

**Sacred Pilgrimage:
A Guide to Jewish Practices
on Death and Mourning
© 1996, Rabbi Richard A. Block**

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Foreword

Rabbi Alvin Fine's beautiful and inspiring prayer in *Gates of Repentance* reminds us that:

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination
And life is a journey...
A sacred pilgrimage to live everlasting.

Properly understood, death is a stage in the journey of life. The recognition that life is finite and that death is a reality that must be anticipated and accepted is one of Judaism's most profound insights. Nonetheless, confronting our mortality and that of those dearest to us is one of life's most difficult tasks. For some, the subject of death is considered morbid. But if we fail to plan ahead and avoid making essential decisions, death catches

us unprepared, confused and uncertain about what to do, making the process of mourning even more painful and burdensome. It is far better, healthier and kinder to our loved ones to face the inevitable with fortitude and convey our wishes to those who will survive us.

This guide has been prepared to help the members of our congregational family and their loved ones understand Jewish practices with respect to the death, funerals and mourning. It was created under the sponsorship of the Religious Practices Committee of our congregation and is intended for reading well in advance of death, when the mind is clear and the heart is not heavy. Read it, share your feelings with dear ones and discuss the issues that should be faced during life. This guide will also prove useful for consultation when death approaches or occurs. Put it where you will have ready access to it in time of need.

This booklet is not encyclopedic; it is a concise, modern guide that draws upon the insights of Jewish tradition, values and practice. Reform Judaism, with its special sensitivity to individual needs and preferences, empowers us to fashion a response to death that is personally meaningful as well as Jewishly authentic. There is no single correct way. The decisions are yours.

Please know that your rabbis are ready to assist with the many aspects of preparing for and coping with death. Feel free to contact either of us with questions and concerns and be sure to notify the congregational office when a death is imminent or has occurred. One of us will respond as soon as possible with comfort, counsel and the assistance you may need in making necessary arrangements. We want to do whatever we can to help you and, ultimately, to bring you closer to the Source of life, in whose unity no one is alone and every life finds purpose.

Lishalom uiveracha - in peace and blessing,

Rabbi Richard A. Block

Introduction

The Jewish approach to death and mourning is guided by four basic principles:

1. Recognition of the reality of death
2. Moderation in grief
3. Respect for the dead
4. Equality in death

It is in accordance with these principles that the laws, customs and practices of Judaism have developed. These reflect, in turn, the wisdom and the spiritual and psychological insights of generations of Jewish scholars and lay people. The recommendations and background provided here are a tribute to those who prepared the way for us.

Before Death Comes

Last Will and Testament

Every adult should have a will, a legal document in which one disposes of one's material assets. Some people think of a will as necessary only if there is a large estate or when death is imminent. Such assumptions are mistaken and can have awful consequences. No matter what your age or financial situation, a will relieves your family of the burden of disposing of personal possessions, avoids or minimizes a range of potential problems

and complications later, and reduces probate and other costs. Although it is possible to create a legally valid will on your own, consulting an attorney with experience in such matters is the wiser course and is likely to prove the most financially prudent one.

In addition to addressing property and guardianship issues, a will can also specify your desires concerning funeral arrangements and organ donations. However, since the will is normally not consulted until after the funeral, it is imperative to record your wishes separately and to make them known to those who will be responsible for handling the arrangements at the time of death. One way of doing so is to fill out the family information forms at the end of this guide. We also recommend that you make a copy of those forms and place them on file in Rabbi Block's office.

"Living Will"

Jewish tradition affirms the sanctity of life and encourages strenuous efforts to preserve life. It forbids both euthanasia and "assisted suicide," the active taking of life of the terminally ill. However, it affirms that when the attending physicians declare that there is no realistic hope for a patient and death is certain, impediments to death must not be created or should be removed, allowing a patient to die in dignity and peace. Thus, Judaism allows the withholding of treatment when its effect is to delay an impending death rather than to prolong life. It also allows the administration of pain relief medication to a patient with a terminal disease, even if the dosage required to control pain endangers the life of the patient.

Many people do not desire that their life be artificially prolonged when they have an incurable and irreversible condition and death is near or they are in an irreversible coma or persistent vegetative state and are no longer able to make decisions regarding medical treatment. The California Natural Death Act allows a voluntary declaration to that effect to be made in writing by those of sound mind. In addition, the California Probate Code provides for a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Decisions, which document designates another person to act as your agent if you become incapable of giving informed consent to health care decisions. These documents can guide your loved ones in acting, should that prove necessary, in accordance with your values and desires.

Ethical Will

In contrast to a last will and testament, which disposes of things of material value, an ethical will is a statement to your survivors of the beliefs and values you wish to transmit and perpetuate. It is a mitzvah to prepare an ethical will for the moral guidance of your family, especially the children. Either rabbi would be pleased to share examples of ethical wills with you. Preparing such a will is not a complicated or technical process. It is as simple as writing a letter to those you love expressing your feelings, advice and hopes for the future. As with other wills, it is advisable to prepare an ethical will when you are strong and healthy. All wills should be left in a safe place that is known to the family.

Organ Donation

Judaism permits and Reform Judaism encourages organ donation in the hope of saving the life or significantly improving the quality of life of another person or persons. The mitzvah of *pikuach nefesh*, saving life, takes precedence over virtually all other considerations. Many people die each year who could be saved if a donated organ were available for transplantation. If you wish to donate organs of your body you should so inform family members, especially those who will be responsible for making funeral arrangements as well as health care decisions, should you be unable to do so. The Department of Motor Vehicles provides an organ donation card to be signed and carried in your wallet with your driver's license. This will make your wishes known to those who would care for you in the event of an accident. Jewish tradition disallows donation of the body to science, but Reform Judaism permits this practice, provided that the body will be treated with respect and the remains are interred when the study is completed. It is wise to discuss your wishes with family members and one of the rabbis.

Autopsy

Reform Judaism permits autopsies when legally required or so long as they are performed for the clear purpose of increasing medical knowledge that will help others to live. If the deceased has forbidden an autopsy, these instructions should be honored unless an epidemic threatens or they are contrary to law.

Burial, Cremation and Embalming

Jewish tradition prescribes burial as the sole acceptable manner of disposition of the body, in keeping with the belief that "the soul returns to God, its maker; the body returns to the earth from which it came." Tradition regards cremation as an unnatural hastening, and embalming as an unnatural retarding, of the body's reintegration with the natural world. In the modern period, cremation has also become associated with the destruction of Jewish bodies during the Holocaust.

Burial remains the practice of a large majority of Jews, including Beth Am members and their families. Reform practice permits cremation when it has been insisted upon by the deceased. A memorial service can be held in lieu of a funeral and it normally takes place after the cremation has been completed. Ashes may be interred in a cemetery or placed in a mausoleum thereafter. This is preferable to scattering as it provides the survivors with a place where they can feel a special closeness to their loved one.

Cemetery Arrangements

One of the first things any newly established Jewish community does is provide for a Jewish cemetery, thus consecrating the ground for sacred purposes and undertaking to provide perpetual care to the graves of those buried there. This goes back to the patriarch, Abraham, who purchased a burial place for Sarah and his family in ancient times.

It is prudent to make cemetery arrangements well in advance of the time of death in order to spare loved ones this burden at a most difficult time. Our congregation maintains a large section for the use of its members and their families at the beautiful Hills of Eternity Cemetery in Colma. There is also a mausoleum for our use. The cemetery office can be reached at 650-756-3633. Beth Am clergy officiate only at Jewish and non-sectarian cemeteries. Fuller information concerning Hills of Eternity and a list of other cemeteries sometimes used by our members can be found below.

In Time of Illness

Visiting the sick

One of the acts that Jewish tradition declares to be both an obligation and a deed whose reward is immeasurable is *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick. Those with a life-threatening illness have a special need and desire for the support of loved ones and friends. A smile, a kindly touch, a listening ear, caring words and one's physical presence can ease suffering and bring peace. One of the rabbis should be informed of the serious illness of a member of the congregation.

Prayers in time of illness

People who are ill may wish to recite special prayers, and others may wish to do so on their behalf. There are many appropriate prayers, some of which are found in *On the Doorposts of Your House* and *Gates of the House*. At such times, recitation of the *Shema* or the 23rd Psalm can be particularly comforting. There is no particular prayer that is called for; the words of one's own heart directed to God are often the most beautiful and appropriate of all.

Vidui / Confessional Prayer

A long-standing practice of Judaism, though one that has largely fallen into disuse, is a confessional prayer called *vidui*, recited by or for one who is critically ill, that concludes with the *Shema*.. This is the prayer's most significant portion. For centuries, Jews have wanted this to be their last words. Those present when death is imminent may help the dying person say these hallowed words or recite them on that person's behalf.

The purpose of the prayer is to enable the dying to reconcile themselves with God by acknowledging and asking forgiveness for past failings. A form of the prayer can be found in *On the Doorposts of Your House* and *Gates of the House*. The opportunity should also be taken, if at all possible, to turn to family members and friends with words of forgiveness, understanding and reconciliation.

From The Time of Death To The Funeral Service

Prayers after the death of a loved one

When one has been present at or is informed of a death, the following prayer is customary, along with such other prayers as the heart may prompt:

Barukh Atah Adonai, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam, Dayan HaEmet.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Sovereign of the Universe, the true judge.

Keriah / Tearing a Garment

According to traditional custom, when one learns of the death of a person for whom one is required to observe Jewish mourning rituals (see "Who is a Mourner?" below), one tears a garment one is wearing to symbolize one's grief. Most Reform Jews no longer follow this custom. Some choose to wear a black mourner's ribbon, instead. If you wish to do so, please consult the clergyperson who will be officiating at the service.

Notifying Family Members

It is a mitzvah to notify all members of the family when a death has occurred, even those who are estranged. If possible, the precious opportunity should be seized to heal wounds by bringing family members together.

Visiting the Bereaved Prior to the Funeral

Unless you are a very close friend or relative, it is best to postpone a visit to the home of the bereaved until after the funeral. Preparations must be made and time taken to begin coping with the loss. There are exceptions, of course, guided by common sense, such as the bringing of food to the family.

Activity by the Bereaved

During the period before the burial, the bereaved do not engage in business or other activities except those required for the funeral or to respond to emergencies. They are in the first, most intense stage of mourning, *ohninoot*, a time when tradition exempts them from all other ritual obligations.

The Body

The body is treated with great respect as the vessel that once contained the soul. By tradition, the body is not left unattended before burial. With candles burning to symbolize the soul's eternal flame, a watchman (*shomer*) sits in attendance and reads Psalms. Most Jews, however, tend to be satisfied with the care of the undertaking establishment. Pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home is not in keeping with Jewish custom.

Tradition calls for the body to be ritually washed, a cleansing called *taharah*, purification, before the body is laid in the earth. This is normally done only by Jewish funeral homes. The body is then dressed in plain white, inexpensive shrouds, emphasizing the principle of equality in death. Most Reform Jews follow the contemporary practice of dressing the dead in their own clothing. Some bury men with a *kippah* and a *tallit* with the *tzitzit* cut off as a symbolic recognition of death. Another practice some follow is to place a small sackful of earth from the land of Israel in the coffin. This emphasizes the attachment of our people to the holy land, the place where, it was believed, the dead would come back to life in the time of the messiah.

Death or Burial Abroad

Consult your undertaker. Burial in Israel can be arranged through Sinai Memorial Chapel. Arranging to convey the body back to the United States sometimes requires the intervention of the State Department. When doing so is extremely difficult, impossible or prohibitively expensive, some families choose to have the body cremated abroad and hold a memorial service at home.

Making Funeral Arrangements

Consulting the Rabbi

When death is imminent or when it occurs, one of the rabbis should be informed as soon as possible. The rabbis and cantors are anxious to help you and will make every possible effort to accommodate their schedules to your needs. If you wish them to be involved in the funeral or memorial service it is essential to consult them before arrangements have been completed. No announcement of the day or time of the service(s) should be made before doing so. The rabbis and cantors are available for counsel, advice and help.

Because their primary obligation is to members of the congregational family, our clergy are available to assist non-members and family members outside of the household only as their schedules permit. When that is impossible, they will gladly assist in locating someone who is available.

Cemetery

If you have not already done so, cemetery arrangements must be made at the time of death. Instructions for doing so are found above.

Funeral Director / *Chevra Kadisha*

At the time of death, family members should contact the funeral home they have chosen. The funeral home will perform such tasks as removing the body of the deceased, obtaining a death certificate, placing obituary notices and preparing the body for burial or cremation. It is normally necessary to meet the funeral director at the funeral home to select a casket and other services and provide for payment if this has not been arranged in advance. Sinai Memorial Chapel (415-921-3636) is a *chevra kadisha*, a not-for-profit Jewish burial society, devoted to serving our local Jewish community by providing both burial and cremation services. It provides free burials for indigent members of the community, and its earnings are distributed to local Jewish community institutions and synagogues, including Beth Am. Its headquarters are in San Francisco, but it has an office in Redwood City to serve residents of the Peninsula. For more information, please contact Robert Malinow at: 650-369-3636 or 408-297-3636.

The other funeral home most often used by our congregants is Spangler Mortuary in Los Altos (650-948-6619), Mountain View (650-967-5546) and Menlo Park (650-323-6500).

Financial Considerations

Upon request, Sinai and Hills of Eternity Cemetery mortuaries will arrange an extended payment plan and they accept a reduced fee in appropriate cases.

The Coffin

The Jewish value of equality in death calls for the avoidance of ostentation and excessive expense in making final arrangements. An elaborate coffin is not required; on the contrary, Jewish tradition discourages this. It prescribes, instead, a simple, all wood casket.

Floral displays

These are discouraged by Jewish tradition, which favors *tsedakah*, a charitable contribution to assist the living. Flowers soon fade and wither, but an act of lovingkindness can have a profound and lasting effect.

Time and Place of the Services

Jewish tradition provides that we bury as soon as possible after death, being mindful of travel arrangements for out-of-town mourners. This generally means the second or third day after death occurs. Funerals are never held on the Sabbath or Jewish festivals and are conducted during daylight hours.

The Talmud indicates that the funeral service was once held in the home of the deceased or at the cemetery. In modern times, services are generally held at a synagogue, funeral home or cemetery. When the deceased is a member of Congregation Beth Am or a close family member of a congregant, the service may be held at the synagogue, in the sanctuary or the indoor or outdoor chapel. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the casket is normally not present, but remains in the hearse for the processional to the cemetery or is taken directly to the cemetery where it is met by the family following the funeral service. When desired by the family, the funeral may take place at a funeral home or be combined with the interment and the entire service held at the cemetery.

Children at Funerals

Children are more aware of death than we may realize, though their understanding of death evolves as they get older. Between the ages of 5 and 9 children generally become able to understand the meaning of physical death and by the time they are 9 or 10 they often have a realistic concept of the finality of death. The ability of children to understand death varies with age, maturity and intelligence, but regardless of the variables, children cannot be shielded from death or protected from its reality.

Death is a crisis that should be shared by all members of the family. The needs of children are sometimes overlooked by grieving adults. When parents discuss death openly with their children, they enable them to develop a concept of death in a healthy manner. Attendance at the funeral can aid children in understanding the finality of death and in dispelling the greater fears and fantasies that can arise when they are kept away. If they are old enough to attend a synagogue service and comprehend a good part of what is taking place, they should be allowed to attend a religious ceremony to say goodbye to a significant person in their lives. Of course, children should not be forced to attend. If apprehensive children choose to remain at home they should be allowed to do so without being made to feel guilty or neglectful. Parents may visit the cemetery with them at another time. It is very helpful to children to explain to them in advance what is going to take place and the fact that people may be crying. For more extensive advice on this subject you may obtain a copy of the pamphlet, *How to Explain Death to Children*, by Rabbi Earl A. Grollman from one of the rabbis, who are also available to discuss this matter with you and offer advice.

The Funeral/Memorial Service and Burial/Interment

One of the rabbis normally officiates at the service. When requested by the family, one of the cantors also participates. The service centers around prayers, psalms and a eulogy in memory of the deceased. Participation by family members or others and the inclusion of additional readings or music should be discussed with the clergy person who will be officiating. At the conclusion of the service, it is customary for those in attendance to remain in their places until members of the family have departed and embarked for the cemetery. Jewish tradition requires that the casket remain closed throughout as an expression of respect for the dead. If the bereaved wish to view the body a last time, they should arrange to do so prior to the funeral service.

The Burial Service/Interment

At the cemetery, pallbearers selected by the family, or the funeral director and cemetery personnel, will carry the casket to the grave. Following the recitation of prayers, it is customary for the casket to be lowered. Family members and friends are then invited to place a shovelful or handful of earth in the grave. Those who are not comfortable participating in this portion of the ritual need not do so and it may be omitted entirely at the request of the family. Tradition considers participation in the burial to be one of the highest and most selfless mitzvot because it is an act of kindness of which the recipient is unaware and that cannot be repaid. The sound of earth falling on the casket can be jarring, but it helps mourners accept the reality of death and, thus, facilitates the process of healing. After earth has been placed in the grave, the mourners' kaddish is recited and the service concludes.

Burial Vaults or Liners

Neither are prescribed by Jewish tradition and they are not necessary, but are acceptable where required by civil law or cemetery rules.

After The Funeral and Interment

The Meal of Consolation

Following the interment, the mourners normally return to the home of the deceased or another family member. Usually, others who attended the funeral or burial service are invited to join them. Customarily, food and beverages are set out by friends of the bereaved so that they may take nourishment after a physically and emotionally exhausting experience. Several foods are traditionally served, including hard-boiled eggs, which symbolize the Jewish affirmation of life, even in the aftermath of death.

Other Customs upon Returning from the Cemetery

Some choose to follow the custom of having a container of water and a towel outside the door of the house of mourning. This serves the practical purpose of allowing those whose hands are soiled from participating in the interment to wash their hands before entering the home.

Mourning Observances

After Burial

After burial or cremation, attention shifts from paying appropriate respect to the deceased to easing the pain of the living. Jewish traditions and practices define periods of mourning and ways for the bereaved to gradually reenter the stream of life.

Who is a mourner?

Judaism recognizes that there is a difference between formal rites of mourning and the very personal grief that cannot be regulated. Reform practice recognizes that one may grieve for any dear person, but it is a religious duty to observe the practices of mourning for a parent, spouse, sibling or child. Those under the age of 13 need not observe the mourning customs. Jewish tradition does not call for mourning observances for an infant less than 30 days old, but Reform Judaism recognizes the devastating character of such a loss by providing for mourning rituals in such cases.

***Shiva* / Seven days of mourning**

In Hebrew, the word *shiva* means seven; when used in connection with mourning it connotes the seven day period that commences the day of the funeral. During the *shiva* period, it is customary for mourners to refrain from all ordinary pursuits and occupations and remain at home, except on Shabbat, festivals and the high holy days, when they attend synagogue services in order to recite kaddish with the congregation following the reading of the name of the deceased as part of the congregation's memorial list. *Shiva* provides the mourner an opportunity to begin working through grief, to be comforted and interact with good friends and loved ones. Most Reform Jews do not follow the customs of sitting on low stools and covering mirrors at the home of the bereaved during *shiva*.

The Memorial Candle

Upon returning home from the memorial service or interment, a seven day memorial candle, usually provided by the funeral home, is lit at the home of the bereaved. It should be lit by a mourner as a symbol of the light the deceased brought to friends and loved ones during life. It recalls the biblical teaching, "the human spirit is the light of the Eternal."

Home Services

Jewish tradition prescribes daily services at home (except for Shabbat and holidays) during the shiva period. When mourners are unable to go out to the community, the community comes to them. Members of our congregation follow a variety of practices in this regard. Most have at least one service in the evening on the day of the interment. Some hold services for three days. A few continue to the end of shiva. These services are available upon request and are conducted by one of the rabbis or cantors or by a knowledgeable member of the congregation, most often at either 5:30 or 7:30 PM. In keeping with the egalitarian principles of Reform Judaism, both men and women count toward a minyan of ten Jewish adults for these services. Beth Amís caring corps can arrange for the attendance of supportive members of the congregation to help constitute a minyan. Please speak to one of the rabbis or cantors for assistance in this regard.

Condolence Calls

It is appropriate for friends and members of the congregation to visit the home of the bereaved following the burial during the shiva period. It is also a kindness to visit or call in the weeks and months after *shiva* when the press of family and friends has begun to give way to loneliness and the full impact of the loss is felt. People are often not sure how to conduct themselves during such a visit. Here are some suggestions:

You may not be certain what to say. Jewish tradition encourages visitors to remain silent and wait until the mourner speaks first. There are no words to take away grief. Your presence and acceptance is often more important than advice. Be willing to simply sit in silence, perhaps holding the mourner's hand, sharing a smile, communicating without words your caring and concern.

Allow mourners the opportunity to talk about and express their feelings of loss and the pain of separation from a loved one. Do not attempt to change the subject or divert them from painful, angry or guilty thoughts. If they wish to cry, allow them to do so without discouragement. Tears are not a sign of weakness; they are a healthy and appropriate outlet for grief.

Listen . Ask questions that will allow the mourner to talk with you about their grief and their memories of the deceased. *Shiva* is an ideal time for reminiscing and reflecting on the life of the person who has died. Do not hesitate to talk about the deceased. Share your own stories and recollections. Memories are a precious gift to mourners.

Share your feelings . The paradox of grief is that the very person who would provide comfort in a time of emotional distress is the one who has died. The person who would hug, hold and console the mourner is no longer available to do so. If you have a close relationship with the bereaved, do not hesitate to hold, hug or touch them as you would want them to do were the situation reversed.

Show your acceptance . Grief often makes people feel as if they are losing their minds; it makes them say and do things that are unusual for them. If you can accept them without passing judgment, you will communicate your unconditional care.

Offer help . Grief can make daily living a burden. During and following *shiva* , you can assist by providing meals, organizing a minyan, carpooling, shopping, running errands or helping the mourner obtain legal advice. Help them, but allow them to remain in charge of their own lives.

Be patient . Grief is a process of adapting to change rather than "recovering." Be patient in allowing people to grieve and return to life after *shiva* . It often takes a year or more for a mourner to feel like himself or herself again. It can be difficult to be in the company of a person in acute emotional pain. Your patience and compassion will make a difference in their healing process.

After Shiva

Sheloshim

After *shiva* , normal occupations and family activities are resumed. During *sheloshim* , the thirty day period that commences on the day of the funeral, it is customary to refrain from public entertainment and parties with music. It is permissible to plan for and attend such events as a family wedding or bar or bat mitzvah ceremony during this period, but it is traditional to refrain from dancing and exuberant celebration.

Kaddish

Jewish tradition establishes one year as the official period of mourning for a parent (thirty days for other close relatives) and calls for daily recitation of the *kaddish* prayer in memory of the deceased at a public worship service attended by a minyan. In our congregation, it is more customary for mourners to attend weekly Shabbat services as often as possible for up to a year, to recite *kaddish* with the congregation. Some find it comforting to recite *kaddish* privately when they are unable to attend services at the synagogue.

Yizkor

On Yom Kippur afternoon and the morning of the last day of the three "pilgrim festivals,"

Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot, a service is held at the synagogue, usually at 9:30 AM in the Beit Kehillah. The service includes a *yizkor* or memorial section with traditional prayers in memory of loved ones. As in the case of the anniversary of death, it is a mitzvah to light a memorial candle at home prior to sundown on eve of each of the four holidays.

Cemetery Visits

It is not customary to visit the cemetery in the month following the funeral. As the intent of this custom is to spare the bereaved the pain such a visit can cause, it should not be considered an inflexible rule. Thereafter, visitation is unrestricted, but it is not customary to visit on Shabbat or Jewish holidays. The month prior to the

high holy days is a common and appropriate season for such visits. The tradition of placing a small stone on the grave marker harkens back to the time when it was a family responsibility to maintain loved one's graves. Today, it testifies that the grave has been visited by those who remember the person buried there.

Unveiling/Dedication of the Grave Marker

Jewish tradition permits the dedication of a headstone or grave marker any time after the end of *sheloshim*. However, it is customary to wait until approximately a year after the death to hold the "unveiling" ceremony, which is so named because the cover is removed from the marker at that time. The ceremony, which is brief and without a eulogy, may take place on any day except Shabbat or a Jewish holiday and may be conducted by a rabbi, cantor or a knowledgeable lay person. It often takes about a year to adjust to a loss and to turn to the future with optimism and energy. Should you need assistance, one of the rabbis can help you choose the wording for the grave marker, which should be ordered two months or so before the date of the unveiling ceremony. On that day, the family and dear friends gather at the grave and return home afterward. The cemetery should be notified of the date and time of the unveiling to insure that the gates are open, that the tombstone or marker is in place and that another funeral or unveiling is not scheduled in the immediate vicinity of the grave at that time. The cemetery can refer you to a reputable monument company that can prepare the headstone or marker to your specifications. It is contrary to Jewish tradition to include a portrait of the deceased on the marker.

Yahrzeit

It is customary to observe the *yahrzeit* or anniversary of the death of a loved one by attending services at the synagogue and reciting *kaddish*, and by lighting a small *yahrzeit* candle at home at or near sundown on the eve of the anniversary of the day of death.

These candles can be obtained at most grocery stores. Our congregation's custom is to read the name of deceased loved ones of its members at the Shabbat services closest to the date of death on the secular calendar. If you notify the congregational office of the date of death, you will be notified each year of the Shabbat on which the name will be read. In the alternative, we can notify you according to Jewish calendar if you so request. If you cannot be present on the closest Shabbat, please let the office know and we will gladly read the name on a nearby date when you can attend.

Resources

Phone Numbers:

Congregation Beth Am - 650-493-4661

Jewish Funeral Home - Burial Society/Chevra Kedisha

Sinai Memorial Chapel

1501 Divisadero Street
San Francisco, California 94115
(415) 921-3636

Sinai Memorial Chapel

Peninsula and South Bay Branch
777 Woodside Road
Redwood City, California 94061
(650) 369-3636

Cemeteries

Hills of Eternity Memorial Park (Beth Am Section)

1301 El Camino Real
Colma
(650) 756-3633

Skylawn Memorial Park (Jewish Section)

Skyline Boulevard and Highway 92
San Mateo
(650) 349-4411

Alta Mesa Memorial Park (Non-sectarian)

695 Arastradero Road
Palo Alto
(650) 493-1041

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