the last moments of life are precious, and should be treated with sensitivity, so as to ensure that the soul is neither hurried from this world, nor delayed, prolonging suffering.

When patients are “transitioning” – that is, they have only a few days or hours to live according to their medical team, Jewish tradition considers them a *goses* (rhymes with “no less”), like a candle flame flickering out. Distractions need to be minimized, to free the soul to move on in its journey.

From that point forward, medical intervention and sensory stimulation are to be kept to a minimum. The only exceptions would be the loving touch of visitors, and acts required to bring immediate comfort and relief, such as giving pain medication. Ideally, caregivers should refrain from:

- **Jarring movement:** Relocating, moving or washing.
- **Sudden or loud noise:** If possible, medical equipment and televisions should be silenced.
- **Distracting contact:** Cold washcloths, blood pressure cuffs and needles should be avoided, if possible.
- **Verbal intervention:** Telling patients to resist death. Rather, they should be told that all is well, and they can relax and surrender to the natural order of life.

## Wishes for the Final Hours

*Check Here If Wished*

Please create a low-stimulation Quiet Time, to ease the Recipient’s departure from this world.



Who will oversee the Quiet Time?

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*After Death*

## Customs of Transition

Once it is clear that death has occurred, after a hug or kiss goodbye, those present may wish to perform a Jewish custom:

- **Say *Baruch Dayan HaEmet*** (Blessed is the True Judge).
- **Open a window.** It allows the spirit to move freely.
- **Light a candle.** It shows that the soul is still nearby. Put it out once the loved one leaves the building.
- **Rend a garment.** The partner, siblings, parents and children of the deceased may want to express their heartache by tearing the collar of their shirt (starting the rip with scissors). Children tear on the left; others on the right. Another option is to wait and tear a black *kri'ah* (tearing) ribbon at the funeral.

## Guardian (*Shomer*)

It is customary to designate a guardian (*shomer*) to sit with the deceased continually until the funeral. It is believed that the *neshama* (soul) remains present until the body rests in the earth, and that it is comforted to have someone nearby, studying Psalms in its honor until then. Some families want coverage around the clock; others just at night. *Shomrim* can include friends, fellow congregants, or scholars hired by the funeral home.

### Wishes for Guarding

*Check Here If Wished*

Arrangements should be made for a *shomer*.

The funeral home should be asked to provide this.

Who will be arrange for *shomer* coverage?

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# Cleansing Ceremony

The ceremony known as *taharah* (purification) prepares the deceased for entry into the World to Come, body and soul. For the body, it's like a day at the spa, getting bathed, ritually purified and dressed with the utmost kindness and respect. The soul receives the spiritual equivalent of full military honors, as a centuries-old liturgy heralds its splendor.

## The Ritual

The *taharah* ceremony consists of these sections:

- **A sponge bath** to remove obstacles to purification;
- **Ablution** by water poured over the body, to simulate a visit to the *mikvah* (ritual bath);
- **Dressing** in traditional garments (see p. 10);
- **Anointing** with materials of religious significance, such as earth from Israel;
- **Wrapping** in a sheet
- **Enclosing** in a plain wooden casket.

## Different Approaches

Taharah is most commonly performed in a mortuary preparation room by a gender-segregated team of three to six Jewish participants. Some taharah providers (called *chevrei kaddishah*) decline requests for changes to the ritual, saying they strive for perfection and this could interfere with their mental focus. Others are more flexible, willing to perform a taharah-type ceremony in a private home, with the family participating, or with other modifications. To find the right ritual team for you, ask your rabbi or Jewish mortuary, or contact *Kavod v'Nichum* (Honor and Comfort), an international non-profit that supports the creation of *chevra kadisha* groups ([www.Jewish-Funerals.org](http://www.Jewish-Funerals.org)).

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# Why Taharah?

Interest in both receiving and participating in taharah is on the rise among Jews of all backgrounds. Reasons include its powerful liturgy; its link to Jewish history, community and faith; and the opportunity it provides to fulfill a sacred duty while expressing love and beginning healing. Team participants often call it one of the most intensely spiritual experiences of their lives.

## Preparations

When taharah is desired, advanced planning can be helpful.

Organ and tissue donations are permitted by many of even the strictest Jewish authorities today, on the basis of “saving a life.” These can complicate taharah, however, as can an autopsy. Consult with a rabbi or taharah expert if these will occur.

The taharah ritual ends with blessings said over a closed casket. Traditionally, no further viewing of the body takes place, so cosmetics and public viewings are discouraged. Funeral homes may ask a family member to identify the loved one prior to the funeral, however.

### Ritual & Mortuary Wishes

*Check Here If Wished*

We decline cosmetics and public viewing.

We wish to have a *taharah* ritual performed.

The team that performs the ceremony should contain:  
Only Men     Only Women     Not specified

If legally possible, we decline to permit autopsy, as it can complicate *taharah*.

*Additional wishes & notes detailed on p. 14.*

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# Humble Raiment

Ecology and equality have long been at the center of Jewish funeral practices. All Jews are traditionally buried in identical white garments, and placed in a simple wooden casket. Every element is biodegradable. Jewish law forbids embalming.

The custom of dressing in white shroud garments, called *tachrichim*, dates back 2,000 years, to the Talmudic elder Rabban Gamliel. He felt that all Jews, rich or poor, should be buried humbly, making a dignified funeral accessible to all.

Tachrichim are made of bleached cotton or linen. A set includes pants, a shirt, a robe (*kittel*) and a head covering. It is sewn without knots, hems, pockets or metal closures. A skull cap (*yarmulke* or *kippah*) and a prayer shawl (*tallit*), rendered unkosher by cutting off a tassel, are standard additions for men. While some may want to use their own tallit, kippah, and/or kittel, others prefer to pass these down to relatives, and have new items provided for burial.



*A kittel*

## Garment Wishes

*Check If Wished*

Dress recipient in traditional Jewish burial garments

Add a *tallit*:      New  Recipient's Own

Add a *yarmulke*: New  Recipient's Own

Add Recipient's Own *kittel*

Other garment wishes:

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# Funeral & Disposition

Jewish funerals are traditionally held within 24 hours of death, although delays of a day or two have become common.

Tradition considers burial the only acceptable manner of disposition, allowing the body to gently return to the dust from which it was formed. Interment in a crypt or mausoleum qualifies as ground burial for many legal authorities because they consider concrete “earth”.

Cremation falls outside Jewish law, as does full-body donation to science, which is followed by cremation. Many Jews see willfully choosing these as anathema. A history of Jews being cremated against their will adds to this aversion. Tradition holds that a soul without its body in the ground will wander for all eternity. Some rabbis decline to officiate funerals that involve cremation, and may ask families to override a request for cremation from the decedent, and bury anyway.

Still, U.S. Jewish families today are choosing cremation at nearly the same rates as their non-Jewish neighbors, and many see body donation to science as a *mitzvah* (sacred duty).

Casketless burial, popular in Israel, is gaining interest in the U.S. as part of the growing “green burial” movement. Cemeteries with this option may also offer wicker caskets, graves without concrete vaults, engraved rocks instead of plaques, and maintenance-free ground cover. Find more information at [www.GreenBurialCouncil.org](http://www.GreenBurialCouncil.org).

## Disposition Preferences *(Check All That Are Desired)*

- |                |                          |               |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Ground Burial  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Green Burial  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mausoleum      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Cremation     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Organ Donation | <input type="checkbox"/> | Body Donation | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Additional wishes and notes can be added on p. 14.*

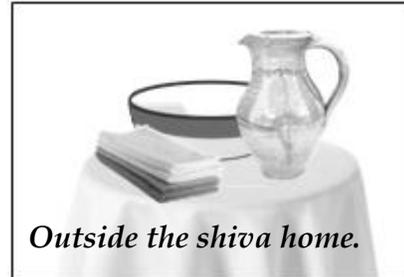
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# Mourning

One thing that Judaism does extraordinarily well is comfort mourners, with a detailed system of time-tested practices that normalize sadness and enable gradual, healthy healing.

This “mourner’s path” begins after the funeral, when a family arrives home. A long-burning candle is lit, and friends deliver a “meal of consolation” consisting of round foods (hard-boiled eggs, lentils, bagels) to remind them of the “circle of life.” A table with a pitcher of water, a bowl and towels is set at the door for guests to rinse their hands after their cemetery visit.



The first week after the funeral is called *shiva* (meaning seven, as in days). Mourners are encouraged to stay home, sit on low chairs, wear slippers, cover mirrors and abstain from shaving and wearing make-up, to de-emphasize the physical and turn to the spirit. Guests visit daily to enable community prayer (*shiva minyans*). Shiva ends with the family being escorted around the block, and back into the world.

For the first month after the funeral, family members observe the rules of *shloshim* (meaning 30). They may work, but avoid parties and public entertainment, and continue to wear the *kri'ah* ribbon or torn garment (*see p. 5*). They also attend synagogue daily to say the *Kaddish* prayer. This requirement continues for 11 months when mourning a parent.

Each year thereafter, mourners observe *yahrzeit* (commemoration) on the Hebrew calendar date of the death. They light a candle in the home, say special prayers in synagogue, and give *tzedakah*, a donation to charity, in honor of the deceased.

Please ensure that the Kaddish is said in the Recipient’s honor.

Check Here If Wished



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# Decision-makers

Some rituals cannot be performed without the consent of the Recipient's decision-making agents, as indicated in the Advanced Healthcare Directive. Please copy these here.  
*If more space is needed, continue on page 14.*

## Financial Decision-Makers (Durable Power of Attorney)

	Name	Phone
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____

## Medical Decision-Makers (Healthcare Proxy)

	Name	Phone
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____

## Religious Advisors (Family, Clergy)

	Name	Phone
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____

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# Preplanning

The following arrangements are already in place for services to be provided at the time of death and thereafter.

## Service Provider, Contact Details

Pre-purchased Casket	
Mortuary/ Donation Service	
<i>Taharah</i> Provider	
Cemetery & Plot Location	
Funeral Officiant	
Shiva Minyan Support	

## Additional Wishes & Notes

### **For More Information**

[www.Jewish-Funerals.org](http://www.Jewish-Funerals.org), the website of *Kavod v'Nichum* (Honor and Comfort), offers a library of information, and online training, to further the organization's mission of supporting Jewish community-based funeral, burial and mourning practices.

[www.GreenBurialCouncil.org](http://www.GreenBurialCouncil.org), the website of the Green Burial Council, lists cemeteries offering natural approaches.