



A Conservative Guide for Jewish Burial and Mourning

**Temple Emanuel
of the
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Shalom Chaverim,

“Chazak v’amatz-May you be strong and of good courage”. These are the words that Moses spoke to Joshua as Moses neared death. Moses was aware that death and mourning, endings and beginnings, require strength and fortitude.

And so, over three thousand years later, I say to you “Chazak v’amatz,-May you be strong and of good courage”. Whether you are reading this booklet as a one loved one is nearing death or simply because you are interested in Jewish traditions, may you be granted strength. In our death denying society, death and mourning is a subject most people would rather avoid. You have chosen to address this difficult yet important topic head on and for that you should be strengthened.

Please note that this booklet is our congregation’s attempt to offer you a brief overview of death and mourning practices in Jewish tradition. We hope that it gives you the critical information you require in your time of need. For a more detailed description of Jewish laws and customs surrounding death and mourning, please feel free to contact me. Also, I encourage you to consult the books and websites at the end of this booklet for more detailed information.

Finally, this booklet, produced entirely by a congregational volunteer, is a wonderful example of what *kehilla* means. When we see a community need and act on it; that is *kehilla*. When we care for each other during times of sorrow and joy, that is *kehilla*. When we learn and grow together; that is *kehilla*. May this booklet and the acts of kindness it inspires bring blessing and comfort to Temple Emanuel and cause us to be a true *kehilla kedosha* (a sacred community).

The first step to take when a loved one dies is to call a Rabbi and a funeral home. Contacting your family Rabbi before finalizing any burial plans is very important. Aside from aiding you with adhering to Conservative Jewish law, your Rabbi has experience with bereaved families, final wishes of the departed, and other special situations that you may have to consider in planning a funeral, burial, and mourning observance. A Rabbi's input will make the decisions you need to face easier and the entire process less daunting.

In **arranging for a Funeral** you will have to make a lot of decisions relatively quickly, selecting a Jewish funeral home and cemetery are chief among them.

[Temple Emanuel cannot suggest one Jewish funeral home or cemetery over another. However, on the back page of this booklet is a list of local Jewish funeral homes and cemeteries should you need them. Temple Emanuel as a congregation also has burial plots for sale to its members and their families. Once your burial plans are finalized you may contact our temple office and ask that the funeral and *Shiva* information be sent to temple members via our e-mail contact list.]

The funeral home you select should have a relationship with a **Chevra Kadisha**, Jewish burial society, who performs **tahara**, the ritual purification (washing) of a body prior to burial.

No matter the status of the deceased or the privileged life he or she may have lead, all bodies are wrapped in the same white shroud (tachrichim) prior to being placed in a coffin.

Men are buried with their tallit (prayer shawl).

At your request, funeral homes can make all the arrangements for burial, everything from limousines to acknowledgment cards, including, obituaries in local and Jewish newspapers, death certificates, and *Yarzheit* candles (memorial candle for the week of *Shiva*) to the family.

Immediate Burial is a hallmark of Judaism. It is tradition for the burial to take place as soon as possible, even on the same day of the death, but no more than two nights after the death. Only under certain circumstances, may the burial be delayed.

It is considered disrespectful to keep the body from being buried as soon as possible as the soul has to return to God, but the body is left to linger on earth.

The deceased may not be left alone. A **Shomer** (guard or watchmen) is designated (or hired) to stay with the departed when no one else is present.

Jewish people do not have a wake (where the body is displayed) because Judaism believes that the body should be brought to its resting place as soon as possible. It is not customary to bring flowers because the funeral is to be as simple as possible.

Embalming is not allowed. Removing blood and substituting chemical preservatives in the body is considered desecration of the deceased and is forbidden by Jewish law.

Autopsies are not allowed because it is considered defilement of the departed. A Rabbi must be consulted if an autopsy has to be done. However, organ donation (for an organ recipient) is now allowed under Conservative law.

Cremation is not allowed in Jewish law because the body was given to us as a gift from God who expects us to take care of ourselves and return in the best condition possible.

It is Orthodox law that a person be buried in the ground.

Wooden Coffins are used in Jewish burials because it is Judaism's belief is that we do not preserve the body because as the body decays the soul ascends to heaven.

Cutting Kria is conducted at the funeral home or at the graveside. The Rabbi or a representative of the funeral home tears the blouse, shirt, or jacket (or a symbolic black ribbon) of the mourners as a sign of mourning. This garment or ribbon is worn throughout *Shloshim*. The Shiva (seven day period) or *Shloshim* (30 day period from the funeral).

For a mother or father, the left side of the garment is ripped because it is nearer the heart and considered a deeper loss for the parent who brought the deceased into the world. For other family members, the right side of the garment is torn.

Mourners and Mourning: Naturally everyone who knew the departed can mourn, however, Judaism specifies immediate family members who are expected to observe the mourning period. They are the mother and father, son and daughter, brother (half-brother) and sister (half-sister), and husband and wife.

Jewish Cemeteries are not denominational in the sense that Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructions, and non-practicing Jews can be buried in the same cemetery. As such, it is your duty, in consultation with your Rabbi, to make sure Conservative laws are adhered to in the burial process.

Filling in the grave is customary at Jewish burials. Under Conservative law Jews must bury Jews. As final show of respect for the departed, family and friends may help fill in the grave. There are many variations of this; however, the most symbolic is tossing 3 shovels of earth on the coffin. Some customs insist the coffin should be covered by earth prior to leaving the gravesite, others believe that the entire grave should be filled in. Contact your family Rabbi for guidance.

Everyone leaving the cemetery after a burial must ceremoniously wash his or her hands 3 times before entering a private home to separate death from life. It is custom that there be a container of water, a cup and towels at the front door of the *Shiva* house so the mourners returning from the burial can wash their hands without disturbing those inside.

Kaddish (Holy) is an important and central blessing in every Jewish prayer service. In prayer services several variations of the Kaddish are used functionally as separators between various sections of the service.

Kaddish is not a prayer about death or mourning. It is an affirmation of life and faith in God. It reaffirms the mourner's relationship with God and God's will on earth.

The term "Kaddish" is often used to refer specifically to "The Mourners' Kaddish" said as part of the mourning rituals in Judaism to show both remembrance for those that have passed on and ones continued devotion to God.

Mourners "say Kaddish" for the first time at the burial service and continue to say Kaddish at prayer services in the presences of a **minyan** (a quorum of ten Jews, the age of 13 and over) for eleven (Jewish calendar) months for the loss of a parent and for 30 days (Shloshim) for the loss of any other family member. Both sons and daughters may say Kaddish for a parent.

Jews who have a non-Jewish parent may say Kaddish for that parent and follow the mourning rituals of Shiva and Shloshim.

If there is no one who can say Kaddish for the departed for the full mourning period, it is appropriate to designate someone else to say Kaddish. It is considered a privilege for the departed's soul to have someone say Kaddish.

Shiva, the week of mourning, that begins with the burial. During the week of Shiva, family members and friends come to comfort the mourners.

Visiting mourners is an essential part of Shiva. Visitors should console and comfort mourners and be respectful of and attentive to their needs. This includes making sure food or meals are brought to the Shiva home, and if necessary that chores are done, so the mourners may mourn for the departed uninterrupted.

Mourners may not work during the Shiva unless it is absolutely necessary. The term work extends beyond a profession or business, to yard work, housework, and even the preparation of meals.

It is tradition that for the first meal after the funeral, the mourners eat a hard-boiled egg and something round to indicate that life is like an orb or a circle, with no beginning or end, just an endless cycle of life.

It is customary to bring food, you should check if the mourners keep kosher. If they do, either uncut fruit or goods from a kosher bakery or store are appropriate. The food is for the mourners so they do not have to make their own meals during Shiva.

It is also customary that there be a minyan in the Shiva house so that the mourners may say Kaddish in their home. [Temple Emanuel can supply prayer books and leaders for evening prayer services. The leaders may either be temple clergy or volunteers.]

Mourners sit on low stools as a symbol of being "brought low with grief" and should not stand up to greet visitors who have come to Shiva house. All mirrors in the house where the mourners sit Shiva are covered, as mourners are not to be vain. Other customs that maybe followed are the prohibition of wearing leather shoes, using make-up or perfume, shaving, haircuts, bathing, and marital relations.

Shiva is interrupted by the Sabbath, where upon the mourners may dress as usual, go to temple or synagogue and say Kaddish there. Shiva ends on noon of the seventh day, however, the arrival of a Jewish Festival annuls the remainder of Shiva. (Please contact your family Rabbi for guidance if a death occurs on or near a Jewish Holiday.)

It is customary for mourners to take a walk around the block after Shiva as a symbol of their return to their normal world.

Shloshim is the 30 days of mourning which includes the Shiva period. Mourners return to their normal routines; however they continue to say Kaddish at services and do not attend weddings, bar/bat-mitzvahs or any event where there is music or dancing.

That said, there is corollary that you do not postpone a **simcha** (joyous event, specifically a wedding or bar/bat-mitzvah) because you are in mourning. Consult your family Rabbi about how to address the issues of music and dancing.

Visiting The Cemetery: Customs vary; in Israel mourners wait until after Shiva to visit the cemetery for the first time, while outside of Israel, mourners generally wait for the Shloshim (thirty days) or eleven months mourning period to end before visiting the cemetery.

Visitors can bring live flowers although it is the custom to put a pebble or stone on the tombstone. This is a symbol that someone has visited the gravesite to pay respect for the departed.

Customs also vary about the **Tombstone Unveiling** ceremony. In Israel, many people do it after Shloshim, while outside of Israel, it is generally done at the 11th month after the burial and no later the eve of the next High Holidays. Your family Rabbi would be the best person to check with.

Any information can be put on the tombstone. Usual procedure is to place both the English and Hebrew names of the departed on the tombstone with their father's name. Some people may also list the birth date and the date that the person passed away. Jewish people who are Cohanim or Leviim also put symbols such as a pair of hands or a wash basin.

The **El Maleh Rachamin** (God, full of compassion) prayer is recited for the first time at the gravesite and then every year at *Yiskor* services. This prayer asks God to grant the departed eternal rest.

Yarzheit (anniversary date of passing) is observed on the day the person passed away according to the Jewish calendar. A Yarzheit candle (which last 24 hours) is lit in the home and the Mourners' Kaddish is recited at a local prayer service. [Temple Emanuel can mail you a reminder of Yarzheit. You can also purchase a brass memorial plate to be mounted on our Yarzheit wall. Contact the temple office for details.]

Yizkor (remember) is a prayer service in memory of the departed. This service is part of prayer services on Yom Kippur, Shimini Atzeretz, the last day of Passover, and the second day of Shavuot.

[In some communities there is a custom that discourages attending Yizkor services during the first year of mourning. It is the practice at Temple Emanuel for mourners to attend Yizkor services even during their first year of mourning.]

Books and Websites that may be of additional interest or comfort to you are:

Books:

[Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew](#), by Anita Diamant

[Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing](#), by Anne Brener

[A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement \(The Art of Jewish Living\)](#), by Ron Wolfson

[The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning](#) (Revised and Expanded Edition), by Maurice Lamm

Websites:

[United Synagogue - Jewish Funeral Practice](#)

Cemeteries:

[Beth El Cemetery / Cedar Park Cemetery](#)

Forest Ave., Paramus, NJ 07652

Telephone: 201-262-1100 | Fax: 201-262-6762

[Mt. Moriah Cemetery](#)

685 Fairview Ave., Fairview, NJ 07022

Telephone: 201-943-6163 | Fax: 201-947-7002

[Riverside Cemetery](#)

12 Market St., Saddle Brook, NJ 07663

Telephone: 201-843-7600 | Fax: 201-843-5268

[Sanctuary of Abraham and Sarah](#)

Forest Ave., Paramus, NJ 07652

Telephone: 201-262-1128 | Fax: 201-262-6762

Funeral Homes:

[Gutterman-Musicant](#)

402 Park St., Hackensack, NJ 07601

Telephone: 201-489-3800 | Toll Free: 800-522-0588 |

Fax: 201-489-2382

[Louis Suburban Chapels](#)

13-01 Broadway, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

Telephone: 201-791-0015 | Toll free: 800-525-3834 |

Fax: 201-797-5110

[Robert Schoem's Menorah Chapel](#)

W-150 Route 4 East, Paramus, NJ 07652

Telephone: 201-843-9090 | Fax: 201-291-2995

[Wein & Wein](#)

402 Park St., Hackensack, NJ 07601

Telephone: 201-569-2404 | Toll Free: 800-322-0533 |

Fax: 201-489-2392