

Sorrow and grief are the price we pay for love and devotion. These reactions are both normal and healthy. When a loved one dies, the world often seems dark and the mourner frequently feels alone. Over the years, Judaism has amassed a wealth of life-affirming traditions that can help guide us as we confront the loss of a loved one.

Jewish religious rituals and practices surrounding death and mourning help individuals accept the reality of death, express rather than repress their grief, talk about their loss with friends, and move step by step from bereavement back to life. The first stage of Jewish mourning is *aninut*, during which the mourners make decisions and preparations for the funeral and *shiva*.

This pamphlet outlines for *aninut*, the funeral, and *shiva* embraced by Temple Beth Shalom. We pray that it helps guide you through these difficult decisions at this time of loss.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר
אבלי ציון וירושלים

*ha-Makom y'naḥem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar
aveilei tziyon virushalayim*

“May God comfort you among all the
mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

“To everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2



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A Time to Mourn

*A guide to rituals and
practices of Jewish
mourning*



“Adonai heals the broken-hearted
and binds up their wounds.”

Psalm 147

Preparations

Timing

Jewish funerals are traditionally held as soon after the death as possible, as it is considered a dishonor to leave the dead unburied.

Casket

Jewish tradition commands modesty and simplicity in funerals and burials, based on the wisdom of the Talmud's Rabban Gamliel who taught that in death as in life, all people, rich and poor, are equal before God. In accordance with this ethical principal, simple wooden caskets are used.

The Deceased

In accord with the statement in the Torah "from dust you are and to dust you shall return," cremation is not permitted in Judaism. However, the tradition places utmost value on saving a life, thus it is considered an honor to the deceased for organs to be donated to save a life. Judaism discourages embalming and autopsy. If these issues arise, please contact a rabbi for guidance.

Sh'mira

We encourage the practice of *sh'mira*. A *shomer* (guardian) should remain with the body at all times before the burial. This ensures that proper *kvod* (respect) is given to the deceased, who is not to be left alone.

Taharah and Takhrihim

Just as a baby is washed upon entering the world, the deceased is also ritually cleansed. *Taharah*, ritual washing, is performed before the body is dressed in *takhrihim*, a white shroud.

All Jews are buried in the same simple garment to show that we are all equal before God. It is also customary for a person to be buried in the *tallit* worn during his/her life with one of the fringes cut, signifying that it will not longer be used ritually.

Viewing the Body

Jewish tradition discourages viewing the body of the deceased, as we should try to remember our loved ones as they were in life.

Flowers

Traditionally, flowers are not part of a Jewish funeral or rituals of mourning. In lieu of flowers, we encourage you to give *tzedakah* to Temple Beth Shalom or a charity of your choice in memory of your loved one.

At the Cemetery

K'riah

K'riah is the tearing of a garment that serves as a visible sign of grief. The torn garment is worn throughout *shiva* (the first week of mourning) and may be worn throughout *sh'loshim*, the first thirty days after the funeral. It is not worn on *Shabbat*.

Burial

It is traditional for the community to help in the burial process. This is a true act of *hesed*, of loving-kindness, since the deceased can never repay the community members for their assistance in his or her burial. Participation in this ritual also provides a psychological benefit to the mourners, providing a sense of finality and closure, making denial less likely.

Shiva

The first stage of mourning is a week of intense mourning called *shiva*. The practices performed in a *shiva* house are designed to help us reflect on the life of our loved one and to express mourning in a Jewish way. Mourners should make arrangements to stay home from work during this period. Today, some families choose not to sit *shiva* for the full seven days. However, many bereavement experts have recognized the value of the full seven day period as a time for loved ones to address their grief. Temple Beth Shalom encourages your family to sit *shiva* for the full week.

Saying Kaddish

One of the most comforting and beautiful traditions is the daily recitation of the mourner's *kaddish*. In addition to being required by Jewish tradition, the regular recitation of *kaddish* in the synagogue is a meaningful religious experience in which one demonstrates respect for the memory of a loved one by affirming solidarity with the congregation and with the Jewish people past, present and future. It encourages mourners to be part of a community, helping them avoid isolation and loneliness.



Please contact Temple Beth Shalom at (845) 628-6133 with any questions or concerns. It is our hope that this pamphlet will help guide you through your difficult time.