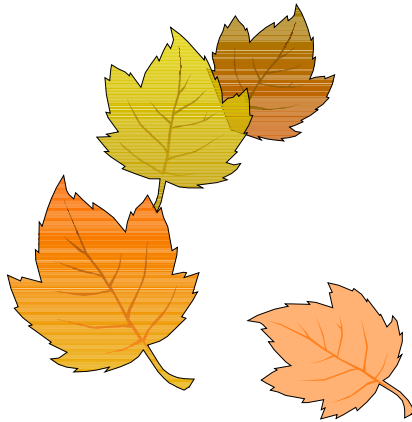


# **Treasure Each Day:**

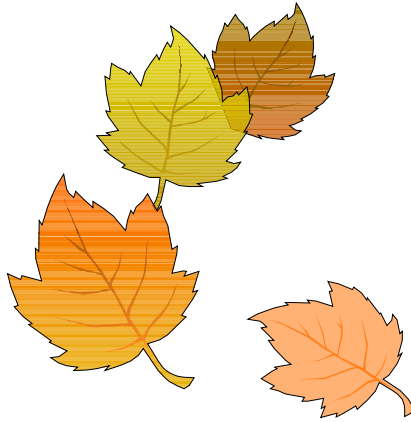
## **A Guide to Jewish Rituals of Death and Mourning**





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## **A Guide to Jewish Rituals of Death and Mourning**

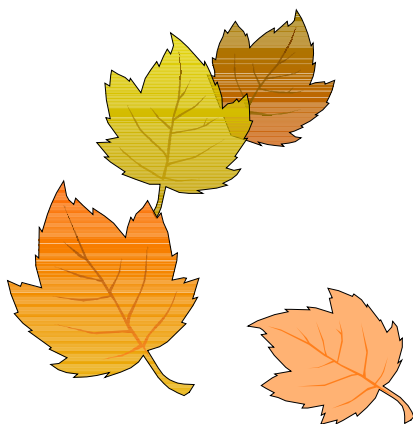


**Compiled by  
The Chevra Kadisha  
Temple Beth Israel  
Eugene, Oregon**

**2010 /5770**

***“Teach us to treasure each day...”***

— Psalm 90



This booklet was adapted from the United Jewish Appeal Leadership Cabinet Judaica Series, written by Rabbi Daniel Pressman and Rabbi Frederic Margulies. Later adapted for use by Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, California, it has been extensively rewritten and modified to reflect the local customs and community style of Temple Beth Israel and Eugene, Oregon.

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# Introduction

One characteristic that makes us human is awareness of our mortality. It would seem that death has much to teach us. It touches every one of us in a number of different ways: we all will die and most of us will be mourners. Living in community, we will all have opportunities to receive and offer help at times of loss. When we brush up against death, we are reminded to value the gift of life. Awareness of death can enrich our daily lives by binding us closer to each other and to the continuum of our ancient past and unknown future.

Judaism provides sensitive and gentle guidance for navigating the process of mourning. Its ancient rituals and customs have relevance to our lives today, enriching and expanding our experiences and our sense of connectedness. Our tradition is wise in its understanding of human emotional needs. When a death occurs, the Jewish laws of mourning are a special gift to us. They give the bereaved a process to follow that provides an embracing structure during a time of turmoil. They guide the comforters toward sensitivity and action, reminding us of our profound connection to each other. Through contact with the Jewish community, many mourners feel a deepened appreciation of Judaism. This may lead to an increased sense of wholeness in their lives.

This booklet attempts to explain Jewish customs dealing with death and mourning, and some of the underlying values expressed through them. We hope it answers questions for some, raises questions for others, and generates thought and discussion among family and friends. If you read this booklet thinking only about the death, burial, and mourning of others, you may be missing an important opportunity. We invite you to use it to explore your feelings about your own mortality and your wishes concerning the rituals following your own death.

Some important information may have been inadvertently omitted here, and for this the writers ask forgiveness. Although not comprehensive, this booklet is a starting point for educating ourselves about Jewish burial and mourning rituals, and what Temple Beth Israel has to offer the Jewish community.

Shalom,

The Chevra Kadisha



## Who is a Mourner?

Judaism defines primary mourners as those who have lost a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister or a child. Clearly we grieve for others we have loved and need to express our grief for them. The formal structure of Jewish mourning is called upon for immediate family. You may wish to follow some of these traditional customs for other losses as well.

## Making Initial Arrangements When Someone Dies

In the midst of the many feelings at a time of loss, the initial focus of the survivors by necessity is on the deceased. The first thing to do is to contact the Temple Beth Israel office or, after hours, the on-call person indicated on the TBI phone message. The *Chevra Kadisha* funeral coordinator will then contact you and help you make funeral arrangements and some important decisions. It will minimize stress at this difficult time if you have previously selected (and in some cases pre-paid) a funeral home and/or a grave site. If arrangements have not previously been made, the funeral coordinator can help you contact the mortuary and the cemetery. A time for the funeral will be set after checking with the Rabbi. In the event the Rabbi is not available, there is always a qualified lay funeral service leader available. Also contact the congregation if there has been a death in the family out of town; there are things we can do to be of assistance.

*Aninut*, the period between the moment of death and the funeral, is often the most intense period of shock and grief. During this time the primary task for the survivors is preparing the funeral. The survivor (technically, a person is not officially a mourner until after the burial) is, in effect, “pulled out” of ordinary life by the experience of death. He/she may be dazed, angry, tearful, or uncomprehending. At this moment of disruption, Jewish law wisely has the survivor excused from all other responsibilities in order to focus attention on planning the funeral, in conversation with family members and the Rabbi.

In some families there may be complex dynamics or even estrangement. Nonetheless, all the mourners have the right to be notified of the death and to participate appropriately. A death in the family can provide an opportunity to rise above the conflict and, where possible, to make peace.

For friends of the survivor, the period until the funeral



is a particularly delicate time. Friends should not completely take over the funeral arrangements; that is the task of the survivor. Friends can help in many other ways: driving or accompanying your friend as she/he makes the arrangements, taking care of children or picking up incoming family at the airport. This is a good time to begin arranging for food to be brought to the home, from now through the end of *shiva*. Your help may be needed to cancel appointments that the survivors, or the deceased, will not be keeping. Above all, you can offer your support. A silent hug or a helping gesture are worth far more than words at this time of peak stress. Don't feel obligated to come up with the one magical phrase that will make everything "all right." There are no such words, but your presence and your concern are of great value.

## First Decisions

Certain decisions will have to be made almost immediately. Visit the funeral home, select a coffin and make arrangements for a cemetery plot. An obituary may need to be written, and usually the funeral home will assist with that task. If you have written anything in advance, bring it to the funeral home along with a photograph to appear in the newspaper. Decide which type of service you want: funeral and/or graveside, or memorial service. In consultation with the Rabbi, arrange a time for the service, and make arrangements for a cemetery plot. Notify family and friends. The Temple office will send an email announcement if you wish. Some of these decisions and plans may have been made in advance, but TBI's funeral coordinator will be available to help you with decisions you have not previously made. If you need help at home with meals, child care, etc. this assistance is also available through the Temple.

## *Shmira* – Being with the Body

This is a Jewish custom that has ancient roots, and for those who strictly follow *Halacha* – Jewish Law – it is very important. *Shmira* literally means "guarding," and it involves having somebody near the *met* (the body of the deceased) until the time of burial. Traditionally, the *Shomer*, or guardian, reads from the book of Psalms or other Jewish texts.

While some of the reasons for *Shmira* have become less relevant in our time - fear of wild beasts, of thieves, of demons - there are some families and groups of friends who wish to perform this *mitzva* (sacred act) for their loved ones, or ask the *Chevra Kadisha* to coordinate this task.



With modern laws about refrigeration, funeral parlors



providing physical security for the *met* and keeping normal business hours, it has become something we can only do in a token way. A *Shomer* might sit in a room in the funeral home, but not in the refrigerated section where the *met* actually lies.

This opens up *Shmira* to the possibility of new interpretation: speaking to the soul of the *met* in one's heart, sending thoughts of love and gratitude and wishes for peace of spirit. This spiritual "guarding" practice can be done from anywhere - from one's home, while walking in nature - and can help to focus more on the person and less on the empty body left behind.

## Burial

According to Jewish law, the deceased is to be buried as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours of death. Prompt burial has psychological benefits. The funeral, the act of burial, and the first recitation of the mourner's *Kaddish*, which takes place at the grave, are of great value in beginning the mourning process.

Long delays between death and burial put strain on the mourners, leaving them in emotional limbo. Every effort should be made to expedite the burial. Delays are permitted in order to honor the dead, for example: if we must wait for a proper coffin to arrive, or for close relatives to come from out of town, or for legal reasons.

Traditionally, Jews return the body to the earth and do not embalm or cremate the dead. The body is allowed to decompose in a natural way, in tune with the insight "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). The body is understood to have been loaned to us in life, and it is to be returned to the earth in as close to its original condition as possible. Any practices which disturb, attempt to preserve, or are invasive of the body are traditionally viewed as not in accordance with *k'vod ha met*, respect for the dead. Nonetheless some Jews, for a variety of reasons, choose cremation. We have areas adjacent to and within the Jewish sections of our two cemeteries for burial of ashes. These are very personal decisions and will be treated with consideration and respect. As the *Chevre Kadisha*, it is our desire to attend to the individual wishes of each member of our community while honoring our history and traditions whenever possible. (see Addendum)

## Tahara

The *tahara*, performed by members of the *Chevre Kadisha*, is a gentle and respectful ritual honoring the



body as the miraculous vessel that housed the soul in life. Care is taken to preserve the dignity and modesty of the *met*. The essential element of the *tahara* involves reciting prayers while bathing the *met* with a continuous flow of water. This is reminiscent of the living waters of the *mikve* (ritual bath) used by traditional Jews to honor occasions of transition.

## Clothing

The tradition is to dress the dead in simple white shrouds, called *tachrichim*. This is in keeping with the Jewish belief that a funeral should be simple, without ostentation. Simple services reinforce the Jewish concept that we are all equal before God. The plain linen or cotton shroud reminds us of the garment worn by the High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple on *Yom Kippur*. Another option for some is to be buried in their *kittel*, the simple linen robe worn for one's wedding, seder, and on *Yom Kippur*. Additionally some people are buried with their own *tallit* (which is altered by the removal of one fringe).

## The Coffin

Burial traditionally takes place in an unlined wooden coffin, or *Aron*, with no metal hinges, nails, or fasteners. Simplicity is emphasized, allowing the natural effects of decomposition to permit the return from "dust to dust." Elaborate coffins are seen as undue expense and unnecessary display. In modern Israel the dead are usually wrapped only in a shroud and lowered into the ground on a bed of reeds without a casket, but in this country a casket is almost always used. As with many aspects of Jewish burial practice, the simplicity of the coffin speaks to the inherent equality of all people and to the stark reality of death.

## Viewing

Viewing is traditionally not a part of Jewish custom. However, prior to closing the coffin, private family viewing can be helpful in facing the reality of death. In some cases viewing is essential to a healthy grieving process, especially for relatives from far away who have not seen the deceased in a long time. Some people may feel that children are too young to look upon the face of death. In some cases, however, children who have a strong need for a concrete sense of closure may find viewing helpful. During the funeral ceremony, viewing the body is not harmonious with the principles of simplicity and dignity. The emphasis during the service is on memories



of the life of the deceased, not their death. To look upon the deceased is seen as disrespectful, creating an unequal relationship, as you are looking upon someone who cannot look back at you.

## Types Of Services

Generally, a funeral service is held before burial with the casket present, a graveside service takes place outside at the cemetery, and a memorial service may be held any time after burial or cremation has occurred.

## Funeral Service

The location and content of the service can vary. The funeral service can be held at the funeral home or on occasion in the synagogue. It is possible to have the funeral in a private home if that is desired. The funeral service takes place in the presence of the closed casket. The service consists at a minimum of the recitation of a Psalm, a eulogy, and the *El Maley Rachamim* prayer. The mourner's *Kaddish* is not said until the burial at the cemetery.

According to Jewish custom, flowers are symbolic of rejoicing and, therefore, are discouraged at a funeral or house of mourning. If someone who does not know this custom should send or bring them, it is important to be appreciative of the kind intention. You may keep them, donate them to a medical facility, or you may wish to ask someone not in mourning to take them.

## Graveside Service

Funerals are generally followed immediately by a graveside service. Some people choose to have the entire service at the graveside. This includes the eulogy and all of the liturgy mentioned above in the funeral section, or it may be an abbreviated service. A canopy is available in case of rain. The choice to hold a graveside service alone expresses the value Judaism places on simplicity, and it eliminates the expense of renting a space for an indoor funeral. A separate funeral service indoors, however, may be desirable for many reasons including inclement weather, a large number of people, and the need for amplified sound.

## Memorial Service

A memorial service is performed without the body present. This is done after a private burial ceremony, in cases of cremation, or if the person died or was buried in



another location. A memorial service may be held in the synagogue, at a private home, at the funeral home, or in some larger space if many people will attend. The *Chevre Kadisha* is available to help with this.

## Eulogy

The eulogy, or *hesped*, is a very important part of the funeral. “Eulogy” means “a good word.” It is not an attempt to write an entire biography of the person, but to convey some of the personality and accomplishments of the deceased. This is an honest assessment rather than a glorification. The eulogizer also tries to express the sense of loss experienced by the survivors.

The Rabbi or the lay funeral service leader, who will generally give the eulogy, will spend time with the family, even if they were well acquainted with the deceased, talking about her/him. This process is valuable not only for the writing of an appropriate eulogy, but for the mourners themselves. A grieving family often experiences some degree of healing through sharing memories of the deceased.

## Young Children at the Funeral

People often wonder if children should be present at a funeral. There is no reason, according to our tradition, for a child to be excluded. Whether a child attends is a family decision based on the child’s maturity and wishes. It is important to realize that children also have feelings of loss, as well as all the other emotions of grief. Furthermore, their inexperience may lead them to misinterpret the tensions and grief present in the house and to conclude that they are somehow at fault. It is important that an adult take time to explain what has happened, to listen to children’s feelings, and to dispel any mistaken conclusions they may have drawn.

If you deny children the opportunity to attend a funeral, it may suggest to them that their feelings don’t count. Many adults remember with anger and resentment such exclusion when they were children. Furthermore, your children can learn from you what grief is, and that death is a part of life. The reality is not easy, but it may be better in the long run than the fantasies and imaginings of an excluded child. If you are the mourner, you might want to have a close friend near you to help with your children during the funeral itself, so that you won’t be distracted from your own grieving. But do not push the children aside, or send them away during *shiva*. It is important to allow children the leeway to express their grief in



their own ways, even if those ways may contradict our own sensibilities. We can help our children by explaining what is happening and allowing them to participate if they choose.

## **Kria**

Death rends the fabric of life. The ritual of *kria*, or tearing the clothing, takes place before the funeral. This is probably the oldest mourning ritual we have, dating back to Biblical days. Some actually tear a garment; others tear a black ribbon which has been attached to the mourner's garment. The tradition is to tear on the left (close to the heart) for parents and children, and on the right for spouse and siblings. After we tear, we recite the blessing "*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu melech holam, dayan ha-emet*. Praised are You, Eternal our God, the true Judge." Alternatively, we may recite: "*Adonai natan v'Adonai lakach. Yehi shem Adonai mevorach*. God has given; God has taken. May God's name be blessed." The torn ribbon or garment is worn through the *shiva* period, and some people wear it for a full 30 days (*shloshim*).

## **Burial Service**

The first part of the burial service is the procession carrying the coffin from the hearse to the grave. At least six pallbearers are chosen for closeness to the family, or if needed, members of the graveside *minyán* can help perform this *mitzva*. The remainder of the service consists of Psalm 23, the *El Maley Rachamim* prayer, lowering the coffin into the ground, covering the coffin with earth, and the mourner's *Kaddish*. In cases where there has not been a prior funeral service, the eulogy would be delivered at the graveside.

It is a *mitzva* for each individual at the graveside to assist in covering the casket by shoveling earth into the grave. The sound of earth striking the coffin can be stark and harsh; it is a very difficult moment for some people. For many mourners this sound is often the first moment of clear realization that their loved one has died, and therefore the beginning of acceptance and healing. It is only after the burial that the bereaved formally becomes a mourner. Burying our own dead is the last act of *chesed*, of loving kindness, we can perform for the deceased. Judaism teaches us that anything we do to accompany the dead to burial is an act of *chesed*, because it is a kindness for which we can never be thanked or repaid.



## Mourner's *Kaddish*

After covering the coffin, the mourner recites the *Kaddish*. The mourner's *Kaddish* does not focus on death but speaks of the power and majesty of God. Perhaps the ancient rabbis understood that it is in the face of death that one is most likely to deny the existence of God. We recite the *Kaddish* to reaffirm our belief. We express our feelings of loss and the hope that God will fill the vacuum that has been created in the world and in our hearts. Some people believe the *Kaddish* is also said for the benefit of the soul of the deceased to help it on its journey.

After the funeral it is customary to say *Kaddish* at every service you attend during the eleven months of mourning. Traditionally, *Kaddish* is only said for immediate family, but you may say *Kaddish* for whomever you wish. Some people undertake the *mitzva* of saying *Kaddish* for a person who left no family or whose relatives are not saying *Kaddish*. Also, on occasion, the whole congregation rises for *Kaddish* to honor the memory of a leader or a person of significance to the community.

## *Shiva*

Jewish tradition offers very specific recommendations for gradual re-entry into normal life.

In the first week after the funeral, the mourners are treated with the utmost care and respect. Their needs are met by the community, both their physical needs, such as meals, babysitting, etc., and their spiritual and emotional needs.

Immediately on returning from the cemetery, mourners should be greeted with a “meal of consolation” prepared by their extended family and/or community. It is traditional to place a pitcher of water, a bowl and towels outside the door of the house for ritual hand washing that marks the transition from cemetery to home.

*Shiva* (literally, seven) is a period of up to a week during which the mourners remain at home. During this time, a service is held daily (often in the evening) at the home, so that the mourners may recite the *Kaddish*. Judaism forbids sitting *shiva* on *Shabbat* or other Jewish holidays.

The tradition is that the mourner's *Kaddish* is said in the presence of a *minyan*, to insure that mourners do not grieve in isolation but rather surrounded by members of their community. Friends, relatives, and community members drop by to visit and bring some food for the household. It is traditional to include round foods (hard boiled eggs, lentils, bagels, etc.)



which are symbolic of the wholeness of life. In some instances where there may be very few or no family members, the role of the community becomes central. People are needed to attend *minyanim*, bring meals, help with dishes and other housework, help with childcare and/or pet care. At Temple Beth Israel, this assistance is orchestrated by the funeral coordinator.

The *shiva* period gives the mourners a time to withdraw from the demands of the world and begin to integrate and accept their loss. Our tradition emphasizes focusing on memory and things of emotional significance, and relieves the mourner from engaging the external world. For this reason there are traditions that the mourner cover mirrors and need not bathe, shave, change clothes, or use makeup. The aim of these practices is to de-emphasize externals, and to keep the focus on the spiritual and emotional aspects of loss.

Through the prayer services and recitations of the mourner's *Kaddish*, and also through the conversations during the *shiva* period, family and community honor the memory of the dead person. The mourners may reminisce about their times with their loved one, perhaps bringing out old photographs and journals to share.

For the visitors, there is something of an art to paying a condolence call. What is most valuable is your presence. Focus on the mourner and be guided by his/her mood, inclination to talk or be silent, to weep or laugh. In some communities superficial and light conversation is common practice, and even assumed to be the purpose of a *shiva* call. However, it is not the role of the visitor to distract the mourners from their grief process but rather to support them in it.

As well as sitting in sympathetic silence, one can ask open-ended questions such as "how are you doing?" Your own memories, stories, and reflections about the dead person may provide a complement to those of the mourners. Obviously, if what you have to say is neither discreet nor becoming, this is not the time to share it. Sometimes one may find one's own feelings opened up in the process of paying a *shiva* call. Grief is part of the human condition, and sharing it highlights our equality in the face of death and loss. At the same time, it is important to remember that the mourner's needs are your primary focus. The support we give each other at such times benefits everyone, mourner and comforter alike.

As a mourner it is important to remember that although people are coming to visit you, you are not their host. You do not need to offer refreshments; visitors are to supply them. You do not need to engage in conversation if you prefer to be silent or alone. In short you are excused from the conventional demands of politeness and hospitality. Feel free to shape the content of the *shiva* to



support your own needs. That may include asking for the company of specific people, asking for specific prayers or readings, or specific foods.

If a funeral and/or *shiva* occurs away from Eugene, you may choose to support your own grief process by asking friends to gather with you on your return. This gathering may include prayers and songs, or just be a time for talking and listening. The gathering provides the mourners a chance to tell their story and share their grief when the community might not have known those details or the person who died. It allows the community to support the mourner and benefit from continuing to learn about the mourner, the deceased, and the mourning process itself. The funeral coordinator can help you with this.

The end of the *shiva* period initiates a new phase in the life of the mourners. One custom is to walk around the block at noon on the last day to symbolize the transition. As the mourners re-enter the world of work and community, their personal reality remains radically altered by their loss. It may take months, or even years, for them to feel fully “over” their grief, and our tradition provides further guidelines for what comes next. It is important to remember bereaved families and individuals at holiday times (which may be particularly poignant) and to phone or visit from time to time, or offer to accompany them to services now and then.

## ***Shloshim***

Some people observe a further mourning period known as *shloshim*, which means thirty, for it is thirty days long, counting from the day of the funeral. The mourner returns to work but is still not completely back in the world. This is expressed by avoiding parties, concerts and other forms of public entertainment. At the conclusion of *shloshim*, according to Orthodox practice, the formal mourning period ends, except for those mourning parents. For them, formal mourning lasts eleven months and includes the recitation of the mourner’s *Kaddish*. However, many people choose to mourn losses other than parents for a full eleven months. Psychologically and emotionally, mourning may continue for some extended time, and it is wise to recognize this and permit oneself to continue saying *Kaddish* and avoiding celebrations, crowds, and public events. The choice of how long to mourn is a personal one that will arise out of the nature of the relationship and one’s own way of handling loss.

Some people may wish to mark the end of *shloshim* with a special *minyán* at which the mourner or family members speak about the deceased. Also, if there is to be a public memorial service it is usually held at the conclusion of *shloshim*. A memorial service may be held for those





who had not wanted a formal funeral or graveside service. It may be held for those who were cremated. It may be held for those whom the larger community needs an opportunity to mourn and where the funeral service had been for family and close friends only. The memorial service may include several speakers and music or poetry that might not have been included in the funeral service.

## The First Year

During the first year, mourners are encouraged to say the mourner's *Kaddish* daily. In our community it may be difficult to find nine other adults to hold a daily service. In larger cities, congregations are able to do this with more ease. At Temple Beth Israel we encourage mourners to say *Kaddish* weekly, at *Shabbat* services, on Friday nights and Saturday mornings where a *minyan* can readily be found. Not only is saying the mourner's *Kaddish* valuable, but coming to services and taking time out of the week to reflect on the deceased and the mourning process offers a special period when the mourner knows they will have time and space to grieve.

Judaism insists that *Kaddish* be recited only with a *minyan*. Drawing the mourners into the community to worship may help them return to the rhythms of life, and to the realization that others are sustaining similar losses. Attending *shiva minyanim* during this year may be of particular value and provide opportunities to recite the *Kaddish*. If you are unable to say *Kaddish* with a *minyan*, you can create your own daily or weekly ritual as part of your first year mourning.

## Yahrzeit

The first anniversary of the death of the loved one, or *yahrzeit*, marks the official end of mourning. *Yahrzeit* means "time of year" and is the anniversary of the death on the Hebrew calendar. There are written prayers to say when lighting a *yahrzeit* candle, or you may wish simply to speak in your heart or out loud as if to the person. For example, you may thank them for the gift of their presence in your life, or forgive and release them, or wish them well, or just recall some happy time in your life together. We observe *yahrzeit* at home by lighting a candle in memory of the deceased. In the synagogue, we observe *yahrzeit* by saying the mourner's *Kaddish* at services. Each year the TBI office will send a reminder of the *yahrzeit* date to the family. In order to do this, the office needs to have on file the date of death and the name and address to



which the annual notice will be mailed. The *yahrzeit* itself is a kind of individual memorial day, a time to remember the deceased with whatever activity or observance reflects the person you are remembering. Some examples are: taking a particular hike, participating in a certain sport, gardening, cooking a special recipe, etc. Family members are invited to purchase a *yahrzeit* plaque to honor the deceased. It is usually put up in the synagogue by the first *yahrzeit*. It can be purchased at any time, and many congregants purchase a plaque years after the death of grandparents or other relatives whose *yahrzeit* no one else may be observing. Small stones are placed on the *yahrzeit* plaque for the *Shabbat* services closest to the *yahrzeit*, whether the family members are at services or not.

## **Yizkor**

*Yizkor* (memorial) services are held on the three pilgrimage festivals (the last days of *Sukkot* and *Pesach*, and on *Shavuot*) and on *Yom Kippur*. The *Yizkor* prayer recalls by name those who have died, along with others in our community and in our history who have left their mark on the world. *Yizkor* was originally instituted as a regular practice after the First Crusade in 1096, when entire communities of Jews in the Rhineland chose death over forced baptism. The surviving communities instituted a memorial to the pious martyrs on *Yom Kippur*, which was later extended to the three pilgrimage festivals. The service was eventually expanded to include memorials for individual relatives.

No matter what we believe or don't believe about the afterlife, most of us would agree with the statement: "We live on in the memory of those who survive us." *Yizkor* provides us with a wholesome framework for including personal and collective memory in our observance of major Jewish holidays.

There is a custom of giving *tzedaka* (charity) and lighting a *yahrzeit* candle not only on the anniversary of the death, but each time we recite the *Yizkor* prayers.

## **The Grave Marker**

The grave stone or monument can be selected shortly after the funeral; customarily families wait until after the eleventh month of mourning to hold the unveiling. The text on the stone often includes the full Hebrew name of the deceased, as well as the English name. The Hebrew and English dates of birth



and death may be included as well as a short Hebrew phrase. The Rabbi or a member of the *Chevrá Kadisha* can assist you with this. Our local Jewish cemeteries have their own guidelines as to size and style of markers.

## The Unveiling

The basic *mitzva* of the unveiling is visiting the grave. The unveiling is simply the first opportunity to do so after the placement of the monument. Customs differ, but usually the unveiling is held in the month before the first *yahrzeit*. The unveiling service is a relatively recent practice originating in the United States. Technically, a Rabbi need not be present, but it is helpful to have an experienced person officiate. The ceremony is very brief, usually consisting of some psalms and readings, a few words about the deceased, the removal of a covering from the monument, the *El Maley Rachamim*, and, if a *minyan* is present, the mourner's *Kaddish*. You may ask the Rabbi to assist you in putting together an appropriate service to mark the occasion. Bringing food to the cemetery is discouraged, but it is appropriate to gather elsewhere after the unveiling for talk, refreshment, and reminiscing about the deceased.

The value of having an unveiling in the eleventh month is that it marks the end of the period of formal mourning and the beginning of a new phase of life without the deceased. It reminds us that we will continue to visit the grave on *yahrzeits* and during the High Holy day season and that the memory of the person will always be with us.

## Tzedaka

There is a close connection between *tzedaka* (gifts to charity) and the various mourning customs. You may give *tzedaka* at any point in the year of mourning as a tribute to the memory of the deceased. Some people will include a suggestion in the obituary of one or more charities so that others may make memorial contributions. Let the funeral coordinator know of your *tzedaka* choices, so s/he can inform the Temple office. It is also customary at a *yahrzeit* to honor the memory of the deceased by giving *tzedaka*.

## Afterlife

This is a deep and complex topic, and one seldom discussed in American Jewish life. Many people think that Judaism does not have a belief in an afterlife. One



glance at the text of *El Maley Rachamim* reveals that Judaism does indeed affirm the survival of the soul after death:

God full of compassion, Eternal Spirit of the universe, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your *Shekhinah* (Presence) to our loved one who has entered eternity. God of Mercy, let her/him find refuge forever beneath Your wings, and let her/his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

For many decades, the rationalist bent of the modern movements made this a taboo topic. Now, in the light of new attitudes and openness about spirituality, it is certainly a valid Jewish option to believe in an afterlife. Judaism over the centuries has never codified a single vision of the afterlife, and the concept continues to evolve. Our tradition offers many rich resources for continuing the exploration of beliefs in this area.

## Some Concluding Thoughts

Below are ten guidelines for the mourner's process. The *halakha* takes into account human needs for self-acceptance, emotional expression, support from others, and time. Traditional practices are noted in parentheses below:

1. **Accept your emotions.** Realize that grieving can be an emotional roller coaster, involving shock, guilt, denial, panic, anger, and physical symptoms. (*Aninut* and the suspension of social obligations; the staged mourning periods).
2. **Express your feelings.** A feeling that is denied remains with you and can erupt at inappropriate times. Acknowledging pain is much better for long-term emotional health. Crying is a natural expression of grief for men as well as women and children (the pre-funeral eulogy discussion; *kria*; putting earth into the grave; saying the mourner's *Kaddish*; sitting *shiva*).
3. **Heal your grief in your own way and in your own time.** Ask that others give you this freedom as well (observing rituals; phased mourning periods).
4. **If you have children, bring them into the grieving process.** They should not be shielded from the awareness of death. Silence and secrecy deprive them of an important opportunity to share grief. Your children's most important source of security is you. Stay close to them, hug them, let them feel the warmth of your body (preparing for the eulogy; the funeral; *shiva*).



**5. Allow yourself flexibility.** Loss can sap one's energy and affect one's ability to function. Give yourself permission not to do unnecessary tasks.

**6. The support of other people is important.** Let your friends and family know you need support and feedback. The synagogue has volunteers ready and willing to help in many ways if you ask for them. Ask for what you need (support during the period of *aninut*; the funeral; *shiva*; help during the difficult days, weeks or months after *shiva* has ended).

**7. Help yourself and others through support groups.** People in these groups understand your fears and frustrations; they have been there, too. Again, the synagogue can refer you to an appropriate support group (the funeral; *Kaddish*; *minyan*).

**8. Counseling may be beneficial.** Seeking professional advice is not an admission of weakness but a demonstration of determination to help yourself during this critical period. This can be a very powerful and fertile time for growth. Therapy, especially with someone attuned to grief issues, can be of great value at this time.

**9. Be gentle with yourself.** Allow your community to assist you. Also be aware that you may need solitude to find yourself. Jewish rituals of mourning and your Jewish community may also help you face and survive the inevitable moments of despair.

**10. Death and grief can be profound teachers.** Loss increases our awareness of our own mortality and heightens our appreciation of the gift of life. Death ends a life, not a relationship. Sifting through memories and continued inner conversations help bring about resolution and a sense of peace. Respect for your own grief process and respect for the tradition are ways of honoring the memory of the deceased.



## A Summary of What To Do When Someone Dies

- 1) Call the office of Temple Beth Israel for assistance. The staff will get you in touch with the funeral coordinator or the Rabbi to assist you with funeral arrangements and provide all necessary information.
- 2) Call a funeral home. We will be able to help you select one.
- 3) Decide about burial or cremation. Decide which type of service you want: funeral and/or graveside, or memorial.
- 4) If you choose burial, select a casket; traditionally it is made entirely of wood. Decide about *tahara* and *tachrichim*.
- 5) The funeral home staff will help you coordinate funeral arrangements with the cemetery. Check with the Rabbi before finalizing the time for the funeral. The Temple office will notify the congregation by email if you wish.
- 6) Make arrangements for getting a death certificate. You will need several official copies. You may wish to write an obituary. The mortuary staff is experienced with these matters and can help and advise you.
- 7) If the funeral is out of town, you may still want to notify the congregation. Call the synagogue, and leave a phone number where you can be reached if you would like contact. If you want a memorial service on your return to Eugene, or a *minyan* or special gathering, the *Chevra Kadisha* can advise or assist you.

## Important Phone Numbers

Temple Beth Israel	(541) 485-7218
Musgrove Family Mortuary	(541) 686-2818
Poole-Larsen Funeral Home	(541) 484-1435
Rest Haven Memorial Park & Funeral Home	(541) 345-8521
Eugene Masonic Cemetery	(541) 684-0949



## A Glossary of Jewish Terms

**Alav ha-shalom (masculine)/aleha ha-shalom (feminine):** “May peace be upon him/her”

**Aninut:** the time between death and burial before becoming a mourner

**Aron:** coffin

**Avel:** mourner

**Baruch dayan ha-emet:** “Blessed is the true judge” Traditional exclamation of acceptance upon hearing of someone’s death

**Chesed shel emet:** “True loving kindness” Refers to the care of the deceased, since the dead can’t reciprocate (*tahara*, pallbearers, and filling in the grave)

**Chevrá Kadisha:** “Holy Society” The group that prepares the body for burial and offers support services to mourners

**El Maley Rachamim:** “God full of compassion” The memorial prayer which mentions the name of the deceased

**Hesped:** eulogy

**Kaddish (Mourner’s Kaddish):** an Aramaic prayer affirming God’s presence even in the face of loss

**Kittel:** simple white robe worn by some for their wedding, *seder*, *Yom Kippur*, and their burial

**Kria:** tearing one’s garment as a sign of mourning

**L’vaya:** funeral (literally: accompanying)

**Matzeva:** gravestone, monument, or marker

**Met:** the body

**Mikve:** ritual bath

**Minyan:** the quorum of ten adult Jews required for saying certain prayers; eg: *Kaddish*

**Mitzva:** “commandment,” an act which fulfills a divine commandment; a righteous deed

**Onen:** a person in a state of *aninut*

**Pikuach nefesh:** “to save a life.” The condition under which certain Jewish laws are set aside when life is at stake

**Seudat havra’a:** the meal of comfort prepared by friends for the mourners returning from the funeral



**Shiva:** the period of mourning at home, traditionally for seven days

**Shloshim:** the thirty day period of mourning (includes *shiva*) after the funeral

**Shmira:** ritual of guarding the body from the *tahara* to the burial

**Shomer:** the guardian of the body, performing *shmira*, before burial

**Tachrichim:** shrouds.

**Tahara:** the ritual washing and dressing of the body

**Tallit:** traditional fringed prayer shawl

**Tzedaka:** literally righteousness, understood as giving to charity

**Yahrzeit:** the anniversary of a person's death on the Hebrew calendar

**Yizkor:** the memorial service in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur*, and the last days of *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*

**Zichrono l'vracha (masculine)/zichrona l'vracha (feminine):** "May his/her memory be for a blessing"

## Liturgy

### *El Maley Rachamim*

*El maley rachamim, shochen bam'romim, ham'tzey menuchah  
n'chonah, tachat canfey ha shechinah, b'ma'alot kedoshim u'tehorim  
k'zohar harakiyah mazhirim et nishmat \_\_\_\_\_ ben/bat \_\_\_\_\_  
shehalach l'olamo (shehalchah l'olamah).*

*Ana ba'al harachamim hastireyhu (hastireha) b'seyter c'nafeycha  
l'olamim u'tzror b'tzror ha chayim et nishmato (nishmata).*

*Adonai hu nach'lato (nach'lata), v'yanuach (v'tanuach) b'shalom al  
mishkavo (mishkava).*

*V'nomar: Amen.*

God filled with mercy, dwelling in the heavens' heights,  
bring proper rest beneath the wings of your *Shechinah*,  
amid the ranks of the holy and the pure,  
illuminating like the brilliance of the sky the soul of \_\_\_\_\_  
who has gone to his/her eternal rest.

May you who are the source of mercy

shelter him/her eternally, and bind his/her soul among  
the living,  
that he/she may rest in peace.  
And let us say: Amen





## **Mourner's Kaddish**

*Yitgadal veyitkadash shemey raba be'alma divra chirutey veyamlich malchutey bechayeychon uvyomeychon uvchayey dechol beyt yisrael ba'agala uvizman kariv ve'imru amen.*

*Yehey shemey raba mevarach le'alam ulalmey almaya.*

*Yitbarach veyishtabach veyitpa'ar veyitromam veyitnasey veyit-hadar veyitaleh veyit-halal shemey dekudsha berich hu. Le'ela min kol birchata veshirata tushbechata venechemata da'amiran be'alma ve'imru amen.*

*Yehey shelama raba min shemaya vachayim aleynu ve'al kol yisra'el ve'imru amen.*

*Oseh shalom bimromav hu ya'aseh shalom aleynu ve'al kol yisrael ve'al kol yoshvey tevel ve'imru amen.*

Let God's name be made great and holy in the world that was created as God willed. May God complete the holy realm in your own lifetime, in your days, and in the days of all the house of Israel, quickly and soon. And say: Amen.

May God's great name be blessed, forever and as long as worlds endure.

May it be blessed, and praised, and glorified, and held in honor, viewed with awe, embellished, and revered; and may the blessed name of holiness be hailed, though it be higher than all the blessings, songs, praises, and consolations that we utter in this world. and say: Amen.

May Heaven grant a universal peace, and life for us, and for all Israel. And say: Amen.

May the one who creates harmony above, make peace for us and for all Israel, and for all who dwell on earth. And say: Amen.



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## Addendum

There are several other subjects that we believe each congregant should be thinking about in advance of her/his death. Although these issues are not specifically Jewish, they affect us all, and so we include them.

### **The values we are dealing with basically reflect:**

- 1) How I want to be treated before death, and how I want to treat others as they move towards death;
- 2) How I want my body treated once I die, and how I want my death observed;
- 3) What I want done with my property, my donations and bequests, and what values I want to pass on to others.

**Will:** We encourage everyone who has not yet done so to prepare a will. It is crucial to have a well written, notarized will that establishes how worldly goods, etc. are to be dispersed. The will should be revised regularly. An effective will eliminates tremendous work and strain for the survivors, and becomes a great gift to them.

### **Living Will - Medical Power of Attorney and Directive to**

**Physicians:** In this day of modern medicine, it is imperative that each individual have a medical power of attorney and an advance medical directive regarding how they would want to be treated in various medical circumstances. Without these documents, the physicians or hospital can make decisions about a treatment that may contradict the patient's or the family's wishes. What level of intervention might you want regarding life-sustaining medical procedures? Do you want to be resuscitated? If you become mentally incompetent, who is it you want to make medical decisions for you? Again, these directives can be changed over time, but they should be in writing now.

**Burial and Cremation:** We believe the decision to be buried or cremated is an individual one. Both may be seen as acceptable, and each person needs to come to a conclusion that is right for them. Burial has been mandated in the past because of the traditional belief that human beings are created in the image of God. In that framework, our bodies are seen as borrowed from God for our lifetime and therefore sacred. Consequently, according to our tradition, the body of the deceased person may not be desecrated in any way. Additionally there is the concept of resurrection, and the concern that the body be cared for so that it can be resurrected. To that way of thinking, cremation disturbs this process, and traditional authorities do not permit it.



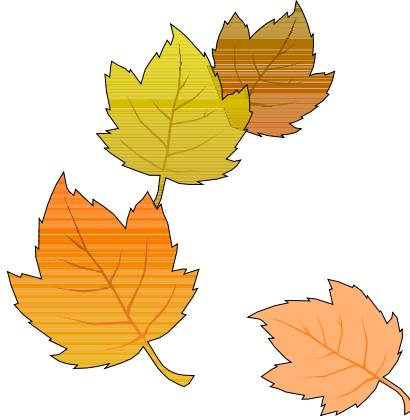
However, respecting the sanctity of the body can be expressed in many ways. Some people believe that cremation is as holy and respectful a way to treat the body as burial. For people who do not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead, and even for some who do, cremation is seen as no more disruptive than burial. Furthermore, in recent years a small number of Jews have chosen cremation in order to honor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

**Autopsy and Organ Donation:** Tradition has prohibited the desecration of the body of the deceased. However, autopsy and organ donation are permissible, and may even be mandatory, in order to save a life (*pikuach nefesh*). Autopsies to investigate genetic causes of death or the effects of experimental treatments are permissible because they assist family members or those suffering from the same illness. Organ donations are also considered to fall within the concept of *pikuach nefesh*. In cases where advanced consent of the deceased has not been obtained, the next of kin must choose whether to permit organ donation and/or autopsy.

**Ethical Will:** An ethical will is an opportunity for communication of your values to loved ones. It may be written to children, spouse, family members, and/or friends. You can reflect on what you have achieved and learned in your life, and the values you cherish and live by that you wish to transmit to your survivors. Essentially, it is a commentary on your ethics and a message of your hopes and dreams for your family and friends in the future. You can address specific individuals, encouraging them to develop in ways you think important. You can encourage your survivors in their paths, vocations, goals, social endeavors, etc. The intention of an ethical will is to be loving rather than critical or controlling. It may contain instructions on how you would like to be remembered, including specific instructions for your funeral, burial, eulogy, *shiva*, *tzedaka*, etc.

As with a legal will, the ethical will needs to be revised from time to time. It encapsulates what you believe now, and what you want survivors to remember, cherish, and embrace. As your values change over time and as you come to see people differently, the ethical will can be rewritten. It can either be filed with other important papers until after your death, or shared with loved ones at any time you choose.





Reading this booklet may bring up concerns and questions for you. Feel free to contact the Rabbi, the TBI office, or the *Chevra Kadisha* (listed in the committee section of the TBI Directory) for further discussion.

May you be blessed that your life is filled with *simcha* (joy) and may the inevitable times of grief serve to heighten *simcha* in its season.

# Notes





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