

**Jewish Practices and Rituals
for Death and Mourning:
A Guide**

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Mourning can be a strange and foreign land. It helps to have a map. The best map available is the one provided by the rituals of Jewish mourning.

Indeed, mourning is a dance. It is the dance that has been choreographed over the millennia by everyone who has passed through the mourner's path. By making loss and bereavement visible, we can fulfill the psalmist's promise: to turn mourning into dancing.

—

from “Reclaiming the Mourner’s Path” by Anne Brener

A NOTE ABOUT THIS GUIDE

We have compiled this guide with the *kavana*, or holy intention, of helping members of our community with the process of death and mourning. We hope it can help individuals consider how they wish to approach this aspect of their own lives and how they would like to honor loved ones when they die.

Several aspects of Tikkun v'Or's communal life influence the tone and nature of this guide. First, we tried to honor the idea that spirituality and practicality are not separate, but rather are equally holy. Second, ours is a multicultural community and many of our households are comprised of people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Third, we recognize that there are traditional practices as well as modern practices, both of which may be helpful as we experience death and bereavement. As progressive Jews we recognize the wisdom of our traditions. We are guided by their spirit, but we do not feel bound by them when our own situation calls for something different.

This guide was developed following an adult education class offered by Rabbi Brian Walt at Congregation Tikkun v'Or in 2012-13. We want to thank Rabbi Brian for his teaching, guidance and support for this project.

Much in these guides is not original. We have borrowed liberally from the following: Saying Kaddish by Anita Diamant, "End of Life Passages: Resources and Traditions for our Loved Ones and Ourselves" created by the Kehillah Community Synagogue in Berkeley, California, "The Jewish Path for Death and Mourning" edited by Temple Solel, Cardiff by the Sea, California, and "Treasure Each Day: A Guide to Jewish Rituals of Death And Mourning" edited by The Chevra Kadisha of the Columbia Jewish Congregation Howard County, Maryland, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

Death has much to teach us. It touches every one of us in a number of different ways: We all will die and we all will be mourners. Living in a community, we will all have opportunities to receive and offer help at times of loss. When we are touched by 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 dying and 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 end of life nears and a death occurs, the Jewish customs 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.

END OF LIFE

The group of congregants who put this guide together all took a class that included reading Saying Kaddish by Anita Diamant. Her words about care for the dying were particularly meaningful to us so we have included them liberally in this section.

Visiting the Terminally Ill

Excerpts From Saying Kaddish (pages 33-36) by Anita Diamant:

To sit at the bedside of a loved one who is dying is to know profound powerlessness. And yet, even after there is nothing left to “do for” him, there is still the opportunity and the responsibility to “be with” him ... *Bikkur Cholim*, visiting the sick, is a mitzvah—a sacred responsibility—incumbent upon all Jews. It is not just a matter of sitting or standing in the room of a sick or dying person, but of being attentive to the whole person and not just the symptoms ... In the end, being present is both the only thing and the greatest thing we have to give one another ...

Jewish law is adamant about treating the dying person with the respect due any living person. A person who is close to death is to be provided every comfort available ... An ethical boundary is constructed around people in their last days to keep them from being treated only as a patient, or even worse, corpses-in-waiting ... It is forbidden to start mourning until after the moment of death ... Standing at the bedside and talking about the person in the bed as though they were not present—even if she is in a deep coma—shows terrible disrespect.

Although you may not be able to do what you may wish (make your loved one better, buy more time, change the course of the illness) there are many things you can do.

From End of Life Passages, Kehila Community Synagogue:

Often words are not so important as our presence. A smile, a touch or a peaceful silence can all be healing for our loved one. It is not uncommon for the dying person to have difficulty expressing her or his feelings. Our presence can act as encouragement for sharing.

Yet it is important to be respectful of the dying person, and not force unwanted conversation. Let the dying person initiate either silence or conversation. This gives her or him the chance to work through feelings in her or his own way. It can also sometimes be a gift to share our own feelings, fears or concerns, as long as we take our cues from the dying person and are sensitive to her or his wishes.

When a person is very near death, he or she may be unable to speak but still able to hear. At this moment it may be helpful to tell the dying person you are there, or to tell her or him how much you love her/him and if appropriate, that it is all right to let go.

When we are with a loved one who is dying, it is invaluable to remember that we will also be on the threshold between life and death one day. When we are with our loved one in the moment of his or her dying, we can honor the courage it takes for all of us to say good-bye, and open our hearts to the mysteries of life and death.

Excerpts From Saying Kaddish:

Some caregivers refuse to leave the bedside for fear that death will come while they are gone. But dying people, wishing to protect the people they love, may find it difficult to let go while others are in the room. If you have said everything that needed to be said, if you have been present and attentive, there is no need for self recrimination. Your love does not vanish when you leave the room. Some people only die when they their family members leave the room, while others may wish you to stay by their side.

Offering Prayers

The offering of prayers for the sick is a mitzvah. The traditional prayer for healing is the *Mi Shebeyrach* which can be said at the bedside of a person who is sick and is said at Shabbat services. We invite you to share the name(s) of your loved one(s) who are in need of healing so that the *Mi Sheberach* can be said on their behalf.

End-Of-Life Decisions

Excerpts From Saying Kaddish (page 38) by Anita Diamant:

While it is forbidden to “hasten death,” Jewish authorities throughout the centuries have agreed that it is permissible to remove “impediments” that prolong dying. Of course the line between hastening death and removing impediments is not always clear-cut ...One may wish to offer guidance to one’s family in these matters by completing a so-called “living will”... But even with medical proxies and living wills, end of life decisions can be agonizing .. Choices around “removing impediments” are best made in consultation with other family members, nurses and doctors, hospice staff and clergy.

When Death is Imminent: Viddui (Confession)

A long-standing practice of Judaism is for the critically ill to recite a confessional prayer called *Viddui*, which concludes with the recitation of the *Shema*. Reciting the *Viddui* we “acknowledge our imperfections and seek a final reconciliation with God.” If a dying person cannot say the prayer, others may recite it for the person. At the end of this document we have included 3 versions of this prayer from Saying Kaddish by Anita Diamant.

When Death Occurs

Excerpts From Saying Kaddish (page 48) by Anita Diamant:

The boundary between life and death is an awesome place. From one minute to the next, the spirit or soul is gone. When there was once energy and consciousness, only a body remains. The room feels entirely different. What is to be done?

Some people simply ask forgiveness from the deceased and sit in silence. For many words are nearly meaningless at the moment of death.

Some may do *Kriyah*/tearing something they are wearing to express their grief. Today *kriyah*/tearing is often done at the funeral as explained later in this guide and the custom is to tear a black ribbon. Originally the tearing was a spontaneous and emotionally intense tearing of one’s clothes soon after the death. This custom originates in the Bible.

There are many other customs dating back to biblical times. The eyes are closed and limbs straightened. Some open a window, light a candle, cover the mirrors, empty any standing water. Over the centuries customs rooted in superstition became metaphors for letting go. The open window brings in fresh air. The candle recalls the light that was extinguished by death. Pouring water symbolizes the tears to follow.

A Note about Unexpected Death

Excerpt From Saying Kaddish (page 49) by Anita Diamant:

People who lose a loved one by violence, accident, or sudden illness are doubly bereaved. A fatal heart attack, a still birth, a car accident, means there is no time to make peace or say good bye or promise to remember. When a child or young person dies, it feels like life itself has been violated. The Jewish path through mourning does not attempt to make sense of such losses, nor does it attempt to make the pain go away. It is only a lifeline, a way to get through.

JEWISH STAGES OF MOURNING

Mourning is a process that takes time, and Jewish traditions and rituals offer a framework that helps us move through periods of grief and loss. Below are the Hebrew names, and the English translations, of the mourning periods and in the full cycle.

Aninut: The period between the moment of death and the funeral

Shiva: The seven days of mourning that begin the day of the funeral

Sheloshim: The 30 day period following the funeral

Shana: The 11 months following *sheloshim*

FROM DEATH TO THE FUNERAL

Judaism teaches that our body and soul were created in the image of God. Thus, treating the body in a respectful manner is of utmost importance. The rituals and customs can be grouped into two categories of *Mitzvot*, sacred responsibilities: *kavod ha met* (the dignity of the deceased) and *nichum aveylim*, (comforting the mourners). Each represents a basic value for guiding us through this time. Observances associated with the care of the body, preparation for burial, and the funeral and interment services all reflect a concern for the dignity of the deceased. All observances that guide individuals through the period of mourning and define the responsibility of the family and the community to those in mourning reflect the value of *nichum aveylim*, comforting the mourners, our sacred responsibility to take care of the living, of one another.

Jewish tradition emphasizes the need for speedy burial, usually within two days after death. This is not always possible. The funeral should be held as soon as it is reasonably possible for the family to gather. Traditionally Jewish funeral services are not held on *Shabbat*, High Holy Days, or the first and last days of Sukkot, Pesach or Shavuot.

Judaism teaches that every human being has dignity and worth; everyone thus deserves a proper burial. Judaism also teaches that every human being is equal. Rich and poor are to be buried alike. This equality is reflected in the funeral service, coffin, and the manner of burial.

Aninut: The period between the moment of death and the funeral

Excerpts From [Saying Kaddish](#) (page 50) by Anita Diamant:

Mourners enter a kind of no-man's land of grief. Jewish tradition provides a name for this place - *aninut*. Those who inhabit this dark and raw state of mourning are called *onenim*, whose only responsibility is *kevod ha-met*, showing honor to the dead. *Aninut* constructs an especially strong protective fence around *onenim* who are exempt from all regular activity.

This is often the most intense period of shock and grief. During this time the primary task for the survivors is preparing the funeral. The bereaved should be relieved of the responsibilities of daily living as much as possible.

Shemira: Being with the Body

We show regard for the deceased by respectful treatment of the body. This begins at the moment of death. Jewish tradition is that the body should not be left alone between death and the burial. This expresses the idea of accompanying our loved one from the moment of death through burial. The Hebrew word for a Jewish funeral is *levaya* which means accompaniment. Traditionally, a *Chevra Kadisha* observes this custom by having a *shomer*, or guardian, stay with the deceased at all times. Usually the *shomer* sits with the body and reads from the Book of Job, psalms or contemporary writings on spirituality or the subject of death.

Tahara: Preparation of the Body for Burial

The *tahara*, performed by members of a *Chevra Kadisha*, is a gentle and respectful ritual honoring the body as the miraculous vessel that housed the soul in life. *Tahara* means purification. It is a *chesed shel emet* – an eternal act of kindness, one that cannot be repaid. Care is taken to preserve the dignity and modesty of the *met* (body of the deceased). In addition to washing the body, the *tahara* involves reciting prayers while pouring water in a continuous flow. This is reminiscent of the living waters of the *mikvah* (ritual bath) used by Jews to sanctify and mark significant moments of transition.

Dressing the Body

For centuries, Jews were traditionally buried in white linen burial shrouds. This tradition is in keeping with the Jewish belief that a funeral should be simple, without display of wealth. Simplicity reinforces the Jewish concept that we are all equal before God. Dressing a deceased loved one in street clothes is now practiced by many non-Orthodox Jews. If you make this choice, you will need to provide the funeral home with your choice of garments. It is also traditional to be buried with your tallit (which is altered by the removal of one fringe). Traditionally Jews are buried without any metal or jewelry.

The Coffin

Many of us have experienced funerals in which Jews were buried in elaborate coffins. However, traditional burial 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 ostentation. As with many aspects of Jewish burial practice, the simplicity of the coffin speaks to the inherent equality and the stark reality of death. Local funeral homes have traditional Jewish caskets.

A Note about Embalming and Cremation

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 viewed as if loaned to us in life and is to be returned to the earth in as close to its original condition as possible. Any practices that disturb, attempt to preserve, or are invasive of the body are traditionally

viewed as not in accordance with *k'vod hamet*, respect for the dead. Nonetheless, some Jews, for a variety of reasons do choose cremation. These are very personal decisions and should be treated with consideration and respect. At Congregation Tikkun v'Or, it is our desire to attend to the individual wishes of each member of our community while honoring our history and traditions whenever possible.

Viewing

Viewing (the public display of the body) is traditionally not a part of Jewish custom. However, prior to closing the coffin, some family members may want to see the body to help in facing the reality of death. In some cases this may be 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 this viewing helpful.

Pall Bearers

It is considered a *mitzvah* to serve as a casket bearer. Traditionally members of the family or close friends generally perform this *mitzvah*. Traditional Judaism does not allow women to be casket bearers. Reform Judaism has no such prohibition regarding women or those who are not Jewish being pall bearers.

The Community and Its Response: *Nichum Aveylim*/Comforting the Mourners

To allow the family private time, it is appropriate for friends and acquaintances to refrain from visiting the home until after the burial. Close friends, however, may be involved in assisting with the funeral arrangements.

Preparing for a funeral is a great deal of work logistically and emotionally for the primary mourners. Negotiating all you have to do and allowing yourself to be with your own grief is strenuous. Hearing from friends can be a great support, yet responding to friends can feel like extra pressure. Allow yourself to have your answering machine take messages without responding. Each mourner has to find the right balance between connecting with friends and staying in one's own process.

Friends want to show they care about you and offer comfort and support, yet they do not want to intrude. Even if you are the kind of person who prefers to take care of things on your own, strongly consider letting your friends and community help. It is a *mitzvah*, a holy act, to assist mourners with practical tasks such as running errands. Friends can help in many ways: driving or accompanying you as you make the arrangements, taking care of children or picking up incoming family at the airport. They can begin arranging for food to be brought to the home, from now through the end of shiva. Help may be needed to cancel appointments. Above all, the presence of a friend can offer support. A silent hug or a helping gesture is worth far more than words at this time of peak stress. Friends cannot come up with the one magical phrase that will make everything "all right" but their presence and concern can be of great value.

FUNERAL SERVICE

The funeral service takes place in the presence of the closed casket. The service usually includes the recitation of Psalms, a eulogy, and the El Maley Rachamim prayer. Traditionally the Mourner's Kaddish is not said until the service at the cemetery, but it is sometimes said at this time as well as at the cemetery.

K'riah: Tearing the Clothing

Death rends the fabric of life. The ritual of *k'riah*, or tearing the clothing, enacts the feeling that death has torn one's world apart, broken one's heart. This is probably the oldest mourning ritual we have, dating back to Biblical days.

K'riah is sometimes done right after the death of a loved one, but more often it takes place immediately before the funeral. Some actually tear a garment; others wear a torn black ribbon, attached to the mourner's garment. The tradition is to wear the ribbon on the left (close to the heart) for parents and on the right for all others. After we tear the ribbon, we recite the blessing: "Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ho-olam, dayan ha-emet. Praised are You Holy One, Your presence fills creation, you are indeed the Judge." The torn ribbon or garment is traditionally worn through the *shiva* period, though sometimes people chose to wear it for a full 30 days (*sheloshim*). Some rabbis invite families to say the shema as an acknowledgement that death and life are both part of greater unity.

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. There is an emphasis on a person's virtues. The eulogizer also tries to express the sense of loss experienced by the survivors.

The Rabbi, Cantor, or the facilitator will generally give the eulogy. This person 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 also for the mourners themselves. Grieving families often experience some degree of healing through sharing memories of the deceased. This sharing can be valuable, bonding, warm, and enjoyable for the family. Friends and family can also be asked to offer a eulogy. Sometimes people are spontaneously asked by family members to share their memories.

Graveside Service

Funerals are generally followed immediately by a graveside service. Some families choose to have the entire service at the graveside. This may include the eulogy and the entire liturgy mentioned above in the funeral section, or it may be an abbreviated service. A canopy and chairs may be arranged. For some the choice to hold a graveside service alone expresses the value Judaism places on simplicity.

Tzedakah Rather than Flowers

Flowers are symbolic of rejoicing and, therefore, are not traditional at a funeral or house of mourning. Traditionally Jews express sympathy by doing mitzvot, good deeds, for the living. There is a close connection between *tzedakah* (giving to charity) and the various mourning customs. People may give *tzedakah* at any point in the year of mourning in memory of the deceased. Some people will include in the obituary a suggestion of one or more charities.

A Note about Young Children at the Funeral

People often wonder if children should be present at a funeral or burial. 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.

BURIAL

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 in advance, or if needed, others at the graveside can help perform this *mitzvah*.

The remainder of the service consists of Psalm 23, the *El Malei 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 mitzvah 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 for some the beginning of acceptance and healing. Diamant notes "According to one custom, mourners use the back of the shovel at first, to demonstrate reluctance. In some communities, each mourner replaces the shovel back in the earth rather than hand it from one person to the next--a practice probably born of the idea that death is somehow contagious. However, others find it comforting to give the spade to the next person, acknowledging the shared nature of the task."

It is only after the burial that the bereaved formally becomes a mourner. Burying our own

dead is an act of *chesed*, of loving-kindness, we can perform for the deceased. Judaism teaches us that anything we do to accompany the dead to his or her burial is an act of *chesed*, because it is the one thing we do for another person for which we can never be thanked or repaid.

Mourner's Kaddish

The Mourner's Kaddish does not deal directly with death but speaks of the great mystery of life and of the power and majesty 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 facilitate its journey.

A Note about God

For those who do not define their belief as a belief in God, it may be helpful to frame the Mourner's Kaddish as an expression of what Rabbi David J. Cooper calls "feelings of awe generated by the contemplation of the infinite and of the infinitesimal, feelings generated in contemplation of the infinite and of the interaction with the cosmos, with people, with art, and with history which is yet ours to make or to end."

For some, a non-traditional Kaddish (a sample is included in the resource section) may more closely express their own beliefs.

Leaving the Cemetery

After the burial, upon leaving the grave, it is traditional for those in attendance who are not mourners to form a double line facing each other, forming a pathway through which the mourners pass to receive words of comfort. Traditionally Jews do not offer words of consolation to mourners until after the burial, so this provides the first opportunity to express the traditional words of comfort, "*May you be comforted among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.*" Any kind words of sympathy may be said to the mourners as they pass through the double line. There is an expression in Hebrew that translates as, "*Words from the heart go directly to the heart*" and any kind expression that is honest and meaningful is, more than likely, appropriate at this time.

SHIVA

The return from the cemetery begins the traditional seven-day period of formalized mourning by the immediate family of the deceased. This period called *shiva*, from the Hebrew word meaning "seven," is a public expression of grief. *Shiva* is the first stage of mourning. Through it, those in mourning initiate a process that ultimately leads them back to life and the world of the living. This is also the time when the community of friends and extended family can offer sympathy and support. Visits from friends and family, and memories of the deceased, occupy the mourners at this time.

Jewish tradition offers very specific recommendations for gradual reentry 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. Traditionally a candle is lit that burns for the seven days of shiva.

Who is a Mourner

Traditionally primary mourners are those who have lost a parent, a spouse, significant other, a sibling, or a child. Clearly we grieve for others we have loved and need to express our grief for them. You may wish to follow some of these traditional customs for other losses as well, such as a grandparent, an in-law or a close friend.

Immediately Following the Funeral

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 a ritual hand washing. It is a custom for Jews to wash our hands after leaving a cemetery.

Shiva Services

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. Mourners are encouraged to join the congregation on Shabbat to say Kaddish. The tradition is that the Mourner’s Kaddish is said in the presence of a minyan, to ensure that mourners do not grieve in isolation but rather are surrounded by members of their community. Friends, relatives, and community members visit and bring some food for the household. It is traditional to include round foods (hard-boiled eggs, lentils, bagels, etc.) that are symbolic of the wholeness of life.

Visitors during Shiva

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 many 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 seek to distract the mourners from their grief process but rather to support them in it. Nor is it the role of the visitor to force the mourner to mourn if they are not so inclined.

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.

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

Household and Personal Care Traditions

The shiva period gives the mourners a time to withdraw from the busyness 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 focusing on 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.

The End of Shiva

The end of the shiva period initiates a new phase in the life of the mourners. One custom is to walk around the block on the last day to symbolize the transition. Halfway round the block, the mourners may stop and say to the deceased, “Go in peace, go in peace.” Then they return home. This custom is called *bagleitin di neshome*, in Yiddish – accompanying the soul of the deceased.

When Shiva is Over

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 fully experience their grief, and our tradition provides further guidelines for what comes next.

Remaining in contact after *shiva* ends lets mourners know friends are there for them. Too often after the initial mourning period, support disappears when people need it the most. 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.

THE FIRST YEAR

Sheloshim

Following Shiva we observe a further mourning period known as *sheloshim*, which means thirty, for thirty days, counting from the day of the funeral. The mourner returns to work but is still not completely back in the world. Traditionally this is expressed by avoiding parties, concerts and other forms of public entertainment. At the conclusion of sheloshim, the formal mourning period ends, except for those who are mourning parents. For them, formal mourning, including the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, lasts eleven months. However, many people choose to mourn losses other than parents for a full eleven months. Psychologically and emotionally, such mourning may continue for some extended time, and it is wise to recognize this. 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 *sheloshim* with a special minyan 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 *sheloshim*. The memorial service may include several speakers and music or poetry that might not have been included in the funeral service.

Shana: The 11 months following *Sheloshim*

During the first year some mourners may wish to say the mourner's Kaddish daily. Mourners are welcomed and recognized at Shabbat services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings where Kaddish is recited. Not only is saying the Mourner's Kaddish valuable, but coming to Shabbat services and taking time out of the week to reflect on the deceased offers a special period when the mourner knows they will have time and space to reflect. Drawing the mourners into the community to worship may help them return to life, and to the realization that others are sustaining similar losses.

Mourner's Kaddish

After the funeral it is customary to say Kaddish at every service you attend during mourning. Traditionally, Kaddish is only said for immediate family, but you may say Kaddish for whomever you wish. Some people undertake the mitzvah of saying Kaddish for a person who left no family.

The Grave Marker

The gravestone or monument (*matzevah*) can be selected shortly after the funeral, though Jews traditionally wait until after the eleventh month of mourning to hold the unveiling. Traditionally the text on the stone includes the English name and dates of birth and death. Some may wish to include the Hebrew name and the Hebrew dates of birth and death as well as a short Hebrew phrase or Jewish symbol. The Rabbi can help you decide on the text.

The Unveiling

The basic mitzvah 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 the unveiling is held after sheloshim and usually in the month before the first *yahrzeit*. The unveiling service is a relatively recent practice originating in the United States. A Rabbi or Cantor need not be present, but it is helpful to have an experienced person officiate. The ceremony is very brief, usually including some psalms and readings, a few words about the deceased, the removal of a covering from the monument, the *El Maley Rachamim*, and the Mourner's Kaddish. You may ask the Rabbi to assist you in putting together an appropriate service to mark the occasion.

The unveiling reminds us that we will continue to visit the grave on *yahrzeit* and during the High Holiday season, and that the memory of the person will always be with us as our life continues.

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit means "time of year" and is the anniversary of a loved one's death on the Hebrew calendar. We observe *yahrzeit* at home by lighting a *yahrzeit* candle in memory of the deceased. In the synagogue, we observe *yahrzeit* by saying the Mourner's Kaddish at services. Some mark the *Yahrzeit* on the anniversary in the secular calendar.

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.

There is a custom of giving *tzedakah* (charity) on the anniversary of the death.

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 framework for including personal and collective memory in our observance of major Jewish holidays.

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

Visiting the Cemetery

It is customary to visit the graves of loved ones before the High Holy Days as well as on the *yahrzeit* of the death. Many Jews also visit the cemetery on the loved one's birthday, an anniversary, or on a special shared day. Visits are not made on *Shabbat* or Jewish festivals. Jewish tradition discourages excessive mourning and cemetery visitation, especially if it becomes an impediment to returning to life.

It has been an old custom dating back to biblical times to leave a pebble or small stone on the grave marker. In earlier times, graves were marked only by a pile of stones. Today, they can be a visible sign of the remembrance.

SELECT BOOKS ON DEATH AND MOURNING

RESOURCES ON JEWISH PRACTICES

Books on Jewish Practice in Death and Mourning

Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew.

Anita Diamant. A guide to making the Jewish practices surrounding death personal, meaningful sources of comfort.

Wrestling with the Angel: Jewish Insights on Death and Mourning.

Jack Reimer, ed. A multi-voiced offering of thoughts, feelings and memories.

A Time to Mourn, A Time to Comfort.

Ron Wolfson. Combines laws and customs with personal experiences and practical advice.

Open Hands: A Jewish Guide on Dying, Death, and Bereavement.

Rami M. Shapiro

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning.

Maurice Lamm. A thorough presentation of laws and customs related to death, funeral, and mourning.

Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing.

Anne Brener. Uses the traditional stages of mourning as a basis for spiritual exercises in self-healing.

So That Your Values Live On: Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them

Jack Reimer

Personal Reflections

Kaddish.

Leon Wieseltier. A narrative of the author's grief during the year following his father's death, delving into a range of texts describing the history and spiritual significance of the mourning prayers.

To Begin Again.

Naomi Levy. The journey toward comfort, strength, and faith in difficult times.

Remember My Soul.

Lori Palatnik. What to do in memory of a loved one.

Healing of the Body, Healing of the Soul: Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength and Solace in the Psalms.

Simkha Y. Weintraub, ed.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People.

Harold Kushner. Classic book to work through loss.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Candle for Grandpa: A Guide to the Jewish Funeral for Children and Parents.

David Techner and Judith Hirt-Manheimer

Daddy's Chair.

Sandy Lanton; Shelly O. Haas, ill. A work of fiction about a boy who loses his father.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages.

Leo Buscaglia. Classic book for children (and adults) dealing with the death of a loved one.

How It Feels When a Parent Dies.

Jill Krementz. Eighteen children tell, in their own words, their feelings and experiences.

When Children Grieve.

Russell Friedman and John W. James. For adults to help children deal with death, divorce, pet loss, moving, and other losses.

When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Own Remembering Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond.

Nechama Liss-Levinson. Grandparent loss workbook.

WEB RESOURCES

Additional Literature

There is a vast amount of literature, general and Jewish, on the subject of death and bereavement. The list below contains a partial listing. See the bibliography at <http://www.Jewish-funerals.org> for a more complete list. This website is called Kavod v'Nichum and it is dedicated to providing information about Jewish funerals, burial and mourning. The tab entitled "Topics" addresses many issues including suicide, organ donations, etc.

Local Hospicare Website

<http://www.hospicare.org/for-those-grieving-a-loss/>

General information for those grieving a loss. Topics include loss of a child, loss of a spouse, attending to practical matters, self care, navigating the journey of grief, surviving the holidays, and advice for children and teens.

My Jewish Learning

<http://myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Death.htm>

A transdenominational website of Jewish information and education geared towards learners of all religious and educational backgrounds.

Ritual Well

www.ritualwell.org/lifecycles/death/

A source for innovative, contemporary Jewish ritual, with resources that address each aspect of the process of navigating death and mourning, including the moment of death, the burial of the body, the tearing of clothes, the weeklong practice of Shiva, and the recitation of *Kaddish*.

Making a Shiva call

Within our tradition, making a shiva call is one of the most important acts of condolence. But all too often we find ourselves unsure of the appropriate behavior. Rabbi Ron Wolfson's article on "How to Make a Shiva Call" offers some important advice:

http://myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Death/Burial_Mourning/Shiva/Makingshivacall.htm

Ethical Wills

An ethical will provides a meaningful opportunity to offer guidance to one's loved ones, especially to one's children and grandchildren. For more on ethical wills, see Rabbi Jack Reimer's essay, "On the Jewish Custom of Leaving a Written Spiritual Legacy for One's Children" at:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Death/Dying/Ethical_Wills_Meaning.htm

PRAYERS & READINGS

Mi Shebeirach: Prayer for Healing

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength,
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing,
and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor habrachah l'avoteinu
Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
And let us say, Amen

Debbie Friedman

Viddui: Final Confession Prayer

My God and God of all who have gone before me, Author of life and death,
I turn to You in trust.
Although I pray for life and health, I know that I am mortal.

If my life must soon come to an end, let me die, I pray; at peace.
If only my hands were clean and my heart pure!
I confess that I have committed sins and left much undone,
yet I know also the good that I did or tried to do.
May my acts of goodness give meaning to my life, and may my errors be forgiven.
Protector of the bereaved and the helpless, watch over my loved ones.
Into Your hand I commit my spirit.
Redeem it, O God of mercy and truth.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohaynu, Adonai Echad
Hear O Israel, Adonai our God, Adonai is One□
Adonai Hu ha-Elohim. Adonai Hu ha-Elohim.
Adonai is God. Adonai is God.

Viddui: Final Confession Prayer
(Translation by Rabbi Amy Eilberg)

My God and God of my fathers and mothers
May my prayer come before You.
Do not ignore my plea.
Please, forgive me for all of the sins
That I sinned before You throughout my lifetime.
I regret things that I have done.
Now, O God, take my suffering and pain as atonement.
Forgive my mistakes, for against You have I sinned.

May it be Your will, O God, my God and God of my ancestors,
That I sin no more.
In Your great mercy, cleanse me of the sins I have committed,
but not through suffering and disease.
Send me a complete healing along with all those who are ill.

I acknowledge before You, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors,
That my healing and my death are in Your hands.
May it be Your will to grant me a complete healing.
If it is Your will that I am to die of this illness,
Let my death be atonement for all the wrongs that I have done in my life.
Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings.
Grant me a place in the World to Come.

Parent of orphans and Guardian of widows,
Protect my dear loved ones,
with whose souls my soul is bound.

Into Your hand I place my soul.
You have redeemed me, O God of Truth.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohaynu, Adonai Echad
Hear O Israel, Adonai our God, Adonai is One□
Adonai Hu ha-Elohim. Adonai Hu ha-Elohim.
Adonai is God. Adonai is God

Alternative Viddui

I acknowledge before the Source of all
That life and death are not in my hands.
Just as I did not choose to be born,
so I do not choose to die.

May it come to pass that I may be healed
but if death is my fate,
then I accept it with dignity
and the loving calm
of one who knows the way of all things.

May my death be honorable,
and may my life be a healing memory
for those who know me.

May my loved ones think well of me
and may my memory bring them joy.

From all those I may have hurt,
I ask forgiveness.
Upon all who have hurt me,
I bestow forgiveness.

As a wave returns to the ocean,
So I return to the Source from which I came.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Hear O Israel,
that which we call God is Oneness itself.
Blessed is the Way of God
The Way of Life and Death,
of coming and going,
of meeting and loving,
now and forever.
As I was blessed with the one,
So now am I blessed with the other.
Shalom. Shalom. Shalom.

—Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Memorial Prayer (“El Malei Rachamim”)

for a male:

El malei rachamim, shochen bam'romim
Ham'tzei menuchah nechonah
Tachat kanfei ha-Shechinah
B'ma'a lot kedoshim utehorim
K'zohar ha-rakiyah mazhirim
Et nishmat [Hebrew name]
She-halach l'olamo
B'gan aden tehei menuchato.
Ana ba'al ha-rachamim,
Hastirehu b'seter kenafecha l'olamim
U'tzror b'tzror ha-chayim et nishmato
Adonai hu nachalato
V'yanu'ach b'shalom al mishkavo
V'nomar: Amen

for a female:

El malei rachamim, shochen bam'romim
Ham'tzei menuchah nechonah
Tachat kanfei ha-Shechinah
B'ma'a lot kedoshim utehorim
K'zohar ha-rakiyah mazhirim
Et nishmat [Hebrew name]
She-halchah l'olamah
B'gan aden tehei menuchatah
Ana ba'al ha-rachamim,
Hastirehah b'seter kenafecha l'olamim
U'tzror b'tzror ha-chayim et nishmatah
Adonai hu nachalatah
V'tanu'ach b'shalom al mishkavah
V'nomar: Amen

God filled with mercy, dwelling in the heaven's heights,
Bring proper rest beneath the wings of your Presence,
Amid the ranks of the holy and the pure, illuminating like the brilliance of the skies
to _____ [son/daughter] of _____ and _____
Who has gone to his/her eternal place of rest.
May You who are the source of mercy
Shelter him/her beneath your wings eternally,
And bind his/her soul among the living, that he/she may rest in peace.
And let us say: Amen.

Note: This prayer exists in many translations/interpretations.

Psalm 23

Mizmor l'David
Adonai ro-i lo echsar.
Binot desheh yarbitzeini
al mei m'nuchot y'nahaleini.
Nafshi y'shoveiv
yan'cheini b'maglei tzedek
l'maan sh'mo.
Gam ki eilech
b'gei tzalmavet
lo-ira ki atah imadi
shivt'cha umishantecha heimah y'nachamuni.
Taaroach l'fanai shulcan
neged tzor'rai
dishanta vashemen roshi
kosi r'vayah.
Ach tov vachosed
yird'funi kol y'mei chayai
v'shavti b'veit Adonai
l'oreich yamim.

A Psalm of David.
Adonai is my Shepard: I lack nothing.
God makes me lie down in green pastures;
God leads me to water in places of repose;
God renews my life;
God guides me in right paths
as befits God's name.
Though I walk through a valley
of the deepest darkness,
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me.
You spread a table for me in full view
of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my drink is abundant.
Only goodness and steadfast love
shall pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the House of Adonai
for many long years.

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד
יְיָ רֹעִי, לֹא אֶחְסָר.
בְּנֵאוֹת דֶּשֶׁה יַרְבִּיצֵנִי
עַל-מֵי מְנוּחֹת יְנַהַלְנִי.
נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב
יְנַחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי צְדָק
לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ.
גַּם כִּי אֵלֶךְ
בְּגֵיא צַלְמוֹת
לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי
שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הִמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי.
תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלַחַן
נֶגֶד צָרָרִי
דִּשְׁנַת בֶּשֶׂמֶן רֹאשִׁי
כּוֹסֵי רוּחָה.
אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֹסֵד
יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי
וְשָׁבְתִי בְּבֵית-יְיָ
לְאָרְךָ יָמִים.

MOURNER'S KADDISH

YITGADAL v'yitkodash sh'mei raba.

B'alma di v'ra chirutei,

v'yamlich malchutei,

b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon

uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael,

baagala uviz'man kariv. V'im'ru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach

l'alam ul'almei almaya.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar

v'yitromam v'yitnasei,

v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal

sh'mei d'Kud'sha B'rich Hu,

l'eila min kol birchata v'shirata,

tushb'chata v'nechemata,

daamiran b'alma. V'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,

v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael.

V'imru: Amen.

Oseh shalom bimromav,

Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,

v'al kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתֵהּ,

וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ,

בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,

בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ

לְעָלַם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמַיָּא.

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאֵר

וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא,

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵהּ דְקַדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא,

לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא,

תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא,

דְאָמְרוּ בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא,

וְחַיִּים עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו,

הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ,

וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

EXALTED and hallowed be God's great name

in the world which God created, according to plan.

May God's majesty be revealed in the days of our lifetime

and the life of all Israel — speedily, imminently, to which we say Amen.

Blessed be God's great name to all eternity.

Blessed, praised, honored, exalted, extolled, glorified, adored, and lauded

be the name of the Holy Blessed One, beyond all earthly words and songs of blessing, praise, and comfort. To which we say Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and all Israel.

to which we say Amen.

May the One who creates harmony on high, bring peace to us and to all Israel.

To which we say Amen.

Kaddish

by Marge Piercy

Look around us, search above us, below, behind.
We stand in a great web of being joined together.
Let us praise, let us love the life we are lent
passing through us in the body of Israel
and our own bodies, let's say amein.

Time flows through us like water.
The past and the dead speak through us.
We breathe out our children's children, blessing.

Blessed is the earth from which we grow,
blessed the life we are lent,
blessed the ones who teach us,
blessed the ones we teach,
blessed is the word that cannot say the glory
that shines through us and remains to shine
flowing past distant suns on the way to forever.
Let's say amein.

Blessed is light, blessed is darkness,
but blessed above all else is peace
which bears the fruits of knowledge
on strong branches, let's say amein.

Peace that bears joy into the world,
peace that enables love, peace over Israel
everywhere, blessed and holy is peace,
let's say amein.

Each of Us Has a Name
by Zelda

Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

Translated by Marcia Falk