

When Death Occurs

A Guide to Jewish Funerals, Burials and Mourning Practices at TI

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”

**Tifereth Israel Congregation
Washington, DC 20012**

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Guiding Philosophy of Funerals at Tifereth Israel

Tifereth Israel conducts funerals according to Jewish tradition, which emphasizes respect for the dignity of the deceased (*met*), speed, and simplicity. Key elements include the following:

- Nothing is done to delay the natural decomposition of the body or to mask the reality of death. Embalming or cosmetic beautification are prohibited.
- The *met* is ritually washed (*taharah*) and dressed in simple white ritual burial garments (*takhrikhim*). Tifereth Israel has separate groups of men and women trained to perform this ritual.
- Once *taharah* is completed, the casket is closed and there is no viewing of the *met*.
- The funeral is held as soon as practicable following the death — preferably the next day, or the day after if the death occurs on a Friday or just prior to a religious holiday, or to accommodate the travel schedules of far-away relatives.
- If the funeral is not at graveside, the *met* is transported immediately after the funeral to a consecrated Jewish cemetery. Burial is in the ground. Jewish law strictly prohibits cremation.

From the time of death until just before the funeral, to the extent possible, the *met* is accompanied or watched (*sh'mirah*). This is done by a rotation of friends, family members (other than the immediate mourners) and synagogue members. This is another act of honor toward the *met* to ensure that the body is never left alone. Family members are not told who performed either *taharah* or *sh'mirah*, as these are *mitzvot* done without expectation of recognition or thanks.

- The casket is made of plain, unfinished pine. It is made without nails, metal fittings, or adornments, as part of Judaism's emphasis on simplicity, the equality of all persons and the naturalness of the body's return to the earth.

II. Making Funeral Arrangements

In Case of a Death: Call one of the *haverim* (members of the Funeral Practices Committee) below:

Shelly Heller	h:	301-942-1836
	c:	301-996-2704 sheller@gwu.edu
Bruce Heppen	h:	301-299-3255
	c:	202-997-1890 bruce.heppen@mwa.com
Marcia Goggin	h:	301-593-8480
		gogg.ins@verizon.net
Naomi Revzin	H:	301-765-6272
		naomirevzin@gmail.com

If you cannot reach any Chaver, Call the office at 202-882-1605, x 101, and ask for either the

rabbi or executive director.

Funeral Practices Committee Haverim. For all funerals for members of Tifereth Israel, a *haver* from the Funeral Practices Committee will be assigned to work with the family. The *haver* provides helpful advice and guidance, coordinates with the rabbi and the funeral home, assists in the funeral and burial, and helps the family organize services during the *shivah* period that follows. The intent is to relieve the family of the burden of financial and logistical details at a time of great emotional stress and grief, and ensure the efficient planning and execution of all arrangements.

The *haver* performs a number of critical functions:

- Meets with the family, by phone or in person, to begin funeral planning, in consultation with the rabbi, and helps the family determine the date, time and place of the funeral.
- Makes the initial contact with the funeral home and coordinates the transfer of the *met* from the place of death to the funeral home.
- Collects the information for the death certificate.
- Collects the information for the newspaper death notice, forwards it to the funeral home and proofs/corrects a draft of the death notice prior to final publication.
- Contacts the appropriate synagogue members to schedule *taharah* and recruits members to perform *sh'mirah*.
- Helps the family make burial arrangements and, if the burial is at a Tifereth Israel cemetery, alerts synagogue staff.
- Helps the family organize pallbearers.
- Helps the family arrange for a post-funeral meal.
- Coordinates *shivah* services with the rabbi and executive director and arranges for prayer books and *kippot* to be delivered to the home.
- Arranges for limousine transportation, if the family desires, for mourners and/or other family members to the funeral, cemetery and home.
- Greets and assists the family at the funeral service, and works with the funeral home staff at the funeral and the burial to facilitate logistics.
- If the funeral or burial is held out of the Washington metropolitan area, works with the family and funeral home to make travel and transportation arrangements.

Contract Funeral Package. Tifereth Israel is the founding synagogue and a participating member of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington (JFPCGW). This organization contracts with local funeral homes to provide a basic funeral package, in accordance with traditional Jewish practice, for a low, fixed-price arrangement that is several thousand dollars less than that charged by other funeral homes.

JFPCGW contracts with: **Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home** in Silver Spring, serving DC and Maryland; Hines-Rinaldi manages all funerals conducted at Tifereth Israel. The current Hines-Rinaldi contract price, which is periodically adjusted upward by a cost-of-living percentage. The contract funeral provides for the following:

- Removal of the *met* from the place of death to the funeral home.
- Securing a signed copy of the physician's death certificate.
- Refrigeration as required.
- An all-wood pine casket.
- Use of the funeral home's premises, 24 hours per day, for *taharah* and *sh'mirah*, until the funeral and burial.
- All necessary facilities, supplies and equipment, including *takhrikhim* and protective equipment for those performing *taharah*, and a separate lounge area adjacent to the *taharah* facility for *shomrim*.
- Use of the funeral home chapel for a funeral service when desired by the family.
- Transporting the *met* to the funeral service at Tifereth Israel, and then to the cemetery, or, if the funeral is at graveside, directly to the cemetery.
- Arranging for newspaper death notices and preparing and delivering death certificates.
- Guest register books, 50 acknowledgement cards, and a *shivah* candle.

Additional charges, not covered by the contract price, include

- Newspaper charges for printing the death notice.
- Certified copies of the death certificate.
- Limousine service.
- Mileage charges for transporting the *met* beyond 40 miles from the Washington Beltway.

If the *met* is transported to another community for the funeral service, the contract price is substantially reduced, but charges for transportation 40 miles beyond the Beltway limit are incurred. The complete contract can be found at the JFPCGW website: jewish-funerals.org/aboutus.htm.

The contract funeral package relieves the family of the burden of making logistical and financial arrangements. The family is not required to sign any contracts or to make a trip to the funeral home, unless they wish to view the *met* prior to *taharah*, or hold the funeral at the funeral home. A representative of the family will have to negotiate with the cemetery as they identify the burial plot.

There is no charge for the services of the rabbi, *haverim* or congregants performing *taharah* and *sh'mirah*. Following the *Sh'loshim* period (see **VI. Mourning Rituals**) it is customary for the family to make a tax-deductible contribution to the synagogue.

Please Note: Families may use a funeral home of their choice, but if they do, they must make their own arrangements. They will not receive the services of the congregation's *haverim*, nor may the funeral service be held at Tifereth Israel.

Cemetery Arrangements. If the burial is at either of Tifereth Israel's cemeteries, but the family has not purchased a plot, the synagogue staff can aid with a purchase.

If the family has a plot in a Tifereth Israel cemetery, but has not provided for the opening, closing or a grave liner, the staff can work with the cemetery for the family.

If burial is a cemetery other than one of Tifereth Israel's, the family will have to make its own arrangements with the cemetery to purchase a plot, arrange for burial, or make payments.

III. Funeral and Burial Services

Funeral Service. The funeral home will transport the *met* to the synagogue before the funeral service, or to the cemetery if the funeral is at graveside. The casket, draped with a pall, is placed in the front of the sanctuary. Guest register books will be at the Juniper and 16th Street entrances to the sanctuary. The *haver* will also be present to greet mourners and assist funeral home staff to usher guests into the sanctuary.

The immediate family members arrive 30-60 minutes prior to the service. Before the service, they meet privately with the rabbi to receive additional guidance and instructions, and to perform *k'riyah*, the traditional tearing of a garment or black ribbon as an expression of mourning. Other visitors are requested not to visit the family prior to the funeral service.

The funeral service itself is simple and brief, lasting about half an hour. It consists primarily of readings from Ecclesiastes and Psalms, followed by eulogies delivered by the rabbi and, if the family chooses, two or three family members or friends. The service concludes with the chanting of the 23rd Psalm and the *El Malei Rahamim* (God, full of compassion) prayer.

At the conclusion of the service, the pallbearers take the casket from the sanctuary to the hearse. When the burial is at a local cemetery, it is customary for those going to the burial to follow the hearse in a procession.

Burial Service. When the hearse and mourners arrive at the cemetery, the pallbearers, accompanied by the mourners and led by the rabbi, carry the casket to the gravesite. They usually pause seven times on the way to the gravesite as a sign of respect for the deceased. The rabbi recites Psalm 91, which speaks of God's sheltering presence. All others follow this procession.

When the casket is lowered into the ground, the immediate family members, followed by relatives, friends and others, shovel earth onto the casket until it is covered.

The mourners then recite the *Kaddish* for the first time and the burial service concludes with another recitation of the *El Malei Rahamim*. Relatives and friends form two parallel lines from the grave back to their limousines and cars. The mourners walk between the lines, receiving condolences from those on either side, before proceeding to the *shivah* home.

Mourners return from the burial to the home of the deceased or of one of the immediate family. Traditionally, they wash their hands before entering the home, although it is the custom of some to wash their hands before leaving the cemetery. Once home, the mourners partake of a meal, usually dairy or *pareve*, that has been pre-arranged by family and friends.