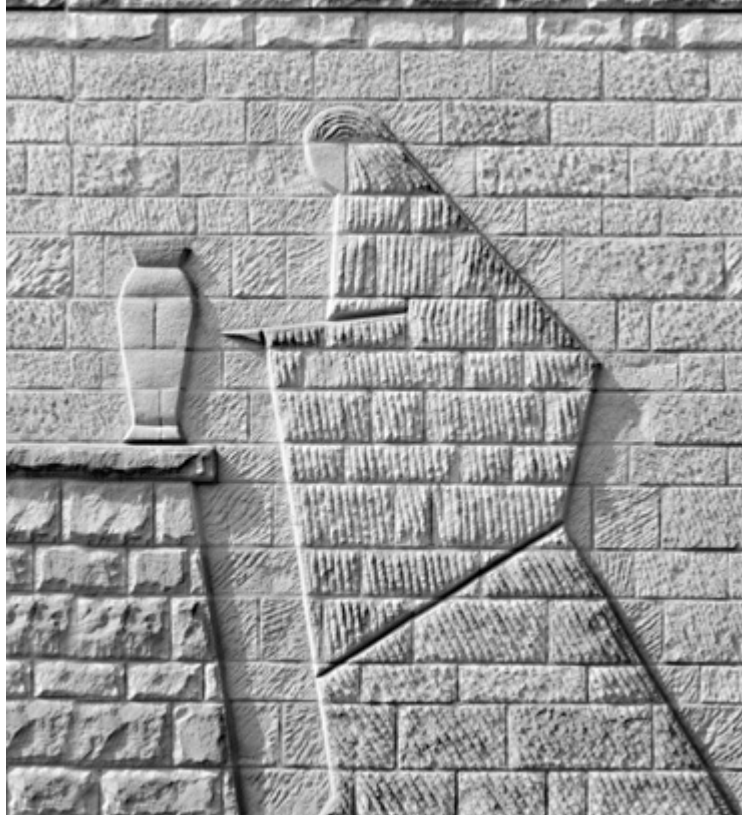


SAYING GOODBYE:

A GUIDE TO DEALING WITH THE PASSING OF LOVED ONES



Jewish Mourning Rituals and Customs

**The Jewish Center
435 Nassau Street
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 921-0100
www.thejewishcenter.org**

Life is a series of transitions. From the early stages of life for the infant and toddler, to the end of our days, each stage is necessary. We all move from stage to stage - from youth to maturity and from adulthood to our golden years, and we often celebrate these moments of transition. In Judaism we have ceremonies for the birth of our children, the *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*, standing under the *chuppah* at a wedding and many others. Each of these moments marks a natural transition and a celebration of life and each comes with its own opportunities and challenges. But life's greatest challenge is in confronting and dealing with its ultimate transition - the one from life to death. There is so much that is unknown and we all have anxieties around death. Saying the final goodbye to people we love is among the greatest challenges in our lives.

Judaism is the art of living and its sacred traditions help us to navigate the transitions that all people inevitably confront. Our rituals help us mark the sadness and reality of death while also celebrating the life that has just ended. Over the generations our sacred tradition has created many beautiful traditions and customs that can help guide us as we confront the loss of someone we love. These customs challenge us, educate us and comfort us.

This guide was created by The Jewish Center to help us all confront the realities of death and to help us understand the rituals and customs that we follow. Our clergy, staff and friends at The Jewish Center are here to help you through these challenging times. As you read through this guide, I hope that you will begin to think about how you want to mark the end of the lives of your loved ones when the time comes. I hope this will provide guidance and support and spark important discussions among family members so they can support one another and embrace our traditions at this moment of transition.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

May God comfort all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Rabbi Adam Feldman

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INTRODUCTION

This manual describes the ways in which The Jewish Center can be of help, stating as completely as possible The Jewish Center's resources and policies. While it also outlines Jewish law and customs regarding death and mourning, it is not all-inclusive. We urge you to seek more information and guidance either from the clergy and professional staff of the synagogue or from the sources listed in the short bibliography at the end of this handbook.

Some members of The Jewish Center consider Jewish law to be a strict guide of observance. Others use it as a model for fashioning rituals to express their personal spirituality. The Jewish Center clergy is always available to you to offer guidance in the tradition as well as in adapting the laws of burial and mourning to your specific needs, within the bounds of Conservative practice.

Please keep in mind that Jewish tradition insists that the laws and customs of death and mourning described in this booklet apply to every Jewish person. Further, these laws and customs apply to a non-Jewish member of a Jewish family. If you have questions about this or any other aspect of death and mourning, please be in touch with us. We want to do what we can to help – including in advance of the death of a family member. It is our whole community's loss if we cannot support our members when they are preparing for or dealing with the loss of a loved one.

BURIAL PLOTS

Before or at the time of need, families may wish to make arrangements for burial plots. When purchasing a burial plot, consider the following:

- Is the plot conveniently located?
- Are the grounds of the cemetery carefully maintained?
- Is the environment a pleasant and peaceful one?
- Is it in an area that is dedicated specifically for Jewish burial?

The Jewish Center owns plots in the Beth Israel Memorial Park in Woodbridge (US Highway 1, Woodbridge, NJ, (732) 634-2100) and in Washington Cemetery in Deans (104 Deans Rhode Hall Road, Deans, NJ, (732) 297-2336). You can purchase these plots by contacting the Administrator at The Jewish Center, (609) 921-0100 ext. 205.

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There are other Jewish burial plots in cemeteries in our area; for information please contact the Administrator at The Jewish Center.

MAKING PREPARATIONS IN ADVANCE

Sometimes it becomes obvious that death is imminent. Our clergy are available to speak with you at these times; they will help you make arrangements for the funeral ceremony, discuss the possibility of organ donation, and be of general assistance and support. The members of the family (including the one who is dying) are encouraged to participate in these discussions.

Speaking with a funeral director prior to the time of death may be helpful. The funeral director can explain the services provided and the associated costs. Orland's Ewing Memorial Chapel, (609) 883-1400, is an exclusively Jewish funeral home in our area, with facilities for *taharah* and *shmirah*. (Note: italicized Hebrew terms are explained later in this guide.) The Star of David Memorial Chapel in Princeton also conducts Jewish funerals.

Please remember that the clergy and administrative staff of The Jewish Center are ready and willing to help you whenever needed.

WHAT TO DO AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Please call Rabbi Feldman at The Jewish Center, (609) 921-0100, ext. 203. If it is not during normal business hours, call that number and follow the voicemail prompts for clergy emergencies. **In the event of a death or any other emergency, it is permissible to call on *Shabbat* or on a holiday.** Even if the funeral will not take place locally, our community wants to know of your loss and be supportive. Our clergy can assist with the logistical details in and out of the Princeton area such as funeral preparation and *shiva minyanim*. They are also available to provide emotional support.

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WHAT HAPPENS FROM TIME OF DEATH TO THE FUNERAL

- **Who Is a Mourner According to Jewish Law:**

The laws of mourning apply to the seven most immediate relatives: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister and spouse. While we may feel sad and even mournful for other close relatives, it is only for these seven that a person is required to observe the laws and customs of Jewish mourning. The laws and customs of mourners apply to all Jewish adults even if the deceased is not Jewish.

- **Making Funeral Arrangements:**

One specific member of the immediate family should be designated to handle all the arrangements. After consulting with all the family members, this person can then coordinate all funeral arrangements and details of *shiva*.

If you are not sure which funeral home to contact, our clergy will be able to make suggestions. Funeral services may be held at a funeral home or at The Jewish Center. The Jewish Center is available to members for funerals, and may also be used by non-members for a fee. It is also possible to have a graveside funeral. There is no fee to congregants for funerals conducted by our clergy for immediate family members; clergy fees for non-members' funerals should be discussed with our clergy.

Please note that funeral services conducted by our clergy and at The Jewish Center must be part of a funeral that conforms to Jewish law in general and, specifically, does not involve cremation.

If the funeral and/or burial will take place out of the local area, the clergy can be of assistance in finding a proper funeral home to contact. The same rituals apply in different locations and care should be given to explain to the out-of-the-area funeral home that these are the rituals that should be followed. If one needs help finding information about funeral homes outside of our local area, we recommend the following website of the Jewish Funeral Directors Association:
www.jfda.org/listing_state_city.html.

- **Traditional Jewish Burial and Funeral Rituals:**

The practical and the simple govern Jewish rituals. While we respect life, we accept the reality of death. We treat the body with dignity and with care, reflecting our respect for the life that has left it.

Here are descriptions of some of the practices involved:

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Shmirah is the process of having *shomrim*, or watchers, who are Jews and remain with the body at all times from when it arrives at the funeral home until the funeral service, and recite psalms until the final funeral arrangements begin. It is a sign of respect that the body is never left alone.

Taharah or purification is the ritual washing and dressing of the body. After the washing and purification, the body is then dressed in simple cotton, muslin or linen garments called *tachrichin* or shrouds. A *tallit* with one of its *tzizit* or fringes cut off may be draped over the shroud.

Our community has a *Chevra Kadisha*, or Burial Society, of volunteers who will do this ritual washing and preparation (at no charge); there is a separate group of men who care for men who have died, and women who care for women. If you wish their services, you can make arrangements through the funeral home.

A simple wooden coffin is preferred, symbolizing the belief that all people are equal before God. Because public viewing is disrespectful in Jewish tradition, the coffin remains closed once the body has been placed in it.

All Jewish funeral homes offer *shomrim*, *tahara* and *tachrichin*. Please discuss these with the funeral home so you can make your wishes known. During your meeting at the funeral home, it is important to finalize the following practical arrangements:

- Time of service
- Clergy who will officiate
- Participation by family members or friends in the service
- Transportation for the family
- Any other issues related to the funeral and burial

Traditional Jewish law prohibits cremation, embalming and autopsy. However, minimal embalming and/or an autopsy are permitted when there are extenuating circumstances such as death from a rare disease or if mandated by civil law. If these issues are raised, our clergy can help you understand the laws involved and how to deal with them.

Out of respect for the deceased and for the bereaved, Jewish law calls for burial to take place as soon as possible. At times, practical considerations may influence the

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scheduling of the funeral, such as transporting the deceased, travel for immediate family, *Shabbat*, and holidays.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

The member of our clergy who will be officiating at the funeral service will meet with the family before the funeral. All of the details for the day of the funeral as well as the days immediately following will be reviewed. Feel free to ask any questions at this time. This is also the appropriate time to share personal information about the person who passed away to be incorporated into the eulogy for the funeral service. If there is anything the family would like mentioned in the eulogy, this is the best time to discuss it.

The family may want to designate two or three speakers to briefly share memories. It is important to coordinate the speakers to avoid duplication. Individuals who have not spoken at the funeral may have an opportunity to share brief memories at the *shiva minyanim*. Mourners who wish to speak should write down their remarks in advance since emotions may make speaking difficult.

Immediately before the service begins, the clergy member officiating will meet privately with the family members and perform the ritual of *kriah* for the child, parent, spouse, and sibling of the deceased. The tearing of one's garment is a public expression of grief at the loss of a loved one. The torn garment is a symbol of a torn heart. The tear is made either in an article of clothing or in a small black ribbon that is pinned to the clothing in close proximity to the heart. As the tear or cut is made, a blessing is recited. All the details of the *kriah* ritual, including the length of time to wear the torn garment or ribbon, will be explained by our clergy.

The Jewish funeral service is impressive in its simplicity and dignity. Several psalms are read, a biblical passage is recited, the eulogy is delivered, family members may offer their remarks, and a memorial prayer, *El Malei Rachamim*, is chanted. As the service concludes, the location of the cemetery and the address and schedule of the *shiva minyanim* will be announced. A charity may also be announced to which contributions may be made in memory of the deceased. Pallbearers, often friends or family members who are not immediate relatives, may accompany the coffin out of the synagogue or funeral home. The coffin is carried to the hearse, which is the lead car for the procession to the cemetery. The funeral home staff will give directions and appropriate instructions for travel to the cemetery.

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AT THE CEMETERY

Family and friends accompany the deceased to the cemetery. On arrival at the cemetery the casket is carried from the hearse and lowered into the grave. A brief graveside service is conducted consisting of psalms, readings, the memorial prayer *El Malei Rachamim* and the Mourner's *Kaddish*. Mourners, relatives, and friends share in covering the casket with earth, which can be a difficult yet moving and meaningful ritual. The *mitzvah* of *chesed shel emet* (the care for the deceased) is the highest honor we perform for others in this world.

The recessional from the graveside focuses on comforting the mourners. Following the burial service, the comforters will be asked to form two lines, leaving an aisle through which the mourners pass to receive the first expressions of comfort. Recognizing the difficulty of finding appropriate words, Judaism provides a ritual phrase: "May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

THE SHIVA PERIOD

Shiva is defined as the seven days immediately following the funeral, with the day of the funeral counting as day one. These are, understandably, the most intense days of mourning. Traditionally, during the *shiva* period the mourners remain at home except for *Shabbat*. This is a time for the mourners to receive the condolences of family, friends, and community. Today, families sometimes choose to observe the rituals of *shiva* for fewer than seven days, and may choose to split the location of *shiva* between the deceased's residence and that of the mourners.

Our clergy can assist in decisions regarding observance of *shiva* and *minyanim*. Also, the congregation will provide *siddurim* (prayer books) and *kippot* at the mourners' home, and also ensures the presence of a *minyan* leader and a *minyan*, which counts both men and women, as defined by Jewish Center policy.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SHIVA HOUSE

Many people find it helpful to have a close friend stay at the home while everyone else goes to the cemetery for the funeral. The role of this person is to see that all

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details are taken care of and the house is prepared for the observance of *shiva*. These details should not be the priority of the mourners. The main preparations are:

- **Pitcher of Water:** A pitcher of water should be placed outside the open front door for those returning from the cemetery. We wash our hands after attending the cemetery to symbolically cleanse ourselves after proximity with the dead. Paper towels and a trash receptacle should be placed nearby.
- **Mirrors:** It is customary to cover the mirrors to remind us of the secondary importance of the physical self during our mourning.
- **Memorial Candle:** The funeral home usually provides the memorial candle. The candle will be lit by the mourners immediately upon returning home and will burn for the entire seven-day period of *shiva*. There is no blessing that is said at the lighting of the candle, but any thoughts that someone would like to share may be appropriate. One traditional phrase that is often said is, “*Ner Hashem Nishmat Adam* – The candle of God is the soul of a person.” (Prov. 20:27)
- **Meal of Condolence:** Relatives and/or friends of the mourners set out a meal of condolence for the immediate family. The Jewish Center can be helpful in suggesting how to arrange for this meal. Bread and hard-boiled eggs, symbolizing the continuity of life, are traditionally served. The simplicity of this meal helps to define the mood of the *shiva* period.
- **Low Chairs:** The Jewish Center will provide low *shiva* chairs with backs for the mourners. The fact that these chairs are lower than normal symbolizes the way that mourners feel, and is yet another way to mark the unique nature of the *shiva* period.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A COMFORTER

The role of the friend or comforter to someone who is mourning is critical to their emotional and physical state. There are many times when a friend or family member can provide a meal or other nourishment as well as serve as a caring “gatekeeper” when the mourner needs time to himself or herself. In order to provide the most assistance, comforters should ask the mourner what they can do to help and then

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make sure all of the mourner's needs are met. If necessary, a friend can say things to other people that are not possible for the mourner to say.

CUSTOMS DURING *SHIVA*

Friends and relatives are strongly encouraged to comfort the mourner in visits of consolation. In a house of mourning, the mourner is not a host and the visitors are not guests. The best time to visit a mourner is usually in the afternoon between 1 pm and 5 pm or at the *minyan*, which is traditionally held in the evening. The front door should be left unlocked so that no one needs to ring the doorbell. Visitors acknowledge all the mourners for their loss, keeping visits brief in recognition that this is a house of mourning.

It is traditional for the mourners to occupy the *shiva* chairs throughout *shiva*. When visiting mourners during *shiva*, it is customary to allow the mourner to begin and choose the topic of conversation. Idle chatter or "small talk" is not recommended unless the mourner initiates such topics. After a brief *shiva* visit, visitors leave with the traditional phrase, "May God comfort you together with all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." This is a time of reflection and soul-searching for the mourner. The comfort and support of community members are very meaningful at this time.

Friends may be interested in sending food. It is recommended that one friend be designated to coordinate the food that is brought to the *shiva* home so that there is not too much. Traditionally, the food in the *shiva* house is for the mourners and the immediate family; it is not intended for entertaining visitors. Serving food at the time of the *minyanim* is optional and solely at the discretion of the family. Leftover food may be donated to community charities, a job for which a friend may wish to take responsibility. Please check the list of charities at the back of this booklet.

There is no specific observance prescribed for the end of *shiva*. However, recognizing the difficulty of the transition back to one's ordinary routine, tradition suggests that mourners take a short walk in the neighborhood to signal the formal ending of *shiva* and a return to society. *Shiva* and the other customs that are followed after the funeral apply to everyone even if the deceased was not Jewish.

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MOURNER'S *KADDISH*

In Jewish tradition, the mourner recites the Mourner's *Kaddish* (mourner's prayer) for a defined period of time following the death of the loved one and annually on the anniversary of the death (*yahrtzeit*). The mourner may say *Kaddish* daily. Morning *minyanim* are held at The Jewish Center on Sunday and Wednesday, and daily *minyanim* are available elsewhere in the community. The synagogue office has this information. Evening *minyanim* are typically held in the *shiva* house. However, no *minyan* should take place in the *shiva* house during *Shabbat*. If the funeral occurs on Friday, mourners are formally received back into the congregation as part of the Friday night service. Mourners may say *Kaddish* daily following *shiva*. If this is not feasible, mourners may wish to regularly attend *Shabbat* services to say *Kaddish*.

No one should mourn alone. *Kaddish* is recited in a *minyan* (a group of 10 adult Jews, men or women) offering connection with the Jewish community. It is noteworthy that the *Kaddish* prayer makes no mention of death. It is a prayer praising God and requesting *shalom* (peace). Saying *Kaddish* helps the mourner by providing a link to former generations and is a visible expression of respect for the departed.

***SHLOSHIM* – THE FIRST THIRTY DAYS**

The thirty days following the funeral are called *shloshim*. It includes the first seven days (*shiva*) and the following 23 days. During this mourning period, the mourner typically refrains from participating in various forms of pleasure and entertainment. The mourner may continue to wear the black ribbon or item of clothing torn at the *kriah* ritual. If a major holiday (Passover, *Shavuot*, *Sukkot*, *Rosh Hashanah* or *Yom Kippur*) occurs during *shloshim*, the remainder of *shloshim* is cancelled. *Shloshim* concludes the mourning period for all relatives except mourning for a parent, which is for eleven months. Please consult one of our clergy if you have any questions about these issues.

THE UNVEILING

The unveiling customarily takes place within the first year after death, and not less than 30 days after the funeral. At the grave, a cloth that has been temporarily placed over the newly erected monument is removed at the conclusion of a brief service.

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The monument marks the burial place and honors the deceased. The custom of erecting a monument dates back to Biblical times. Our clergy are able to assist a family who would like to conduct the unveiling themselves, or else they can be available to officiate. Please be in touch with them before finalizing any details with family members or the cemetery.

YAHRTZEIT

Yahrtzeit is the Hebrew anniversary of the day of death. The *yahrtzeit* is calculated according to the Jewish calendar. The funeral home will give the mourners a listing of future dates. The custom is to attend a service during the week of the *yahrtzeit* to recite the Mourners *Kaddish* in memory of the departed. Aspects of the observance of *yahrtzeit* take place in the home, in the synagogue and at the cemetery. In the home, a memorial candle is lit at sunset preceding the *yahrtzeit* day to burn for twenty-four hours. The candle is lit before sunset on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* (Eighth Day of *Pesach*, the Second Day of *Shavuot*, *Shemini Atzeret* and *Yom Kippur*). We recite *Kaddish* in the synagogue at the service. The Jewish Center maintains files of *yahrtzeit* dates for those who register the information. A letter is sent before *yahrtzeit* to remind us of the date and our responsibilities to say *Kaddish*.

Some traditionally visit the cemetery on the *yahrtzeit* to recite psalms and the *El Malei Rachamim* prayer. This may be done on any date close to the actual *yahrtzeit*. The *yahrtzeit* day is one of remembrance and reverence. We try to set aside time for study and reflection. We give *tzedakah*, charity, to perpetuate the memory of our loved ones.

English Date of Death _____ Hebrew Date of Death _____

English Date of Death _____ Hebrew Date of Death _____

* The Date of the *yahrtzeit* is the Hebrew Date of Death

YIZKOR

Yizkor is when we remember our loved ones by reciting psalms and prayers at a brief memorial service four times each year. The *Yizkor* service is held as part of the congregational service on *Yom Kippur*, *Shemini Atzeret*, the Eighth Day of Passover and the Second Day of *Shavuot* at the synagogue. The Jewish Center publishes an annual Book of Remembrance which includes the names of family members who

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died during the previous year and also those deceased whose family make a donation to have the name included. Most people follow the tradition of not reciting *Yizkor* during the first year of mourning.

COMMUNITY CHARITIES THAT TAKE FOOD

Princeton Senior Resource Center
Spruce Circle
Harrison St.
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 252-2362 ask for Evelyn

Green House
St. Anthony of Padua Church
56 Maxwell Ave
Hightstown, NJ 08520
(609) 448-0141

Hightstown Community Action Service Center
(609) 443-3346

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Appendices

Glossary of Terms

Chevra Kadisha – The group of men or women who care for the body after death and prepare it for burial.

El Malei Rachamim – “Lord, Compassionate God” – These are opening words of the memorial prayer, though many people use these words to refer to the prayer as a whole.

Kaddish – The prayer said by mourners daily for the entire period of mourning as well as on the anniversary of the death.

Kippah (pl. kippot) – ritual head covering also known as yarmulke.

Kriah – the tearing of a garment or ribbon that symbolizes the tearing of the heart that the mourners feel. This is done immediately prior to the funeral.

Minyan (pl. minyanim) – the requirement of ten adults to join for the service. Also used to describe the service at the shiva home.

Ner Hashem Nishmat Adam – “The candle of God is the soul of man.” Taken from the Book of Psalms and recited by some as the shiva candle is lit.

Shiva – The seven day initial mourning period after the death of an immediate relative.

Shiva minyanim – the services that take place (generally in the evening) in the house of the mourners for the initial week.

Shloshim – the second mourning period that lasts 30 days. This is the final mourning period for siblings, spouses and for parents mourning children.

Shmirah – watching – From the time of death until burial the deceased should be accompanied by at least one person. This is done out of respect so that the person is never left alone.

Shomrim – the people who stay with the deceased from the time of death until burial.

Siddurim – prayer books – based on the word Seder – the order of the prayers.

Tachrichin – the simple white shrouds that the body is wrapped in for the burial.

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Taharah – ritual washing of the body prior to the burial. This is done by the Chevrah Kadisha with the utmost respect for the body and for modesty.

Tallit – A ritual prayer shawl used for morning services. It is customary to bury a person in his or her tallit after one of the tzizit is removed.

Tzizit – the fringes on a tallit that represent the 613 commandments in the Torah.

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Prayer for Kindling the *Shiva* Memorial Candle

The light of life is a finite flame. Like the *Sabbath* candles, life is kindled. It burns, it glows, it radiates warmth and beauty, but then it fades and is no more. Yet we must not despair. We are more than a memory vanishing in the darkness. With our lives we give life. Something of us can never die; we move in the eternal cycle of darkness and death, of light and life. The memorial light we now kindle is a sign of this truth. As it burns pure and bright, so may the memory of our dear _____ brighten and purify our lives.

נֵר ה' נִשְׁמַת אָדָם - *Neir A-do-nai Nish-mat A-dam*
The human spirit is the light of Adonai, the Eternal.

Prayer for Getting up from *Shiva*

Our period of formal mourning is ended. It is time to return to our customary pursuits. Though our grief is not spent, we pray that it may begin to abate and that, little by little, strength and hope and consolation will enter our hearts. That would truly be God's healing. Let us now rise, as a sign that our time of *Shiva* is over.

ה' עוֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן. ה' יְבַרְכֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם
A-do-nai oz le-a-mo ye-tein. A-do-nai ye-va-rech et a-mo va-sha-lom.
May God give strength to our people. May God bless our people with peace.

Prayer for Lighting a *Yahrtzeit* Candle

At this moment, I/we pause for thought in memory of my/our beloved _____ . I/We give thanks for the blessing of life, of companionship, and of memory. I/We am/are grateful for the strength and faith that sustained me/us in the hour of my/our bereavement. Though sorrow lingers, I/we have learned that love is stronger than death. Though my/our loved one is beyond my/our sight, I/we do not despair, for I/we sense my/our beloved in my/our heart as a living presence. Sustained by faith, comforted by precious memories, I/we kindle the *yahrtzeit* light in remembrance. As this light burns pure and clear, so may the blessed memory of the goodness of my/our dear _____ illumine my/our soul.

(The *yahrtzeit* candle is now kindled)

For A Male

זְכוּרוֹנוֹ לְבִרְכָה - *Zich-ro-no li-v'ra-cha*

v'ra-cha

May his memory be a blessing

For a Female

זְכוּרוֹנָהּ לְבִרְכָה - *Zich-ro-nah li-*

May her memory be a blessing

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Preparing in Advance

Our tradition discourages making any kind of funeral arrangement in advance for another person, particularly when that person is ill. Though our tradition calls for a timely burial, there is always sufficient time to attend to all the necessary arrangements. However, our tradition permits an individual to make his/her own arrangements in advance of his/her own death. That is why many of our parents were able to purchase cemetery plots long before there was a need for them. Orlands, as well as most funeral homes, offers preplanning for funeral arrangements. A prearranged funeral specifies your wishes in advance, so your family will know your preferences when the time comes. If your family does own cemetery plots you should write the information about your cemetery plots here for easy retrieval:

Cemetery _____ Phone _____

Block _____ Section _____ Grave Numbers _____
Organization _____ Contact _____

Name of person who has rights to graves, if not you:

_____ Phone Number _____

There are other issues that should be addressed well in advance: living wills, health care proxies, powers-of-attorney, and organ donation registration. Some people will avoid dealing with any of these issues out of fear that doing so will bring on an untimely death. We urge you to think about these issues in advance. The following material is provided to help you.

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Organ Donation

According to Rabbi Elliot Dorff, the Vice-Chair of the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, “The overriding principles of honoring the dead and saving lives work in tandem. That is, saving a person’s life is so sacred a value in Judaism that if a person’s organ can be used to save someone else’s life, it is actually an honor to the deceased.” We strongly urge you to take the steps necessary to fulfill this important *mitzvah* of becoming an organ donor. To become an organ donor, there are three steps you must take: you must decide to become a donor, you must register your decision, and you must share your decisions and wishes with your family.

In making this decision, you should know that Judaism affirms saving a life as one of the very highest *mitzvot* we can perform. Organ donation is one of the ways you can fulfill the *mitzvah* of saving a life. There is no objection to organ donation throughout Judaism, with the exception of the most strident traditionalists (who, in the opinion of your Jewish Center clergy, are misinterpreting our values and traditions).

Aside from religious considerations, some people are fearful that, if they are registered organ donors, they will not receive the best medical treatment to save their own lives. Nothing is further from the truth. We strongly encourage you to decide to become an organ donor. Judaism affirms your choice and you will not be harmed in any way by your choice.

It is essential that you discuss this decision with your family. Your family will be consulted before the donation can take place. Even if you have signed your driver’s license and registered with the Organ and Tissue Donor Registry, your family can still veto your wishes. That is why you must tell your family you want to donate to save a life, so they can respect and carry out your wishes later by giving their consent to the donation.

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Family History

You should know the Hebrew names of your family members. Our clergy will need to know the Hebrew name of the deceased for the funeral service and to confirm the proper name on the monument.

Hebrew names are made up from a person's Hebrew given name and their parents' Hebrew given names. For instance, if your Hebrew given name is *Peloni*, your father's Hebrew given name is *Avraham* and your mother's Hebrew given name is *Sarah*, your Hebrew name would be *Peloni ben Avraham v' Sarah*. (Peloni son of Avraham and Sarah.) Similarly a woman would be *Pelonit bat Avraham v' Sarah*. (Pelonit daughter of Avraham and Sarah.)

If you do not know the Hebrew name of a family member, there are several ways to find it or figure it out. Yiddish was often used for Hebrew names instead of Hebrew. Sometimes the pronunciation of the names was inadvertently changed with the passage of time. Our clergy can help you sort this out, but you can begin the process by finding documents like a *ketubah* or *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* certificate, or a *Brit Milah* certificate.

You may wish to list Hebrew names for your family members here:

Person 1

Your Hebrew Name

Your Father's Hebrew Name

Your Mother's Hebrew Name

Person 2

Your Hebrew Name

Your Father's Hebrew Name

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Your Mother's Hebrew Name

Your Children's Hebrew Names

Your Siblings' Hebrew Names

Now is also a good time to begin collecting information about your family and its history. While family members are living, you can get together to create oral histories, special remembrances, that will be a wonderful heritage to pass on to your children and grandchildren. There are many genealogical software programs and sites on the Internet to assist you in researching your family history.

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Bibliography

Some suggested reading material about death and mourning in Jewish tradition

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, Maurice Lamm, Jonathan David Publishers, New York, 1969

A Time to Mourn – A Time to Comfort, The Art of Jewish Living Series, Dr. Ron Wolfson, A Project of the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs and the University of Judaism, New York, 1993

Jewish Insights into Death and Mourning, ed. by Jack Reimer, Schocken Books, New York, 1995

To Begin Again – The Journey toward Comfort, Strength and Faith in Difficult Times, Naomi Levy, Ballantine Books, New York, 1998

Making Loss Matter – Creating Meaning in Difficult Times, Rabbi David Wolpe, Riverhead Books, New York, 1999

Prayers of Consolation for the House of Mourning, Yahrzeit and Cemetery Visits, Prayer Book Press, Bridgeport, CT, 1984

Grief in Our Seasons – A Mourner’s Kaddish Companion, Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 1998

Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew, Anita Diamant, Schocken, New York, 1999

You can order these books through The Jewish Center’s special Amazon.com link at <http://tinyurl.com/2leexp>

In addition to this reading material, we encourage you to look for other resources widely available on the Internet. A search on the term “Jewish mourning” will yield a wide variety of resources.

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