

Roles Available in the OKC Chevra Kaddisha

The Chevra Kaddisha (Funeral Practices Committee) helps with funeral preparations and the mourning process. We rely on volunteers to make this possible. Please consider joining our efforts!

With questions, or to volunteer, please email chevra@ohrkodesh.org.

Important note: Volunteering for one (or more!) of these roles does not mean that you are required to show up every time someone passes away. It simply means that you are willing to be on our roster of volunteers for that role; when the need arises, you'll receive an email or a call, asking whether you are available - and if you are, you step up and help out. We rely on having a large number of volunteers on our roster, so that many hands make light work.

Volunteering or coordinating?

We need both volunteers, who go out to the funeral home or to the shiv'a house to carry out their tasks there, and coordinators, who help ensure that volunteers are lined up. Both are important roles, and both are needed. One may suit you better than the other - choose as you wish.

Shmira

After a person dies, we do not leave the dead body (*met*) alone until the funeral. A *shomer* sits in an adjacent room in the funeral home, and in doing so guards and accompanies the remains. This used to ensure that no vermin or other animals would attack the *met*, but today serves to honor the person who passed away.

Commitment: We split the period from death until burial into 2-hour *shmira* slots.

Need to know: This can be done by anyone with a couple of hours to spare; no specific skills are needed other than the ability to be present. Some have the habit of studying or Jewish texts, or saying Psalms, while present, but this is not a requirement.

Tohora

Before the burial, the body is washed and cleansed, prepared for burial by a team of 4-5 people. *Tohora* involves a physical and a ritual purification, both of which are carried out with water. The *met* is then dressed in shrouds and readied for the burial.

Commitment: The *tohora* takes approx. 1 hour and is often carried out in the evening.

Need to know: Being a *metaher/metaheret* requires nothing but the will to participate and the ability to carry some weight when the *met* is laid in the coffin. On the "job" guidance will be provided by experienced metaharim/ot.

Minyan Maker

During the *shiv'a* after the burial, services are held at home with the mourner(s), usually only in the evening, but sometimes in the morning as well. We need a roster of volunteers who are willing to show up and ensure that a minyan is present so the mourner(s) can say *kaddish*.

Commitment: The evening service can take as little as 20 minutes, or a bit longer in summer (when *mincha* is also said). *Shacharit*, the morning service, lasts about an hour.

Need to know: Do you have a pulse? Are you Jewish and over bar/bat mitzva? You're an expert! Kohanim are welcome too!

Minyan Leader

If you know how to lead *mincha* and/or *'arvit* services, or you're willing to learn, why not volunteer to lead at a *shiv'a*? The service can take as little as 20 minutes, or a bit longer in summer. Same applies for those who can lead *shacharit*, although most *shiv'as* don't have morning minyanim.

Need to know: If you know how to lead the service, or are willing to learn, you're in. Kohanim are welcome too!

General Coordinator

You are the first contact and main liaison between the bereaved family and Or Kodesh and the funeral home and cemetery. Anytime someone in the Or Kodesh universe passes away, you ask what is needed from the Chevra Kaddisha. You are a kind listener, ready to serve, and you get the other coordinators and volunteers the information they need. Detail-oriented but with eye for the bigger picture, you are a resource to the family, and ensure that the funeral home and Or Kodesh have the information they need, and that the whole planning process keeps moving forward. This can be done from anywhere with a phone.

Commitment: This coordination opportunity requires the ability to drop everything at the drop of a hat, to listen to a family that has just lost a loved one, and get the right information to the right people in time. You and another coordinator will serve as the go-to people for a month, sharing the duties as needed. You can expect to serve once every 6 months.

Need to know: You help arrange the funeral and make sure the other coordinators are on task and informed. The ability to pick up the phone and ask other coordinators to get started is crucial. No prior knowledge is required; you'll learn from other coordinators and then set out on your own.

Shmira Coordinator

You coordinate the continuous presence of a *shomer* with the *met*, drawing from our list of *shmira* volunteers. This can be done from anywhere with a phone and computer.

Commitment: This coordination opportunity requires the ability to drop everything at the drop of a hat, to arrange for *shmira* as soon as the *met* arrives at the funeral home. You and another *shmira* coordinator will serve as the go-to people for a month, sharing the duties as needed. You can expect to serve once every 6 months.

Need to know: The ability to pick up the phone and ask people for a favor is crucial, and knowing how to use Google Docs makes this task easier. You do not need to have experience as a *shomer*. Kohanim are welcome!

Tohora Coordinator

You arrange that a team of 4-5 people is ready to carry out the *tohora* before the funeral takes place. This can be done from anywhere with a phone and computer.

Commitment: This coordination opportunity requires the ability to make time within a day or so to put together a *tohora* team. You will serve as the go-to person for a month. You can expect to serve once every 6 months.

Need to know: The ability to pick up the phone and ask people for a favor is crucial. You do not need to have experience as a *metaher/et*. Kohanim are welcome!

Minyan Coordinator

You arrange that there will be sufficient people at the *shiv'a* to ensure a minyan, so the mourner(s) can say *kaddish*, and if necessary, arrange someone is present who can lead the service. Sometimes the family alone is enough, or we know that plenty of people will attend, and no help is needed. Or the family might need someone who can lead the service and 8 people to show up. It's variable! You also make sure that *siddurim* and *shiv'achairs* are at the house of mourning (you don't have to shlep them yourself!). This can be done from anywhere with a phone and computer.

Commitment: This coordination opportunity requires the ability to make time within a day or so to get people lined up for minyanim. You will serve as the go-to person for a month. You can expect to serve once every 6 months.

Need to know: The ability to pick up the phone and ask people for a favor is crucial, and knowing how to use Google Docs makes this task easier. You do not need to have experience as a minyan leader. Kohanim are welcome!

FAQ:

Q: I have no time. How can I help?

A: There are tasks for everyone, no matter your availability. Late evening or early morning slots for *shmira* might just be the ticket. A *shiv'a minyan* can be as brief as 20 minutes. Or if you're unable to be present in person, but can free up some computer and phone time: maybe a coordinator role suits you better. We know that you're busy - by getting more people involved, each individual volunteer carries less of a burden.

Q: I have little kids. How can I help?

A: There are tasks for everyone, no matter your availability or your age. Late evening slots for *shmira* might just be the ticket, or helping with *tohora*, which is often done in the evening right after bedtime. Alternatively: bring your kids to an early morning *shiv'a minyan*.

Q: I have kids. Can they help too?

A: Sure! From early on, children can be introduced to the work of the Chevra Kaddisha. Children are often welcome at *shiv'a minyanim* (but expected to maintain age-appropriate decorum) - and if they're too little for that, take them to visit the bereaved outside of the minyan times! Your teen may even be ready to accompany you to sit *shmira* or help with a *tohora*.

Q: I am scared of death. How can I help?

A: Aren't we all? Talk to us at any time and we'll help find a task that you are already comfortable with, or we can pair you up with a buddy for your first time (or times) volunteering for the Chevra Kaddisha.

Q: I am a kohen. How can I help?

A: Kohanim can help in various ways! You can serve as a minyan-maker or a minyan leader, or in any of the coordinator roles.

Q: I am young. Why should I care about the Chevra Kaddisha?

A: Well, to put it bluntly, you won't be young forever. The Chevra Kaddisha will work with everyone in the community at some time, so pay it forward and get started now as a volunteer!

To volunteer or for more information, contact chevra@ohrkodesh.org