

Temple Beth Rishon Life Cycle Events

Death

What should one do when a death occurs?

The family should contact the Rabbi. Please do not arrange a time or place for the funeral without first checking with both the funeral home and the Rabbi.

Can organs of the deceased be used for transplants?

Liberal Judaism approves of organ donation because it is a *mitzvah* to save a life.

Are autopsies permitted?

Routine autopsies are forbidden out of respect for the dead (*Kevod Hamet*). However, they are permitted when: The physician claims it could provide knowledge to help cure others. When the law requires it. In every case, all body parts should be properly buried after the autopsy.

Where does one obtain information about a funeral home?

The temple office can provide you with a list of funeral homes in this area. Listings of Jewish funeral homes are also in the local yellow pages.

What if one does not have a cemetery plot?

Funeral homes are helpful in making the necessary arrangements. Also, cemetery plots can be purchased through Beth Rishon. The gravesites are located in the Cedar Park Cemetery in Paramus. They cost \$1,200 per site (additional charges for grave opening, burial, and maintenance). For information, please call the temple office. In the case of exigent need, please call Warren Kaufman at 201-825-8212. You should also consider being prepared for the future by purchasing gravesites now.

In what type of cemetery can one be buried?

All burials should be in a Jewish or nonsectarian cemetery with a Jewish marker placed over the grave. We do know that 2,000 years ago, the rabbis of the Sanhedrin were placed in underground crypts, so mausoleums are compatible with Jewish tradition. However, they do not conform to the phrase: "The dust is returned to the earth from which it came."

Is cremation permitted?

Cremation is banned by traditional Jews. They believe that resurrection of the body at the end of days would be hindered by cremation. Also, although Judaism stresses that our souls are more important than our bodies, our tradition disapproves of the deliberate destruction of "human beings made in the image of God." Liberal Judaism does permit cremation and requests that the ashes be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

What is *aninut*?

This is the period of time between the death and the funeral. According to Jewish law, burial must take place without delay: within 24 hours unless intervened by *Shabbat* or a holy day. However, it is permissible to postpone the service "for the honor of the dead," especially to allow the immediate family to come together. During this period, funeral preparations and arrangements are made and people notified. Out of respect for the deceased, the body should not be left alone during this period. The family should arrange for someone to be at the side of the deceased at all times, reciting psalms. Liberal Jews do not always follow this practice.

What is the *Chevra Kadisha*?

It is a Jewish burial society. A member of the *Chevra Kadisha* performs *taharah*. Jewish tradition considers membership in a *Chevra Kadisha* to be exceptionally meritorious, since so few are willing to take on this responsibility.

What are *taharah* and *tahrihim*?

Taharah is the ritual cleansing of the corpse performed by men, for males, and by women, for females. *Tahrihim* is the covering of the body with a shroud. However, ordinary clothes can be worn over the shroud. If the deceased has left instructions that he or she be buried with a *tallit*, such a request should be honored. Jewish law teaches that the body should return to the dust from which it came. Therefore, embalming is discouraged. Liberal Jews do not always follow the practice of *taharah* and *tahrihim*.

What is the Jewish tradition regarding the casket?

In general, ostentation is to be avoided. The basic requirement is that the coffin be made entirely of wood in order to facilitate the decomposition of the body.

Can flowers be used to decorate the casket?

Traditional Judaism does not permit the use of flowers. Liberal Jews disapprove of using flowers since doing so runs contrary to the principle of keeping the funeral simple. Donations to charity in the memory of the deceased are encouraged in lieu of spending money on flowers.

Where does the funeral service take place?

It can be performed in a funeral home's chapel or at the gravesite. In special circumstances, for example, if the deceased was a past president of the temple or a prominent board member, the synagogue may be used. However, this is rarely done.

Is an open casket permitted?

Tradition frowns on viewing the body and on leaving the coffin open. This non-Jewish custom is strongly discouraged.

What is *keriah*?

The rending of one's garment (*keriah*) is an ancient mourning practice. Before the funeral service, immediate relatives of the deceased (parents, children, brothers, sisters, and the spouse) pin a black ribbon on their clothes and, in a brief ceremony, have it cut by the Rabbi. The ribbon is worn on the left for a parent and on the right for other relatives.

Who conducts the funeral service?

A funeral service can be conducted by a rabbi and/or a cantor. During the service, in addition to a eulogy, psalms are read and the *El Male Rachamim* is chanted. The Rabbi and/or others close to the deceased can deliver the eulogy.

What occurs during the burial service?

After the coffin has been placed in the grave, the Rabbi reads selections from Psalms and appropriate prayers and concludes with the *Kaddish*. It is customary for members of the family to throw some dirt on the casket as a sign of accepting the reality of death. It is a mitzvah to assist in the burial of the deceased; therefore, family members and friends are encouraged to cover the coffin with shovelfuls of dirt. It is also customary for some to remain at the gravesite until the coffin is completely covered and for others to remain until the grave is filled.

Who is a mourner?

Of course, every death affects the lives of countless numbers of people. However, Jewish law requires seven individuals to observe the Jewish mourning rites and customs: the deceased's father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and spouse.

What if a mourner is away during the funeral?

According to Conservative Judaism, if one is notified within 30 days of the death, one must observe all the laws and customs from the day of notification. According to Liberal Judaism, at least one day of mourning must be observed.

What is the period of mourning?

Official mourning begins with the burial of the body and lasts, according to the Rabbinic law, seven days. This period is called *shiva* (seven). In actuality, there are only six or fewer days, since mourning is forbidden on the Sabbath and on holy days. Many Liberal Jews observe only the first three days of the seven-day period.

It is customary to light a seven-day candle as soon as the family returns from the cemetery to the house of mourning. It is also customary for the mourners to partake in a meal known as *seudat havraah* upon returning from the cemetery. It is a *mitzvah* for friends to prepare this meal.

Traditionally, mourners do not leave their house except for *Shabbat* worship. Daily worship with a *minyan* is conducted in the *shiva* home so the mourners can recite *Kaddish*. The *mitzvah* of *Kaddish* is incumbent on men and women.

During *shiva*, some Jews cover mirrors (which symbolize vanity). This practice is not required by Jewish law. It is also customary to wear slippers, not shave, and to sit on low stools (which are intended to reinforce the mourners' inner emotions).

During *shiva*, friends and relatives visit the mourners, offering consolation and practical help. They bring food so the mourners do not have to cook for themselves. It is a *mitzvah* to make a contribution in the memory of the deceased during the period of *shiva*.

At Beth Rishon, *minyan* services are held at mourners' homes. The Rabbi will assist you in arranging *minyan* services.

Sheloshim is the 30-day period (including *shiva*) following the burial. During this time, normal life gradually resumes, and mourners begin returning to work and school. During this period, festivities are avoided.

Please note that the rules concerning *shiva* and *sheloshim* become complicated when death occurs just prior to or during a Jewish festival. In such a case, please contact Rabbi Emert.

The year of *aveilut* (mourning) follows *sheloshim*. Jewish law mandates a full year of mourning only for one's parents. *Kaddish* is said for eleven months. During this period, traditional Jews abstain from any entertainment and avoid festivities. The mourning period for other close relatives, including spouses, terminates at the end of *sheloshim*.

Formal mourning ends at the end of a year. That occasion is marked by lighting a memorial candle at home and attending services at Temple for the reading of *Kaddish* and the giving of *Tzedakah*. The tombstone should be in place at this time. (A tombstone can be erected as early as seven days after the burial.)

When can one visit the grave?

Traditional Jews do not visit the grave until the one-month mourning period is over. Liberal Jews may visit after the *shiva* period. Graves are not visited on *Shabbat* or on holy days. It is traditional to visit the graves of parents during the month of *Elul* just before *Rosh Hashanah*, and many visit on the day of the anniversary of the death, known as *Yahrzeit*.

What is the *Kaddish*?

The *Kaddish* is a prayer for the living. The words of this prayer are Aramaic, not Hebrew. It praises God as a source of eternal life and contains no direct reference to death or the dead. As such, it is an appropriate prayer at a time of mourning when we need to affirm the value of life despite our loss. The *Kaddish* should be recited by the children, spouse, siblings, and parents of the deceased. In many Liberal Jewish congregations, the community recites the *Kaddish*. While superstition dictates that the *Kaddish* should only be recited if a loved one has died lest we bring on an early death, especially after the Holocaust, nontraditional Jews recite the *Kaddish* in memory of those who have no one to say a prayer for them.

The *Kaddish* is also recited during the various *Yizkor* (memorial) services held during the Jewish year: on *Yom Kippur*, on the seventh day of *Pesach*, *Shemini Atzeret*, and on *Shavuot*. It is also recited on the *Yahrzeit*. During these memorial times, a memorial candle is also lit.

What is an unveiling?

This service is a formal dedication of the monument at a gravesite. It involves removing a veil, cloth, or handkerchief that is draped over the gravestone. It symbolizes the erection of the tombstone.

When should an unveiling take place?

Tombstone dedications or unveilings are not required by Jewish tradition. However, if the family wishes, a service of dedication can be held in the cemetery any time after *shiva* and before the end of the first year on those days when grave visitation is allowed. Arrangements can be made by contacting the Rabbi. Note: keep in mind that it usually takes a few months to have the monument made.

In order to preserve the holiness and sanctity of the institution, it is improper to bring food or drink into the cemetery. In previous ages, a snack may have been desirable because of the long trip a cemetery visit may have required. It was also thought that in raising the glass of wine and saying "*l'chayim*," one implied "not for death." Today, this custom should be discouraged.