

הג"מ HGSS

# Never Forgotten

A Jewish Guide to Death and Mourning:  
Customs and Halacha



חֶסֶד שֶׁל אֱמֶת

Chesed Shel Emet  
A True Act of Kindness

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Dedicated in loving memory of Shlomo ben Yosef Zvi and Shaina Rochal bat Zvi - The Coller Family

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“

*The dust returns to the  
dust as it was, but the spirit  
returns to G-d who gave it.*

”

*King Solomon, Kohelet*

This means that there is a part of  
man that is eternal, that lives beyond  
the lifetime of the physical body.

**Dear All,**

**This guide has been lovingly created to help you when you have lost a loved one.**

**We understand that each person has their own level of religious observance. However, there has been a noticeable absence of a comprehensive guide that provides information on Jewish traditions and the immediate processes following the loss of a beloved family member.**

**We hope that this helps you to find solace, and for you to use how you need.**

**We unfortunately experienced the loss our dearly beloved father John, who died prematurely aged 50 and of our remarkable mother Sylvia, who lived a long life devoted to her children. This booklet is dedicated in honour of both of their memories.**

**We sincerely thank Rabbi Marc Levene, Rebbetzen Lisa Levene and the community for their loyal and most careful consideration in compiling this booklet.**

**We wish you a long life and may your memories provide you with comfort in these difficult times.**

**With our best wishes,**

**Susan, Jeremy and Caroline Coller**

“

**There is a time for every  
experience under heaven.  
A time to be born and a time  
to die... A time to weep  
and a time to laugh.**

”

*King Solomon, Kohelet*

During such moments, we may encounter a wide range of emotions and sentiments that are often difficult to predict and articulate. As people of faith, we are taught to question everything we do and our purpose in this world. Yet no matter how much we want to understand and challenge ourselves to find the answers, we must recognise our limitations. Death is one significant area in which we cannot possibly hope to find those answers. Its secrets remain unrevealed – partly because we lack the benefit of personal testimony. And as it stands in mystery, it is combined with strong emotional responses and pain.

Quite often, a death can be sudden or there are other layers of complexity to consider. Nuances in families, sensitivities concerning some of the practices. Every situation is unique and personal.

Even with perspective, if the cycle of life happens in its right place and time, when one suffers a bereavement, it can be devastating. In the midst of the flurry of essential activities that need to be arranged, there is a system of Jewish law and customs that also falls into place. This special system is sensitive to the magnitude of feelings that a person can experience emotionally and spiritually, and offers a detailed, structured, meaningful approach for us and for the departed soul.

As a community, we try to support one another as we have done for thousands of years. In the following pages we hope to provide a simple guide for anyone who is going through a bereavement, based on the *minhagim*, customs we follow here in the UK within the United Synagogue. We hope to offer, not only practical information, but also an understanding as to why we do what we do.

This guide is not comprehensive. Depending on your situation, you may have specific questions or needs; indeed, you may find it difficult to follow a guidebook at all. Nothing replaces a conversation or words of comfort during a uniquely difficult situation. However, as with many aspects of life, there is much to digest. If you would like any further guidance and support, please ask the Rabbinic team who are here to support you in the best way we can.

May the Almighty only shower us all with blessings, including good friends and strong support during the hard times that we face. Please know we are here for you - and may you find comfort among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

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## Mourning: A Return to Life

Judaism sees the miracle and gift of life as something precious and holy, overflowing with almost limitless potential. In every human being, Judaism sees a capacity to choose and build a life of beauty, goodness, kindness and sanctity. Yet, the death of a loved one is devastating. For every mourner, to one degree or another, and for various periods of time, life in the face of loss seems almost unliveable. Death threatens to drain life of its beauty and vitality. Still, even on the brink of despair, there is nothing that Judaism embraces more than life itself.

Each stage of mourning serves the purpose of drawing one back from the brink and renewing one's ability to wholeheartedly engage the towering wonder of life.

[MyKaddish.com](http://MyKaddish.com)

”

**At life's closing moments there are some basic halachic observances and customs which we follow:**

1

## RECITE THE SHEMA

***As death nears for us, we recite the Shema and other verses affirming our belief and faith in G-d and G-d's Oneness.***

It helps remind us that the physical and spiritual world are connected, reiterating the premise that life is eternal and does not end. Anyone present should recite the Shema together with them. If someone is unconscious, those present should recite it on their behalf.

2

## THE VIDUI - CONFESSION

***The Vidui\*, confession, is the formal verbal acknowledgement of our mistakes and it is customary to recite it for those mistakes we have made over the course of our lives. Similarly, if there is anyone specific we feel we have wronged, if appropriate we try to seek forgiveness.***

Vidui is even recited on Shabbat and Yamim Tovim, festivals. It is customary to wash one's hands before its recitation. This should be done by pouring water from a cup three times over each hand alternately, beginning with the right hand. This is done out of respect for the mitzvah we are about to perform. Should a person be alert enough and not frightened by it, it is a mitzvah to help a person say this, in whatever language they understand. In doing so, we remind ourselves of the importance of our relationship with G-d above all else, prioritising it over our material possessions and accomplishments.

Even if it is not certain that death is imminent, Shema and Vidui are recited to give voice to the departing soul. This is just in case consciousness is lost or we are otherwise prevented from doing so closer to the time of death.

3

## WATCH OVER A PERSON

***It is a matter of the greatest respect to watch over a person as they pass from this world on to the next. Every effort is made that there be loved ones present, or even a caring stranger, so that no one leaves this world alone.***

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\* A copy of the Vidui, as found in the United Synagogue Authorised Prayer Book, can be found on the next two pages.



## וְדוּי שְׂכִיב מֵרַע

The following confession is said by one near death.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱ-לֹקֵי וַא-לֹקֵי אֲבוֹתַי, שְׂרַפּוֹאתַי  
וּמִיתַתַי בְּיָדְךָ. יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, שְׂתַרְפָּאֵנִי רַפּוּאָה  
שְׁלָמָה, וְאִם הַמּוֹת כָּלָה וְנִחְרַץ מֵעַמְךָ, אֶקְחֶנּוּ מִיָּדְךָ  
בְּאֵהָבָה. וְתִהְיֶה מִיתַתִּי כְּפָרָה עַל כָּל חַטָּאִים וְעוֹנוֹת  
וּפְשָׁעִים שְׂחַטְאֵתִי וְשַׁעוֹתַי וְשִׁפְשָׁעַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ. וְתִשְׁפִּיעַ  
לִי מֵרַב טוֹב הַצָּפוֹן לְצַדִּיקִים, וְתוֹדִיעֵנִי אֶרְחַח חַיִּים, שֶׁבַע  
שְׂמֻחוֹת אֶת-פָּנֶיךָ, נְעִימוֹת בִּימִינְךָ נֶצַח.

אָבִי יְתוּמִים, וְדִין אֲלֻמְנוֹת, הֲגֵן בְּעַד קְרוּבֵי הַיְקָרִים,  
אֲשֶׁר נִפְשֵׁי קְשׁוּרָה בְּנַפְשָׁם. בְּיָדְךָ אֶפְקִיד רוּחִי, פְּדִיתָה  
אוֹתִי יְהוָה אֵל אֱמֶת. אָמוֹן, וְאָמוֹן.

When the end is approaching, the following should be said:

Three times:

**ה' מְלֶכֶה, ה' מְלֶכֶה, ה' יְמִלֵךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד.**

Three times:

**בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד.**

## Confession on a Death Bed

The following confession is said by one near death.

**מוֹדָה אֲנִי** I acknowledge before You, Lord my G-d and G-d of my ancestors, that my cure and my death are in Your hands. May it be Your will to send me a perfect healing. Yet if my death is fully determined by You, I accept it in love at Your hand. May my death be an atonement for all the sins, iniquities and transgressions I have committed before You. Grant me of the great happiness that is stored up for the righteous. Make known to me the path of life, in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand bliss for evermore.

**אָבִי יְתוּמִים** Father of the fatherless and defender of the widow, protect my cherished family, whose souls are bound with mine. Into Your hand I entrust my spirit. May You redeem me, Lord, G-d of truth. Amen and Amen.

When the end is approaching, the following should be said:

Three times:

**The Lord is King, the Lord was King,  
and the Lord will be King for ever and ever.**

# At the Time of Death

The following words are said: **Baruch Dayan HaEmet, 'Blessed be the True Judge'**

The Talmud teaches us that just as we bless G-d for the good in our lives with *simcha*, joy, so too do we, with a full heart and mind, proactively bless G-d for the tragedy and challenges that we face.

Immediately following the moment of death, a series of practical and religious practices take effect. All of these rest on the following values:

- a) The respect, dignity and holiness of the body, the vessel for the soul.
- b) Expediting the return of the body to the earth, the place from which it was formed.
- c) Helping the soul continue its spiritual journey as smoothly and easily as possible.

## Close the eyes and cover the body

After death is established, the eyes and mouth of the deceased are closed and a sheet pulled over the face as a sign of respect.

## Open a window

To give the soul more comfort by offering it a 'point of exit'.

## Pour out any water

Any water that has been left uncovered (in drinking glasses, flower vases, jugs or sinks, etc) is thrown away.\*

## Light candles

There is also a custom, when possible, that candles are lit near the deceased. A spiritual reminder of the eternity of the soul.

## Lower the body to the floor

In situations where it is possible, the body is lowered to the floor to keep it cool, but also to remind us that the soul goes up. When lowering the body, forgiveness is asked of the deceased for any anguish caused to them while doing so. This is also the reason that we touch the body as little as possible.

\* This is due to the concept of *tuma*, spiritual impurity. Uncovered water takes on this status and is therefore thrown away. Understanding this concept in its entirety is beyond the scope of this booklet but more information can be found in Maurice Lamm's book, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*.

# Initial Practical Steps Following Death

**Coping with the loss of a loved one is undoubtedly the most challenging experience any of us will have to face. In the midst of grief, we are immediately faced with the need to manage the various processes that are required by both Jewish and English law.**

**We are detailing many halachic observances and customs, but it is very much up to each individual to be guided by their own level of observance in consultation with their own Rabbinic authority.**

If your loved one has passed away in a hospital, the hospital protocols will require the deceased to be taken to the safety of their mortuary within a designated time period. This is to grant the deceased greater dignity than being left on the ward. It is essential that the hospital authorities take your loved one away from the ward, to be kept in the safety of the hospital mortuary until such a time that the United Synagogue Burial Society are permitted to collect them into their care. Whilst traditionally the deceased should not be left alone, instead being accompanied by a loved one or someone from the Jewish community, this is not required within a hospital environment.

## Anticipating the loss of a loved one

If your loved one has passed away on a Shabbat/Jewish Festival, outside of regular office hours at home, or in a private nursing home without mortuary facilities, you may consider or request their relocation before the Burial Society can take charge of the situation. On Shabbat or Yom Tov a deceased loved one is not moved until Shabbat or Yom Tov is finished. There are various independent companies we would recommend who can help facilitate this request. Carmel Funeral Services, based in Stamford Hill, can be contacted on 020 8880 1655 and 07860 395 420. However this is an Orthodox company and not available to assist on Shabbat or Jewish Festivals.

Alternatively, for North West or Central London, please contact Macleans Funeral Services, 01923 894 116. For Essex or East London, please contact T Cribb and Sons, 020 7476 1855. Please note these are private companies and there is a charge for their services.

In the event that your loved one dies at home, until the Burial Society can collect them, either you or a relative should do the following: Cover the entire body of the deceased, including the face, with a sheet, close the eyelids gently, and ensure that you turn the heating off and open the windows. This is done out of utmost respect for our departed while we wait. If the wait will be longer than a few hours, speak to the Burial Society about any further measures that may be recommended.

The following is a guide written by the United Synagogue to help you through this time. Please be assured that both HGSS and the United Synagogue Burial Society are here to help you should you have any further questions.

1



**Contact the United Synagogue  
Burial Office – 020 8950 7767.**

Their office is staffed throughout the week and on Sunday mornings. There is also an out of hours service – details of which will be available on their answerphone message.

You may have to make a second call but there will always be someone to speak to.

2

Please also call the Synagogue Office 020 8455 8126, choosing option 1.



3

**Notify the Rabbi.** This is optional as the Burial Office will do this.

4

**Obtain a medical cause of death certificate from the doctor or hospital.**

This will be issued electronically and emailed directly to the registrar. Please ask if it can also be emailed to [bbo@usburial.org.uk](mailto:bbo@usburial.org.uk). The Burial Office will need to know the cause of death recorded.

5

**Call the Registrar for Births and Deaths in the vicinity where the death occurred,** who will make an

appointment with you to register the death. Please advise them that you are Jewish and require a quick funeral. If the appointment is to be delayed, request that the green certificate permitting a burial be issued in advance of the appointment and emailed to [bbo@usburial.org.uk](mailto:bbo@usburial.org.uk).

6

**Upon receipt of all the correct official documentation, the Burial Society will confirm a time for the funeral arrangements.**

7

**Funeral arrangements will then be confirmed by the Burial Office to the Rabbi and Synagogue Office who will assist with every aspect of the funeral and shiva, including providing shiva chairs and prayer books.**

Please note, the Rabbinic Team will be available throughout to support you and guide you through the arrangements for the funeral service and shiva.

8

**The Synagogue Office can send out a notification to all members to advise them of the bereavement and relevant arrangements.**

**Other useful numbers**



If you would like to reserve a grave in a specific area of one of the United Synagogue cemeteries, please contact the Burial Society on 020 8343 6283 to discuss the options available to you.

To arrange a stone setting, contact the Cemetery Maintenance Department.

They can be reached by calling 020 8950 7767 and selecting option 2.

## In the Presence of a Departed

“

*The Zohar says that just before death a person gets a preview of his portion in the soul world: “When a man is about to die, and judgement hovers about him so he would depart from the world, a supernal spirit is added to him that he did not have during his lifetime. When it hovers about him and cleaves to him, he is able to see what he never saw in his days, due to the additional spirit in him. When the spirit is added to him... his eyes are opened to the sight they have just seen...” (Zohar, VaYechi). In essence, at the moment of death, we catch a glimpse of G-d. The Torah teaches us that G-d decreed, “No man can see me and live.” (Exodus 33:20) That is the reason, many commentators suggest, that we are obligated to close the eyes of the deceased. The eyes that have now beheld G-d Himself must be shut off from any further contact with the mundane. And it is this momentary meeting that serves to give meaning to all of our lives. We suddenly grasp that everything we have ever done or said was in the presence of a Higher Power.*

*Rabbi Benjamin Blech*

”



**Psalms** The following psalms are customarily recited when a person dies.

### Psalm 23:

מְזוֹמֵר לְדוֹד  
 מְזוֹמֵר לְדוֹד ה' רֵעִי לֹא אֶחְסֵר  
 בְּנֵאוֹת דָּשָׁא יִרְבִּיעֲנִי, עַל-מִי מִנְחוֹת יִנְהַלְנִי:  
 נַפְשִׁי שׁוֹבֵב, יִנְחֵנִי בַמְעַגְלֵי-צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ  
 גַּם כִּי-אֵלֶּף בְּגִיֵּא צִלְמוֹת לֹא-אֵירָא רַע כִּי-אֲתָה  
 עִמָּדִי, שְׁבֹטֶךָ וּמַשְׁעֲנֶתְךָ הִמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי:  
 תַּעֲרֹף לִפְנֵי שַׁלְחֹן נֶגְד צַרְרֵי, דְשִׁנְתָּ בְשִׁמּוֹן רֹאשִׁי  
 כּוֹסֵי רוּחַ  
 אֵף טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָל-יְמֵי חַיִּי, וְשִׁבְתִּי  
 בְּבֵית-ה' לְאָרְךָ יְמֵים:

A song of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He causes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Even as I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You set a table before me in the presence of my adversaries; You anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows; May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days.

### Psalm 91:

יֵשֵׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצֵל שְׁדֵי יִתְלוֹנֵן:  
 אָמַר לֵה' מְחֹסֵי וּמְצוּדֹתַי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹטְחֵבּוֹ:  
 כִּי הוּא יִצְיִלְךָ מִפַּח יְקוֹשׁ מְדַבֵּר הוֹזוֹת:  
 בְּאֲבָרְתוֹ יִסֹּף לְךָ וְתַחַת-כַּנְפָּיו תִּחְסֶה צְנָה  
 וְסַחֲרָה אֲמַתּוֹ:  
 לֹא-תִירָא מִפַּחַד לְיָלֵה מִחַץ יַעֲוֶף יוֹמָם:  
 מְדַבֵּר בְּאִפְלֵ יְהִלְךָ מִקְטֵב יִשׁוּד צַהֲרִים:  
 יִפֹּל מִצִּדְּךָ אֵלֶיךָ וּרְבֵבָה מִיַּמִּינְךָ אֵלֶיךָ לֹא יָגֹשׁ:  
 רַק בְּעֵינֶיךָ תִּבְטֵחַ וְשִׁלְמַת רְשָׁעִים תִּרְאֶה:  
 כִּי-רִאֲתָהּ ה' מְחֹסֵי עֲלִיּוֹן שְׁמֵתָ מֵעוֹנֶךָ:  
 לֹא-תִאָּנֶה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה וְנִגַע לֹא-יִקְרַב בְּאֵהָלְךָ:  
 כִּי מִלְּאָקִוּ יִצְוֶה-לְךָ לְשִׁמְרוֹךָ בְּכֹל-דְרָכֶיךָ:  
 עַל-כַּפְּיִם יִשְׁאוּנֶךָ פְּרִתְגוֹף בְּאֲבָן רִגְלֶךָ:  
 עַל-שַׁחַל וּפְתוֹן תִּדְרֹף תִּרְמַס כְּפִיר וְחַנּוּן:  
 כִּי בִי חָשַׁק וְאַפְלֹטְהוּ אֲשׁוּבָהוּ כִּי-יַדַע שְׁמִי:  
 יִקְרָאנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ עִמּוֹ-אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה אֲחַלְצֶהוּ  
 וְאֲכַבְּדֶהוּ:  
 אֲרֹךְ יָמִים אֲשׁוּבִיעָהוּ וְאֲרָאֵהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי:  
 אֲרֹךְ יָמִים אֲשׁוּבִיעָהוּ וְאֲרָאֵהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי:

You who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Omnipotent, I say [to you] of the Lord who is my refuge and my stronghold, my G-d in Whom I trust, that He will save you from the ensnaring trap, from the destructive pestilence. With His wing He will cover you, and under His wings you will take refuge; His truth is an encompassing shield. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that prowls in the darkness, nor the destruction that ravages at noon. A thousand may fall at your [left] side, and ten thousand at your right, but it shall not reach you. You need only look with your eyes, and you will see the retribution of the wicked.

Because you [have said], "The Lord is my shelter," and you have made the Most High your haven, no evil will befall you, no plague will come near your tent. For He will instruct His angels on your behalf, to guard you in all your ways.

### Watching over the body

Where possible, someone should remain with the body until the funeral. This is known as *shemira*, guarding. Those accorded this honour to the deceased should recite prayers or Psalms, as this brings comfort to the soul of the deceased.

### The role of the Burial Society

They will arrange for the *Taharah*, ritual washing, before burial by a group of volunteer men or women, as appropriate, called the *Chevra Kadisha*. It is their responsibility to clean the deceased, to clothe them in funeral shrouds, treating the deceased with the highest degree of dignity and sanctity.

**No autopsy should be performed (except when required by civil authorities under special circumstances) and the body should not be embalmed, displayed or cremated. We treat every single body with the utmost respect in Jewish law due to the belief in respecting the human body, which is considered to be created in the image of G-d.**

This is done to avoid causing harm to the body and anguish to the soul. We are fortunate that the United Synagogue Burial Office collaborates with the University of Oxford when feasible, allowing for a non-invasive scan that facilitates investigation without the necessity of physical interference with the body.

Organ donation is permitted according to Jewish law, but only under the appropriate and correct halachic circumstances. One cannot take an organ or any part of a person's body that will, in doing so, end or shorten a life. As a result, it becomes complicated to broadly endorse organ

donation without individually discussing each and every case and situation with Rabbinic guidance.

**Jewish law teaches us that no mitzvot should be performed in the presence of the deceased.**

After the person has passed away, the body, which was their vessel and housed their soul, is treated with honour and respect. Therefore, anyone in the presence of the deceased acts with the same respect and reverence that they would show for the person when alive. The departing soul is aware of what is going on. It may be out of its body, but it is very much present. For this reason, we do not eat or drink or fulfil any mitzvot in front of them since they are now incapable of doing the same. Although the body may not know or care, the soul does.

If you are a Cohen you are prohibited from being in contact with a dead body and therefore should leave the room. This law applies in all cases, unless the deceased was a close relative, in which case a Cohen is allowed to be with the body. Close relative is defined as someone who will sit shiva for the deceased, i.e. parents, siblings, children and spouse (see page 26).

“

***A newborn is cleaned and washed when it enters the world. And so it is when a person leaves the world. After all, the soul is about to be reborn in a new spiritual world. We also believe that eventually the body will be resurrected in this world. A Taharah is performed by members of the Chevra Kadisha (Holy Society). This is a complete cleansing and dressing of the body, performed according to Jewish law and custom.***

*National Association of Chevra Kadisha*

”



“

*Judaism regards burial procedures, for the most part, as devoted to the respect, honour, and endearment of the deceased... The Sages wisely noted that one cannot and should not comfort the mourners while their dead lie before them. Comfort and relief come later, after funeral and burial arrangements have been completed and the dead have been interred. Until that time, the deceased remains the centre of concern. Their honour and integrity are of primary importance.*

*Rabbi Maurice Lamm,  
The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*

”

## Aninut: Before Burial

“

*When a person dies, the neshama, soul hovers around the body. This neshama is the essence of the person, the consciousness and totality.*

*The thoughts, deeds, experiences and relationships. The body was its container while it lasted, and the neshama, now on the way to the eternal world, refuses to leave until the body is buried. In effect, the totality of the person who died continues to exist for a while in the vicinity of the body. A Jewish funeral is therefore concerned with the feelings of the deceased, and not only those of the mourners. How we treat the body and how we behave around the body must reflect how we would act around that person at this crucial moment.*

*Based on teachings of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan*

”

# The Laws of the Onen

**These laws and customs apply to any mourner immediately after death who has lost any of the following relatives: mother, father, sister, brother, daughter, son and spouse.**

The deep sorrow we may feel at this time is referred to as *'aninut'* and is the name assigned to this period of mourning in which we now find ourselves, between death and burial. As individuals we are referred to as an *'onen'*.

The laws of an onen are suspended on Shabbat but the restrictions marked with an asterisk (below) would still apply.

Often this time is emotionally intense, balancing loss with the practical, logistical elements that are necessary to ensure and facilitate a quick burial for our loved ones.

*"The dust returns to the dust as it was, but the spirit returns to G-d Who gave it." (Kohélet).* This means that there is a part of man that is eternal, that lives beyond the lifetime of the physical body.

But just as we, as family members, face a very difficult time; so does the deceased. According to the spiritual traditions, the soul does not completely leave this world until after burial. The period between death and burial is very confusing for the soul, as it is in a vulnerable, transitory state, disconnected from both the past and the future, which is why we ensure a burial is carried out as quickly as possible.

**NOTE:** If an onen is in the Synagogue on Friday night, they remain in the service for the Kabbalat Shabbat service and are not required to leave, as they are during the the shiva.

## According to Jewish Law, restrictions include:



- **Greeting** other people
- **Eating meat** or **drinking wine**
- **Washing our hands** or face with warm water
- **Praying** or saying blessings
- **Wearing fresh clothes**
- **Looking in a mirror**
- **Wearing leather shoes**
- **Marital relations\***
- **Going to work**
- **Studying Torah**, except laws of mourning\*
- Taking a **shower** or **bath**
- **Applying cosmetics**, perfumes, etc.
- **Having a haircut** or shaving
- **Cutting nails**
- **Washing clothes**
- **Wearing tefillin**

## Preparing for the funeral

### 1. If one wishes to speak personally at the funeral, focus should turn to preparing a eulogy

This is known as a *hesped*, the words that will be spoken at the funeral about your loved one. It is important to consider that the soul of your loved one will be among those listening, as the departing soul separates gradually and hovers over the body.

***Preparation of a eulogy is part of our obligation to honour the person who has died. "Everything that is said before the dead is known to him..." (Shabbat 152b)***

### 2. Wear an item of clothing at the funeral that can be torn

At the funeral, *kriah*, tearing, will take place on a garment of choice. This will be facilitated by the Rabbi or a member of the Chevra Kadisha, who will guide you as to how this is done at the burial grounds. This torn item is then worn throughout the shiva, except on Shabbat. Most people choose items that are not new and outer garments such as a suit jacket, cardigan, jumper, shirt or blouse. We do not cut ties and scarves, only items we wear on our body and those nearest our hearts.

It is important to note that it is not customary for mourners to wear black at funerals or during shiva but rather dress modestly with suitable head coverings, for both men and women, as expected when visiting a synagogue.

### 3. Contact the Synagogue Office for help and guidance in arranging services during the week of shiva

If you are unable to have prayers in the shiva house, *aveilim*, mourners can attend Synagogue services, but we recommend checking times and availability beforehand.

### 4. Prepare the shiva house

- During shiva week, cover the mirrors that you usually pass by and use. The covers may be removed for Shabbat. Computer and television screens do not need covering. Certain reasons are cited for this custom:
  - A mirror helps us to enhance our appearance, but since this is a time to reflect on our personal loss, covering the mirrors symbolises our withdrawal from the community.
  - Prayer services, commonly held in the shiva house, cannot take place in front of a mirror, just like any time we pray, our focus should be on G-d and not on ourselves.
  - During shiva, a mourner strives to ignore their own physicality and vanity and direct attention to their soul and the true reality of life.
  - Physical relations between a husband and wife are suspended during the week of shiva, and therefore objects that promote this preoccupation for physical beauty remain forbidden.

- Have a candle burning throughout the shiva: it can be a seven-day candle, day, or one-day candle, whichever is easiest. These can often be bought at kosher food shops and/or bookstores.
- Prepare two candles in candlesticks to be lit during each prayer service held at the shiva house. Shacharit (morning prayers), Mincha (afternoon prayers) and Maariv (evening prayers). This is based on the ancient tradition of lighting candles every time Tefillah, prayer, was recited..
- Ensure you have non-leather footwear to put on after the funeral – leather footwear is considered a sign of luxury. These or other non-leather footwear should be worn throughout the shiva
- Ensure you have enough low chairs for all the mourners. Please contact the Synagogue Office or the Rabbinic team for more information.
- Refreshments are generally only offered to those visitors who have come a long distance.
- In the shiva house, display the following

verse for those who wish to say it. Please note that the Synagogue Office can provide this information on a card:

הַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר  
אֲבֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

May the Omnipresent comfort you among the rest of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. (See page 44 for the reason we say this.)

- Communicate visiting hours with the community and on the door. It is strongly recommended that you set aside a rest time during the day and a time after which you do not want to receive visitors.
- Ask someone to help arrange chairs, clean up, accept deliveries etc.
- Put up pictures of the deceased.

## 5. Practise the Kaddish

As the Kaddish is written in Aramaic, mourners might find it helpful to practise it in advance of the funeral.

“

***It is an ancient Jewish tradition that mourners, during shiva, do not sit upon chairs of normal height. Until modern times it was the custom to be seated on the earth itself, a procedure which demonstrated the departure from normalcy during the early stages of bereavement. Thus, expression was given to the sense of loneliness and depression one felt after one's relative was interred in the very earth on which he sat. The Bible tells us that when Job suffered a succession of disasters he was comforted by friends who sat with him 'to the earth.' It is, almost in a literal sense, a physical adjustment to one's emotional state, a lowering of the body to the level of one's feelings, a symbolic enactment of remorse and desolation.***

*Rabbi Maurice Lamm*

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## Burial: What to Expect

“

**Anyone dealing with a dead body must know that he is dealing with a sacred object: the body of a person is not simply a container for holiness that served the holy soul, rather it itself became sacred ... similar to a Torah scroll. During the life of a person, while his soul ... is in it, [the body] is called a living Torah scroll. (It is important a person not forget this, and be careful with his Torah scroll and those of his friends.) And so, one who witnesses the moment of death of a person it is as if he is watching a Torah scroll burn.**

*Rabbi Tucazinsky, Gesher HaChaim, 1:65*

”

Burial is a mitzvah. The source for this comes from the Torah, where G-d tells Adam: “You will return to the ground, for it was from the ground that you were taken.” (*Genesis/ Deuteronomy 3:19*) This is reiterated in Deuteronomy 21:23 which insists on burial directly into the ground. The body is treated with great respect since it is through the vessel of the physical body that we have fulfilled our mission in life. It is more than a physical shell; it is a vehicle of holiness.

Burial allows the soul the time to slowly depart from the body and to become accustomed to its new place. This process of decomposing is crucial, which is why Jewish Law forbids embalming or burial in a cement mausoleum, which would delay the process, and one of the many reasons that we are buried in a wooden casket - to facilitate a quicker decomposition. Jewish Law dictates that burial take place as soon as possible after death, in Israel this is often on the same day as the death. This is done for the benefit of the soul. As the Talmud says, “Burial is not for the sake of the living, but rather for the dead” (*Sanhedrin 47a*).

Burial of the body is likened to planting a seed in the ground. A seed is planted and then one waits for it to sprout and bloom. So too, we plant our bodies in the earth (the most humble of all elements) as a *tikkun*, fixing and so that we can await the resurrection in the future, when the purified body and soul will come back together for all eternity.

# The Order of the Burial Service

“

**The body is to be treated with great respect because it is through the vessel of the physical body that we have fulfilled our mission in life. The body is thus more than just a physical shell; it is a holy instrument.**

*Rabbi Shraga Simmons*

”

After the body has been washed and prepared for burial by the Chevra Kadisha, it is placed in simple white garments and put into a closed coffin. This ensures that loved ones are left with memories focused solely on the vitality of the person who contributed so much to their lives, without any distracting memories.

*"The neshama, soul is about to face its final Judgement Day. For this, clothes no longer matter, it is good deeds that count. That is why every Jew is buried exactly alike. In a handmade, simple, perfectly clean, white linen shroud which includes a white linen hat, shirt, trousers, coat and belt. In addition, men are dressed in a tallit, prayer shawl. The shrouds have no pockets, to accentuate the fact that no worldly belongings accompany them. The shrouds are modelled after the white uniform worn by the High Priest in the Holy Temple on Yom Kippur when he stood before G-d asking for the needs of his family and the entire Jewish People. These shrouds are therefore especially appropriate because each and every neshama, soul asks for the needs of his or her family on the final Judgement Day." (National Association of Chevra Kadisha)*

Before the burial takes place, it is the United Synagogue's custom that the family is invited into a hall to spend a few minutes alone with the deceased.

The coffin is closed and covered in a large blue shroud with the Star of David on it. Details including the name and Hebrew name are checked by the Chevra Kadisha and *kriah*, cutting the garments, is performed.

**Kriah** – A cut is made (around four inches) on the left side of the clothing if a parent has died and on the right side for all other relatives.

The purpose of this is not to allow physical release, or to tear something as a sign of anger, but rather to remember the relationship between body and soul, which symbolically parallels the connection between our garments and body. Our clothes cover us, they are not our essence or our identity. If a garment we wear gets ripped, it does not actually affect us. Our true selves remain intact. Similarly, our bodies are the 'garments' of our soul, external, independent of the other. Death is considered the removing of our outer garment. *Kriah*, tearing reaffirms that as painful as the loss of our loved one may be, we can take comfort in knowing that 'ripping of the garment' has not affected the actual person, their soul still lives on.

The Rabbi will make a cut in the clothing (a woman is asked to cut for a female mourner), then the mourner will use both hands to make the tear themselves.

Once *kriah* is completed, the mourners will make the following blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, דֵּין הָאֱמֶת

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, the True Judge.

Once the family is ready, guests are invited into the prayer hall for the service. This takes place in three parts: the prayers before the burial; the burial itself; and finally the memorial prayers, kaddish and the first moments of the shiva period.

The prayers are mainly known as *Tziduk haDin* which opens with:

הַצּוֹר תָּמִים פִּעְלוֹ. כִּי כָל-דְּרָכָיו  
מִשְׁפָּט א-ל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עוֹל צְדִיק  
וְיֵשֶׁר הוּא.

The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a faithful G-d who does no wrong; righteous and fair is He.

This is another reminder to ourselves of

G-d's righteous judgement. On days where *tachanun*<sup>1</sup> is not recited, these prayers are replaced with Psalm 16. King David was more gentle in this Psalm, describing our duty to recognise G-d more as an overview, which is more appropriate for happier times.

Once these prayers have concluded, *hespedim*, eulogies are given. We speak about the attributes of the person whom we have lost and how they impacted this world. The coffin is then moved from the prayer hall and we follow, accompanying the deceased to their final resting place.

If a person passes away during a Jewish holiday, the burial and shiva happen when the holiday is complete. If one passes away on Shabbat, the burial happens the next day. If there is a burial during Chol Hamoed, then the shiva does not commence until the festival has concluded.

<sup>1</sup> *Tachanun* is said after the morning and afternoon weekday Amida is recited. It is a personal request for forgiveness, also referred to as 'nefilat apayim', 'falling on the face'. We are taught that this is a prayer of high intensity and allows us to literally "fall on our faces", expressing our unique closeness to G-d. We learn that by placing our head upon our arm in a form of submissive prayer, we are more likely to have our prayers answered and accepted for the good. (Bava Metzia 59a)

“

**We need to be reminded that our lives are important. That we will be remembered. That the world will take note, in some way, that we lived. That we died. That our lives had meaning. Throughout history, graves and tombstones have provided a unique and powerful message that our lives mattered. A burial plot provides this witness. The person lived, loved, tried his best – and returned to his Maker.**

**Doron Kornbluth, Cremation or Burial – A Jewish View**

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On entering the cemetery, the following blessing is recited if one has not visited a cemetery for 30 days:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין וְזָן  
וְכִלְכַּל אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין וְהִמִּית אֶתְכֶם  
בְּדִין וְיֹדַע מִסְפָּר כָּלְכֶם בְּדִין  
וְעֵתִיד לְהַחְזִיר וּלְהַחְיֹתְכֶם בְּדִין.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים

**"Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who, with judgement, formed you, nourished and sustained you, has taken your lives in judgement, knows the measure of you all and, in the future, will restore you to life. Blessed are You, G-d, who revives the dead."**

As we walk, we recite Psalm 91 three times. These verses emphasise G-d's support for the *neshama*, soul of our loved ones, and His ongoing comfort for us. Similarly, we are taught that it offers personal protection for those of us accompanying the body. As everyone escorts the coffin, the mitzvah of *Levayat HaMet*, accompanying the body, is performed. It is customary to make three short pauses to help us reflect on the fragility of life.

The coffin is lowered into the ground and people are invited to place earth in the grave. It is customary at some Jewish funerals for the reverse side of the shovel

to be used when depositing earth on the coffin. This is to indicate our immense sadness at performing such a task, and by using the reverse side, we make the process much harder, an outward expression of our reluctance in performing this mitzvah. It is also the custom to insert the shovel in the ground before the subsequent person picks it up, to indicate an unfamiliarity with the upsetting task of burial.

The Jewish custom is not to bring flowers to the grave, but instead to place a simple stone on the earth itself. The Hebrew word for stone is *tzur*. This word is also used to refer to G-d. At this time, we remind ourselves that G-d is our rock, our strength and support. He is our one constant, always there to comfort us at our darkest times. The small, simple stone acts as a symbol of eternity placed to last for all time, representing our eternal devotion to upholding the memory of our loved one. It also acts as a physical reminder that our loved ones themselves are eternal – their legacy, qualities, deeds and characteristics live on. Similarly, the rock is generally round, reminiscent of our lives being circular.

## Kaddish Prayer

After the burial has taken place, we return to the prayer hall - firstly we wash our hands, starting on the right and pouring three times over each hand, a total of six times. In the hall, we recite Psalm 91, followed by Kaddish.

There are several versions of Kaddish, with each playing a particular role. At this time, there is a special Kaddish that is only recited by children at the funeral of a parent. No one else recites this Kaddish and it is not said when tachanun is not recited.

**Mourners** יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. (אמן Cong) בעלמא  
 די הוא עתיד לאתחדתא ולאחיאה מתיא ולאסקא יתהון  
 לחיי עלמא. ולמבנא קרתא דירושלם ולשכלל היכלה  
 בגויה. ולמעקר פלחנא נכראה מארעא ולאטבא פלחנא  
 די שמיא לאתרה. וימלך קדשא בריה הוא במלכותה  
 ויקרה בחייכון וביומיכון ובחיי די כל בית ישראל בעגלא  
 ובזמן קריב, ואמרו אמן. (אמן Cong)

**All & Mourners** יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא.

**Mourners** יתברך וישתבח ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא  
 ויתגדל ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה די קדשא בריה הוא  
 (בריה הוא Cong) לעלא (לעלא Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)  
 מן כל ברכתא ושירתא תשבחתא ונחמתא, די אמירן  
 בעלמא. ואמרו אמן. (אמן Cong)

יהא שלמא רבא מן שמיא, וחיים עלינו ועל כל ישראל.  
 ואמרו אמן. (אמן Cong)

Bow, take three steps back, then bow, first left,  
 then right, then centre, while saying:

עשה שלום במרומוי, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו, ועל כל  
 ישראל, ואמרו אמן. (אמן Cong)

**Mourners** *Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mey rabbah, (Cong. Amen) b'al'mah dee hu atid le-it-chadata, ul'achaya'ah meytaya, ulasaka yat-hon lechayey al'ma, ulmivney karta dee-roosh'ley, ulshachleyl heychley begavah, ulmekar polchana nuchra-a mey'ara, v'la-atava polchana dee-shmaya l'atrey v'yimlach kudsha berich hu b'malchutey vee-karey, b'chayeychon uwyomechon, uvechayey dee chol beit yisrael, ba'agal-a uvizman kareev v'imru Amen. (Cong. Amen)*

**All & Mourners** *Y'hey sh'mey rabbah m'varach  
L'alam ulal'mey al'my-ah.*

*Yitbarach v'yishtabach, v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasseh, v'yit-hadar v'yit-aleh v'yit-hallal, sh'mey dee kudshah, b'reech hu. (Cong. b'reech hu) l'eylah (Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: L'eylah l'eylah) min kol birchatah v'shiratah, tush-b'chatah v'nechematah, dee'amiran b'al'mah, v'imru Amen. (Cong. Amen)*

*Y'hey sh'lamah rabbah min sh'mayah, V'cha-yim aleynu v'al kol yisra-el, V'imru Amen. (Cong. Amen)*

Bow, take three steps back, then bow, first left, then right, then centre, while saying:

*Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu ya-aseh shalom, Aleynu v'al kol yisra-el, V'imru Amen (Cong. Amen)*

At the conclusion of this Kaddish, the memorial prayer is said, followed by the regular mourners' Kaddish for all the mourners present.

The funeral service concludes in one of two ways. Either, the mourners can sit on low chairs and people come to pay their respects. Alternatively, a *shura* is performed, where

two rows of people are lined up opposite each other, and the mourners walk down the row, out of the prayer hall, signifying the start of their shiva week. This is a matter of personal preference and also something that you will be guided on based on the custom of the burial grounds, and the number of people etc.

## Shiva: The Week After Burial

**Although one may sit *shiva* wherever convenient, it is preferable to do so in the home where the departed lived or died.**

“

*Every situation is unique and personal. As Jews we have the gift of a faith that provides us with clear guidelines during these moments to guide us through the complex maze of emotions that we may feel. This will not take away the pain in our hearts, but will allow us to express it in a way that enforces the respect and love we have for those whom we have lost.*

*Rabbi Marc and Lisa Levene*

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The seven-day period of mourning begins immediately after the burial. Since the Jewish day starts at night after sunset, if the funeral was on a Monday, the shiva period is observed up to and including the following Sunday morning. If a Jewish holiday (for example, Rosh Hashana) falls during the seven days, shiva ends the afternoon just prior to the holiday. In such a case, it is considered that you mourned for seven days, even though it was cut short. Please contact a member of the Rabbinic team if you need help working out the exact timing.

The first thing the mourners do upon entering the shiva house is sit on a low seat to eat a 'meal of condolence.' This meal should be provided for them, in order to show the mourners that those around them wish to provide support and consolation.

Another, deeper psychological reason is also cited by our Rabbis for this custom. Having just returned from the heavy trauma of the burial, some might suffer feelings of isolation and may not want to continue living without their loved one. The meal they eat

speaks to that part of them and says, "Now you must continue a new chapter in your life, affirm life and live."

**The meal of condolence is customarily eaten silently and includes foods that are usually round, symbolic of the cycle of life:**



- **Bread** – considered the sustenance of life – often a bagel
- **Hard-boiled eggs**
- **Cooked vegetables** and/or lentils

A memorial candle is lit and kept burning for the entire *shiva* period. Some have the custom to continue this through the whole year for parents – a physical reminder of the eternity of the soul. Just like the light they brought into the world lives on, so too do they. For a more detailed understanding, please see page 37.

Ideally, meals for the rest of the *shiva* period should be brought by others. The mourner always eats sitting on a low chair.

### According to Jewish Law, restrictions during shiva include:



- **Greeting** other people, but one may choose to respond if greeted
- **Sitting on a chair** higher than 12 inches from the ground (except on Shabbat)
- **Bathing** or showering for pleasure
- **Applying cosmetics**, perfumes, etc.
- **Getting a haircut** or shaving
- **Cutting nails**
- **Wearing new clothing** (even on Shabbat)
- **Washing clothes** (even if they are washed by someone else)
- **Wearing freshly laundered clothing.** On Shabbat one should not wear finest or new clothing. One may wear freshly laundered underwear/socks
- **Wearing shoes that contain leather** or suede unless worn for health reasons (except on Shabbat)
- **Wearing jewellery** other than a wedding ring for a woman (except on Shabbat)
- **Intimate contact** with one's spouse
- **Studying Torah**, other than topics of mourning
- **Conducting any business** or work
- **Listening to music**
- **Leaving the home** unnecessarily

signs of mourning, therefore mourners do not wear torn clothing or non-leather shoes. Instead, normal Shabbat clothes and shoes are worn. If the *aveilim*, mourners are in the synagogue on Friday night, they do not remain in the service for the Kabbalat Shabbat section. This is because these prayers are considered a joyful and celebratory service that marks the welcoming of Shabbat. Due to the custom of refraining from active participation in such activities, mourners leave after Mincha. They are invited to re-enter at the end of Lecha Dodi, at which time the traditional words are recited:

הַמָּקוֹם יִנַּחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שָׂרָר  
אֲבֵלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

### The end of the shiva period

There are many different customs associated with marking the end of *shiva*. The seventh and final day of *shiva* is observed for only a few short hours, although this counts as a whole day. After the last *Shacharit*, morning service, the mourners sit low again for a short time. The mourners acknowledge that the *shiva* is over by leaving the *shiva* house publicly for the first time, taking a short walk around the block with those who have come to comfort them. This is a physical expression of a personal transition, from the depths of our grief to our normal everyday lives.

The completion of a *shiva* does not need a Rabbi. Some may want a ceremonial tone and others may prefer not.

**NOTE:** On Shabbat we do not show public

After the period of shiva has ended it is advisable to **contact the Burial Office and arrange a stone setting**. The place of burial provides a very powerful and unique message, a testimony that this was someone who lived, loved, contributed, tried their best and returned to their Maker.



# Shloshim: Thirty Days After Burial

**These laws and customs apply to anyone who has lost any of the following relatives: mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter or spouse.**

Thirty days mark the lunar cycle. Thirty days enable us to emotionally come full circle, a time to review and start to consider a new reality. We count thirty days from the day of the funeral, that being day number one, and on the thirtieth morning ends the shloshim period.

## According to Jewish Law, restrictions include:



- **Bathing** or showering for pleasure
- **Applying cosmetics**, perfumes, etc.
- **Getting a haircut** or shaving
- **Cutting nails**
- **Purchasing** (for oneself) or wearing **new clothing**
- **Wearing freshly laundered clothing** besides garments next to the skin, such as underwear, socks, vests, and shirts (except on Shabbat)
- **Purchasing** or renting a home, unless a significant loss would otherwise be incurred
- **Sitting** in or near your usual seat in the synagogue (some do sit in their their regular seats on Shabbat and Yom Tov)
- **Listening** to music
- **Attending any simcha**, joyful occasion, or social gathering, but for family events, one should consult a member of the Rabbinic team

**NOTE:** Yom Tov will mark the early completion of the laws of Shloshim



*One of the reasons why Yom Tov marks the early completion of the laws of shiva and shloshim is because the lessons and insights that Yom Tov comes to teach us, that Hashem loves us and everything He does is for the best, even if we don't understand the reasons why, is the same message that shiva would have taught us. However hard for us to digest at this time, Yom Tov overrides any outward manifestations of mourning.*

*Rabbi Mordechai Cohen*



**The end of shloshim marks the end of the formal mourning period for the loss of a sibling, child or spouse.**

# Twelve Months After Burial

**These laws and customs apply ONLY for the loss of a mother or father.**

Since Judaism understands and appreciates the psychological necessity to grieve, there are certain actions that are considered outward manifestations of mourning. For each mourner, it is a personal journey, but one thing in common is the feeling of loss. These restrictions are not exhaustive but examples that are observed to support each person through their year of grief. One should be encouraged to consult with their own Rabbinic team to help navigate their own personal circumstances.

**According to Jewish Law, restrictions include:**



- **Purchasing** (for oneself) or wearing **new clothing**
- **Purchasing** or renting **a home**, unless a significant loss would otherwise be incurred
- **Sitting** in or near one's usual seat in the synagogue
- **Listening to music** and going to the theatre and concerts
- **Attending a simcha**, joyful occasion or social gathering

## Yizkor

For centuries, Ashkenazi Jewry has maintained the custom of recalling the souls of our loved ones and giving charity in their memory in a service called Yizkor. Yizkor is recited four times a year, on Yom Kippur, Shmini Atzeret, the last day of Pesach and the last day of Shavuot. It is a way for us to elevate the soul of our loved ones as we recite the prayers and perform this mitzvah in their memory.

Yizkor is most commonly recited on behalf of a lost parent, additionally it may be recited for others who passed away. However, if a person has never sat shiva before, some have the custom to leave the synagogue during the Yizkor service. If there is no minyan available, Yizkor may be recited without. The evening before Yizkor is said, those who will say it should light a candle in memory of the departed.

There are varying customs for those in their year of mourning; some have the practice not to attend Yizkor during this year. It would appear the custom to attend is also valid and one should not feel pressured either way. Yizkor is also said for siblings/children/spouses and even grandparents. The candle is lit the night before, as this is when the Jewish day begins, just like Shabbat.

Sephardic communities do not maintain the tradition of reciting Yizkor, but instead mention the loss of their loved ones after being called up to the Torah.



# Stonesetting

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The stonessetting gives honour to the body that housed the soul. In Hebrew, the ceremony is called *Hakamat Matzeivah*, raising up the stone. In English it is referred to as the stonessetting or the unveiling, the formal dedication of the stone. This is a longstanding custom that dates back to Biblical times.

In United Synagogue cemeteries, it is customary to engrave the name of the person and their date of death, both in Hebrew and English. Beyond that, many also add the names of loved ones, personal attributes and scriptural verses to enhance the beauty and meaning of the stone.

As soon as the shiva has ended, it is recommended to book the stonessetting, especially if you are looking to hold the service on a Sunday. It is our recommendation that it should take place within the first year after the passing of a loved one and usually planned for a time when close family can attend.

There are times that are generally not appropriate for visiting the cemetery, such as festive periods, Yamim Tovim, holidays and Rosh Chodesh, but the actual date set for the stonessetting is flexible and often selected at a time that is based on personal preferences.

**Booking is through the Burial Society - 020 8950 7767 option 2. Mourners should also check with the Rabbi/Synagogue Office to book someone to officiate.**

The Burial Society have a list of approved stonemasons. Please feel free to see the US website for more information [theus.org.uk/burial](http://theus.org.uk/burial).

If desired, the date of the stonessetting should be shared in advance to family, friends and members of the community.

There are a variety of specific customs that take place around the gravesite to honour our loved one as we formally dedicate the place where they have been laid to rest. It is a time for the family and friends to comfort each other and remember their loved one.





Upon arrival at the cemetery the following usually takes place in the hall:

1. Readings from the Book of Psalms and others prayers.
2. A eulogy from either a Rabbi, member of family or friend. Please note, if anyone speaking at the stonsetting did not personally know the departed, it is advisable to discuss and share the goals and relevant aspects of their life with the speaker. This helps to provide a more accurate and reflective portrayal of who the person was.
3. Recitation of Kaddish, which requires a *minyán*, ten men (over the age of Bar Mitzvah).

Everyone is then invited to go to the graveside where the stone is formally dedicated by the reading of the inscription, followed by the 'Keil Malei Rachamim' memorial prayer and the final recitation of Kaddish. This marks the conclusion of the service.

As mentioned earlier, before leaving the grave there is an ancient and widely-preserved custom of placing a small stone on the grave.

Although a person can visit a cemetery any time after the stonsetting, there are special

days that are particularly appropriate for visiting our loves ones. These are usually reflective times when we can ask our loved ones for help and to be an advocate on our behalf, remembering always that we are praying to G-d through them.

Other customary times to visit include:

- On the completion of the first 12 months of mourning
- On the *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death, every year
- The days leading up to the High Holy Days
- Some have the custom to visit their loved one to "invite" them to upcoming family celebrations



# Yahrzeit: Memorial Anniversary

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“

***Every righteous man is given a dwelling in the World to Come according to his merit, and this is like a king with his servants entering a city. They all enter through one gate, but when night comes, every man is given a room in accordance with his rank.***

*Talmud Shabbat*

”

A *yahrzeit*, Yiddish for ‘anniversary of death’ is a commemorative day. A day to contemplate the life, legacy and lessons of the person who died. It may be observed for a relative or friend but primarily is for parents. There are many customs of observance, which take place at home, at Synagogue or at the cemetery. These may include:

## 1. Lighting a *yahrzeit* candle

A *yahrzeit* candle should be lit at nightfall or before regular candle lighting if before Shabbat or Yom Tov. It is customary to allow the lights to burn out by themselves. For more details on this please see page 38.

## 2. Attendance at Synagogue

At Synagogue, *kiddushim* are often sponsored or a light *l’chaim* shared. For men, sometimes an *aliyah*, a Torah honour is given and if able, men often lead the synagogue services. *Kaddish*,

if said, is also recited at every service. There is no pressure to do this if you feel uncomfortable.

## 3. Visiting the grave

It is customary to visit the grave annually on the *yahrzeit*.

## 4. Torah study and charity

Many have the custom to give *tzedaka*, (charity) and learn Torah on behalf of the deceased.

## 5. Fasting

Some have the custom to fast on the *yahrzeit* of parents, if it does not fall on Shabbat or a Jewish Holiday. The fast begins at sunrise and ends at nightfall. If one does not fast, some have the custom to avoid eating meat and drinking wine.

# A Deeper Look into Loss, Mourning and Bereavement

## Understanding Kaddish

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ  
לְעָלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵיָא

**Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varakh  
l'alam ul'al'mei al'maya**

When we live in this world, we can always grow, change, improve and perform *mitzvot*, commandments. After death, this opportunity has passed. We rely on others to elevate our soul through actions and words.

Kaddish is one way of doing this, as well as Torah study, giving charity and performing acts of kindness in the memory of our loved ones.

The Kaddish, literally meaning sanctification, is a communal prayer that affirms our faith in G-d. When a mourner publicly inspires other Jews to affirm their faith in G-d, this greatly benefits the soul of our loved ones. It is a prayer for the living. Our great Rabbis in their heightened sensitivity and knowledge understood that often in the face of death we are likely to deny the existence of G-d. We recite Kaddish to reaffirm our belief in Him. It allows us to express our feelings of loss and our hope for the future.

Since Kaddish is a communal prayer of public sanctity, it requires a minyan for it to be said, but it can be recited by any mourners who wish to, be they men, women or children.

This phrase

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵיָא is considered the nucleus of Kaddish. Seven words, comprised of 28 letters. We are taught that the 28 letters of this phrase correspond to the numerical value of the Hebrew word 'koach', meaning 'strength'. Reciting these words embues us with a koach, a strength. That strength is a commitment to G-d which in turn gives us the strength to continue living our meaningful but mortal lives. Our Rabbis teach us that 'Y'hei sh'mei raba...' is so powerful that when said with conviction and meaning, it ensures us a place in the World to Come. This is the reason why so much emphasis is placed on saying these words.

Men are obligated to say Kaddish in their parents' memory, since children are the extension of their parents even after death. If there is no one to say Kaddish, any person could take it upon themselves to do so, to demonstrate the enduring connection of our actions and the impact that the lives of our loved ones had on us. There are also organisations that you can donate to who will say Kaddish on your behalf.

Saying Kaddish is optional rather than obligatory for women. Any mitzvah one does in a person's honour is a beautiful and befitting way to remember them. Examples of this can include learning Torah, teaching Torah, helping others, praying and giving *tzedakah*, charity. These actions serve as the catalyst for bringing more goodness and connection to G-d. As a result, the departed soul is elevated.

## Understanding Kaddish

Kaddish can be said by all mourners for the first thirty days after burial. When mourning the loss of a parent, the Kaddish is recited daily for eleven out of the twelve months. Tradition teaches us that the souls of the righteous ascend straight to heaven and throughout the year, each soul is judged on its merits. The more holy the soul, the quicker they ascend. The twelfth month of the year is reserved for those least deserving, so we always assume that the souls who we pray for have already ascended.

***Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba***

***b'alma di-v'ra***

***chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei***

***b'chayeichon***

***uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol***

***beit Yisrael, ba'agala***

***uvizman kariv, v'im'ru: "amen."***

***Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam***

***ul'almei almaya.***

***Yitbarach v'yishtabach,***

***v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam***

***v'yitnaseh, v'yithadar v'yit'aleh***

***v'yit'halal sh'mei***

***d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,***

***l'eila min-kol-birchata v'shirata,***

***tushb'chata***

***v'nechemata da'amiran b'alma,***

***v'im'ru: "amen."***

***Y'hei shlama raba min-sh'maya***

***v'chayim aleinu***

***v'al-kol-Yisrael, v'im'ru: "amen."***

***Oseh shalom bimromav, hu***

***ya'aseh shalom aleinu***

***v'al kol-Yisrael, v'imru: "amen."***

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךְ  
מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיִּיכוּן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוּן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל  
בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב  
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ  
לְעָלַם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמַיָּא

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם  
וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ  
דְּקַדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא

לְעֵלְא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא  
וְשִׁירְתָא תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא

וְנִחַמְתָּא דְאִמְרִין בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ  
אָמֵן

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים  
עֲלִינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם

בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל  
כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

***Glorified and sanctified be G-d's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will.***

***May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.***

***May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.***

***Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.***

***May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.***

***He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.***

“

***Life can only be  
understood backwards;  
but it must be lived  
forwards.***

*Søren Kierkegaard*

We have no choice but to live the most meaningful life we can, in view of the fact that we may never really understand our own story until it is complete.

”

## Significance of a yahrzeit candle: Eternality of the soul

By Rabbi Marc & Lisa Levene

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“

*G-d formed man out of dust of the ground, and  
breathed into his nostrils a breath (soul) of life*

*Bereshit 2:7*

”

Our innermost essence, our soul is from G-d.

The Talmud compares the soul in the body to G-d's presence in the world.

“

*Just as G-d fills the entire world,  
so too the soul fills the entire body.  
Just as G-d sees but is not seen,  
so too does the soul see but is not seen.  
Just as G-d sustains the entire world,  
so too the soul sustains the entire body.  
Just as G-d is pure, so too is the soul pure.  
Just as G-d resides in His inner sanctum,  
so too the soul resides in the innermost  
recesses of the person.*

*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 10a*

”

A soul doesn't die. A thought we remind ourselves of when we look into the light of the *yahrzeit* candle, which is lit at the beginning of *shiva* and kept burning publicly for the whole seven days of *shiva*. Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk described death as 'a matter of going from one room to another'.

A person's soul is compared to a flame. The presence of the "candle of G-d that is the soul of man." (*Proverbs 20:27*). Since each person brings light into the world, just as we can take from one flame to light more candles without diminishing the original flame, we remind ourselves that the same soul, the same reality continues to live, with more intensity, because it is no longer getting channelled through its physical body. The light of our loved ones will never go out if we continue to fuel it; it is our job to do this in their memory. Just as a soul always strives upward for what is good and right, so too should we in their honour.

Watching the flame dance and flicker in the wind, we also direct our thoughts to the transitory nature of life. Just like we must breathe, change, grow and strive against the darkness and ultimately fade away, we remind ourselves of our precious delicate lives and the lives of our loved ones, which must be embraced and cherished.

Our souls are the light of this world. They infuse spirituality into the body and the world of materialism. We are all, each and every one of us, a beacon of light. If one small candle can illuminate a dark room, imagine what

millions of small lights can do to our world!

The *yahrzeit* candle reminds us of the soul's eternity and can help bring light into the darkness in which we may feel we are now immersed.

A flame will shine brightly as long as there is fuel. When a person passes away, their light will shine brightly in our lives, as long as we are its fuel. The more we remember them, act in their honour and bring them into our lives, the brighter their soul shines.

The *shiva* week begins with this candle, but the light of our loved one continues to shine long after, as long as we remember the person, honour their memory, and incorporate their presence into our lives.





# What Happens when we Die: The Journey of a Soul

By Elissa Felder, Facilitator of Core's Communities of Practice  
www.coretorah.org

“

***Olam Haba, Heaven, is more easily understood when compared to a theatre. Our sages state that every Jew has a portion in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a). This means that a seat in the theatre has been reserved for each person's soul. But as in any theatre, some seats are better than others. If G-d is 'centre stage', some souls will enjoy seats in the front row centre section, others will sit in the balcony, and some will have obstructed views, but everyone will have a place. What seats we are assigned are based on the choices we make and the deeds we do in Olam Hazeh, this world. (Pirkei Avot 4:21)***

*Rebbetzen Lori Palatnik, Remember My Soul*

”

Life is a coupling of a soul with a body. Souls yet to be born reside in the heavenly divine realms and are blown into a baby at birth. Our soul is who we are. We are a soul with a physical body, which is the vehicle that transports the soul in this world. The combination of a soul and a body is who we are in this life. The *neshama*, soul is considered, by the *Kabbalists*, to be the breath of G-d. G-d is constantly blowing our life force into us. The breath (*neshama*) of G-d is the source of our soul and begins in the innermost part of G-d. This teaches us that we are holy. Our material body clothes a divine soul which is linked to the Source of everything.

Every life matters and has a reason to be here. Every soul and body combination is ordained and orchestrated by G-d. Everyone has a mission, a purpose that is necessary for the functioning of the world. Death is an indicator that our work here is done and that the soul which is divine in origin and comes from the spiritual world must return to its place of origin. Death is an untethering, a separation of the soul from its body.

At birth the soul is crying because it doesn't want to leave the spiritual world. Yet the living rejoice and proclaim 'mazel tov!'. At death the soul is happy and the people are crying. Such is the paradox of our existence.

Death allows the divine soul to shed its body and to ascend into the higher, spiritual realms. The soul cannot die and never will die. The soul separates in stages. At first the soul hovers over its body (which it has had an intimate relationship with for its whole lifetime) until burial which allows the soul to begin its ascension. Next there are seven days of shiva. The kabbalists teach that the soul goes back and forth between the grave and the shiva house and is aware of what is being said. After shiva, the soul ascends some more. The next time frame is shloshim (thirty days), after which the soul continues to ascend and so on.

It is important to know that the living continue to influence the afterlife of the dead by how we are in this world, when we say kaddish, or give charity, or do good deeds in the memory of our beloved then the soul benefits, and gets an aliyah (moves up in the heavenly realms). We continue to walk in this world and affect the afterlife of our deceased loved ones by all the good things we do because of them.

In conclusion, death is a separation of the soul from its body. The body returns to the earth from where it came and the soul returns to the spiritual realms from where it came.

### **Who meets us after we die?**

Judaism teaches that there is life beyond this life. There is a reality beyond this one,

where we will experience a different existence, perhaps the more 'real' one and certainly an eternal one.

There are a few teachings about the experience of the soul after death. The Kabbalists speak of everyone seeing and having an experience of G-d when we die. The common understanding is that as the soul separates from its connection to the physical body it encounters intense, loving, warm light. The Kabbalists speak of the soul as taking a dip in the 'River of Light.'

Furthermore, Judaism teaches about the soul that, "the instant it becomes aware that its confines have been removed, and the broad expanse of divine creation is again open to it, it is drawn with all the force of spiritual magnetism to its Source, the centre of all its longings." In addition the Zohar teaches, "At the moment the time of departure is reached...the soul, because of its great joy, love and intense desire for the *Shechinah* (divine presence) leaves from the body to greet the Shechinah."

Another tradition, along the same theme teaches that the soul rejoins with and is greeted by all of their predeceased family members.

What we know from Jewish sources is that the soul, untethered from the body which housed it, is able to joyously ascend into the spiritual realms, connect to and be bound up with its Source.

“

*Each of us innately has the sense that the 'real me' is more than the sum of our body parts.*

*This feeling becomes even more poignant when we suffer the loss of a loved one. The loss of their physical presence is not the end of the story.*

*Judaism teaches that we have an eternal soul that continues to exist after physical death. The eternality of the soul lies at the root of the Jewish perspective.*

*Death is defined as a parting. The soul returns to its Maker, and the body returns to the earth from which it was formed. But our souls are immortal, and our good choices and positive actions affect eternity.*

*In keeping the laws and customs associated with our loss, we remember our loved ones, celebrate their impact, the person they were and the life they lived.*

*They are never forgotten.*

*A reminder to ourselves for how we choose to live our own lives.*

*And that we too are important.*

*Rabbi Marc & Lisa Levene*

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# Get Involved in True Kindness: Strengthen the Chevra Kadisha

By National Association of Chevra Kadisha

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Every Jewish community has a group of people who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of caring for the deceased.

This group, known as the *Chevra Kadisha*, Jewish Burial Society, performs the *tahara*, ritual purification of the deceased, washing them, immersing them in a mikvah, clothing them in burial shrouds and overseeing their burial.

The term Chevra Kadisha literally means 'Sacred Society', a designation unique among organisations dedicated to *chesed*, kindness. Its sanctity stems from the fact that its work is considered *chesed shel emet*, the truest form of kindness.

*Chesed shel emet* is a *mitzvah*, commandment of the highest order. So important is it that Moses himself took care of the body of Joseph during the exodus from Egypt; and as a reward, his body was cared for by Hashem Himself.

The work of the chevra is both physical and spiritual, and is performed in an atmosphere of reverence and prayer. They treat the body as befits its status as a *Tzelem Elokim*, an image of G-d, and the earthly home of an eternal soul. Like a Torah scroll, it is uncovered only when necessary.

Moreover, there is perhaps no other mitzvah in which the connection of body and soul is made as clear as *tahara*. Although the soul leaves the body at the moment of death, it remains near the body until burial. (In fact, it lingers in this world even longer than that.)

The soul is aware of how the body, its longtime partner, is handled, and feels pain if it is mistreated. At the conclusion of their work, the chevra asks aloud for forgiveness from the deceased for any insult to its honour they may inadvertently have caused.

Not everyone may feel capable of participating in a *tahara*, but that doesn't mean they can't be involved in *chesed shel emet*. The work of the Chevra Kadisha includes activities that take place outside the *tahara* room. People are also needed to make phone calls, arrange *minyanim*, set up the *shiva* house and provide meals for the mourners. In addition, everyone can help advocate for better communication between hospitals, funeral homes and *chevrot*, Jewish Burial Society. Doing outreach to expand awareness of Jewish burial ritual, and organising continuing education for Chevra members, are also important aspects of *chesed shel emet*.

Our sages make clear that the responsibility for burial falls on each member of the community. Through assisting the Chevra Kadisha – in whatever way is possible for us – we are able to play our part in this holy task.

May our dedication to *chesed shel emet* and *kavod hamet*, respect for the deceased, bring us speedily to the time when the work of the Chevra is no longer required; a time when, as Isaiah prophesied, there will be no more death.

“

***The meis, body is prepared by four people, with men attending to male bodies and women attending to female bodies. Women may assist in the tahara, ritual purification of their mothers, sisters, and daughters. However, men are not allowed to prepare male members of their family.***

***The room where this sacred mitzvah is performed exudes a special aura of quiet and deep respect. The meis is clothed in a manner suitable for meeting Hashem, G-d. No personal items are placed with the body in the coffin. Every person, regardless of age, wealth, or social status, is treated with equal amount of respect.***

*National Association of Chevra Kadisha*

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# The Meaning of HaMakom Yenachem... The Traditional Phrase We Say

By Rabbi Marc and Lisa Levene

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May the Omnipresent comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem

הַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר אַבְּלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

HaMakom yenchem etchem betoch sha'ar avelei Tziyon vi'Yerushalayim

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When speaking to a mourner, it is customary to say this traditional phrase of comfort. Sometimes the preference to say it in Hebrew adds awkwardness to an already painful moment. However, understanding the words that are being said allows us to see the depth and beauty of the Torah's language and offers a unique perspective on our loss. It is our intent that by exploring each of the words in turn we will, please G-d, reveal this.

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## HaMakom, The Place

Who can truly empathise with our loss? How can anyone else truly understand and appreciate our feelings? Our circumstances? They can't! For some, time heals; for others, this is not true. Loss is unique, as is our individual reaction to it.

Only G-d, who knows the secrets hidden in

## הַמָּקוֹם

our heart is truly capable of recognising our loss and providing comfort to us. G-d as 'HaMakom', The Place, is everything and everywhere, physical and spiritual. At a time when we may experience feeling abandoned by G-d, may we find comfort through gaining a new sense of G-d's presence, even in the midst of our grief.

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אַבְלִי

## Mourners, avelei

As aveilim, having lost a loved one, we mourn them not being here with us in a physical sense, even knowing that their soul has returned to G-d.

יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם

## Comfort you, Yenachem etchem

As we listen to the words, Hashem should comfort 'YOU'. It reminds us to think about who the real 'us' is. Our physical selves? Our bodies?

Listening to these words reminds us that we don't just HAVE a soul, we ARE a soul and we HAVE a body. We are a soul before we are born and after we die. It is our essence. It is only for the short time we live in this world that we have a physical body. A concept we remind ourselves of everyday in our morning tefillot, prayers.

אֶ-לִקְנִי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנִּתְּתָה בִּי טְהוֹרָה  
 הִיא. אֶתָּה בְּרֵאתָהּ ... וְאֶתָּה  
 מְשַׁמְרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי, וְאֶתָּה עֹתִיד  
 לְטֹלָהּ מִמֶּנִּי, וּלְהַחְזִירָהּ בִּי  
 לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא. כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה  
 בְּקִרְבִּי, מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ ... רַבּוֹן  
 כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת.  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְּחַזֵּיר נְשָׁמוֹת  
 לְפָגְרִים מֵתִים.

*My G-d, the soul which You have placed within me is pure. You created it... and You preserve it within me. You will eventually take it from me and restore it to me in the future. As long as the soul is within me, I offer thanks to You...Master of all works, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, G-d, Who restores souls to the dead.*

צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

Zion & Jerusalem, Tziyon  
vi'Yerushalyim

Zion and Jerusalem: our homeland. A place set aside by G-d for us, acquired by immense pain and suffering. Remembering the loss of so many righteous and innocent people as we ourselves mourn, connects us to our past and future, to each other. We are not alone. It infuses us with the responsibility we have to those who have come before us and those who will come after.

## Everything is on Loan

By Rebbetzen Lisa Levene

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Twenty-five years ago, I went to a shiva I will never forget. A mother had lost her 18-year-old son. It was a heartbreaking tragedy where no words seemed appropriate. Yet I left the shiva house inspired. The mother was broken, her heart had been wrenched. I was single at the time, so I had no concept of what it meant to be a wife, let alone a mother.

*"She said to me, "I was blessed – this soul was entrusted to me for 18 years. It wasn't MINE, it was Hashem's gift, a neshama, soul on loan to look after. Now it has fulfilled its mission in this world, it has gone back to its real father. I only hope I met expectations and looked after the soul as Hashem would have wanted me to."*

I remember thinking that should I ever be blessed as a wife, and as a mother, this is the perspective I would try to adopt. Nothing is 'ours' per se but a gift, on loan to us. Ultimately all we have belongs to Hashem – His to give and His to take away.

“

*Akavyah the son of Mehalalel said: Contemplate three things and you will not come to transgression. Know from where you have come, to where you are going and in front of Whom you will have to give an accounting.*

*Pirkei Avot 3:1*

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# Choose Life

By Rabbi Marc and Lisa Levene

*Judaism is a religion of life. Preserving life and averting death is fundamental; G-d's most basic desire is life. Even the Torah itself is called a 'Living Torah'. This is why we wish everyone, 'chayim aruchim', 'long life' or, 'arichat yamim' 'length of days', in our darkest moments. We are reiterating this message that each of us is important. Our individual lives matter, our actions matter. We matter!*

**At the end of his life in Parshat Nitzavim, our greatest leader Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us to choose life: 'uvacharta bachayyim'. (Devarim 30:19)**

As a nation that has for millennia followed this instruction, it has become immortalised and ingrained in our psyche.

**Love life. Believe in life. Choose life!**

This is why the great Vilna Gaon was crying on his deathbed... Why cry if he knew intrinsically that he was moving to a better location? One of the sages of the Talmud, Rabbi Yehuda, explained it to his students on his deathbed: "If you want to know why I am crying, it is only because of the Torah

and the meritorious deeds that I will no longer be able to perform." Death deprives us of the ability to continue to serve G-d and to accomplish acts of kindness. Life presents us with opportunities for personal growth. It is what we do now that really matters. The choices we make today have a ripple effect for generations. Leaving this world closes the curtain on our ability to do acts of kindness for ourselves; we now become reliant on others to do it for us.

And so while the focus of this booklet is to examine the laws and customs of our loss, more than anything we need to use this as an opportunity to ensure the words **וּבְחַרְתָּ** **בְּחַיִּים**, choose life are indelibly engraved on our hearts.

## An overview of the guidelines for shiva, shloshim and twelve months

The year of mourning is a complex maze to navigate, containing an emotional rollercoaster within itself. These guidelines are designed to shield the mourner from the natural simcha, the happiness that exists in the world, which one who is experiencing bereavement may temporarily wish to distance themselves from.

According to the strict letter of the Jewish law, these are the practices we follow:

The recommendations below, presented here by arrangement with Jonathan David Publishers ([www.jdbooks.com](http://www.jdbooks.com)), are based on the Guidelines for Social Conduct found in *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, by Rabbi Maurice Lamm. Please see pages 289 and the pages following of that classic work for additional information. **Note, these guidelines are to protect the emotional well-being of the mourner and in that vein there are exceptions, especially for family celebrations. One should ask advice for specific circumstances.**

### Mourners for a parent: Religious celebrations

WEDDING			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Ceremony (singing permitted, no instrumental music)			
Meal	Do not attend	Do not attend	Do not attend

SHEVA BRACHOT			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Weekday	Do not attend	Do not attend	Do not attend
Shabbat	Do not attend	Permitted	Permitted

BAR/BAT MITZVAH			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Service	Do not attend	Permitted	Permitted
Meal (No music)	Do not attend	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>BRIT</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Parents – Ceremony	Permitted at synagogue only	Permitted	Permitted
Parents – Meal	Permitted at home only	Permitted	Permitted
Friends & Relatives-Ceremony	Do not attend	Permitted	Permitted
Friends & Relatives-Meal	Do not attend	Do not attend	Do not attend

<b>SHALOM ZACHAR*/ KIDDUSH FOR GIRLS</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Do not attend	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>PURIM</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Megillah Reading	Attend synagogue	Attend synagogue	Attend synagogue
Meal	Permitted at home only	Permitted at home only	Permitted at home only
Mislo'ach Manot Gifts	Send but not receive	Send but not receive	Send but not receive

<b>CHANUKAH PARTY</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Do not attend	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>SHABBAT KIDDUSH</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Do not attend	Permitted briefly for greetings on special occasions	Permitted

\* A Shalom Zachar is a Jewish tradition observed on the first Friday night following the birth of a baby boy. The term "Shalom Zachar" means "Welcome, Male" in Hebrew. It is a gathering or celebration held in honour of the newborn, and it typically takes place in the home of the baby's parents.

## Mourners for a parent: Social Occasions

### BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, HOUSE PARTIES ETC

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Do not attend	Do not attend	Depends on the situation. Consult your local Rabbi

### CHARITY BANQUETS AND GRADUATIONS

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Do not attend	Do not attend	Permitted only for honouree, but without music

### INVITING GUESTS TO ONE'S OWN HOME

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Weekdays	Not permitted	Not permitted	Permitted
Shabbat	Not permitted	Permitted	Permitted

### DINING OUT

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Not permitted	Permitted with family only	Permitted but limited to a few guests

### PLEASURE CRUISES AND GROUP TOURS

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted

### FAMILY HOLIDAYS

	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Not permitted	Permitted	Permitted

<b>RADIO AND TELEVISION</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Only news and educational programmes are permitted	News, education, drama and sports programmes are permitted. No music is permitted except as background or adverts	News, education, drama and sports programmes are permitted. No music is permitted except as background or adverts

<b>THEATRES, CINEMA AND SPORTS</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Not permitted	Avoid public events and organised entertainment	Avoid public events and organised entertainment

<b>LISTENING TO MUSIC</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Dancing and listening to dance music	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted
Classical music	Not permitted	Permitted only in private	Permitted only in private
Concerts	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted
Cantorial singing and concerts	Singing permitted only at services	Permitted	Permitted

<b>COMPUTER/INTERNET</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
	Permitted	Permitted	Permitted

<b>BUSINESS</b>			
	during shiva	during shloshim	during 12 months
Travel	Not permitted	Permitted	Permitted
Entertainment	Not permitted	Not permitted	Not permitted*

\* Unless job requires it

## Mourners for relatives other than parents: Religious celebrations

<b>WEDDING</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Ceremony (singing permitted, no instrumental music)		Differing customs
Meal	Do not attend	Do not attend

<b>SHEVA BRACHOT</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Weekday	Do not attend	Do not attend
Shabbat	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>BAR/BAT MITZVAH</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Service	Do not attend	Permitted
Meal (No music)	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>BRIT</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Parents – Ceremony	Permitted at synagogue only	Permitted
Parents – Meal	Permitted at home only	Permitted
Friends & Relatives – Ceremony	Do not attend	Permitted
Friends & Relatives – Meal	Do not attend	Do not attend

<b>SHALOM ZACHAR/KIDDUSH FOR GIRLS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>PURIM</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Megillah Reading	Attend synagogue	Attend synagogue
Meal	Permitted at home only	Permitted at home only
Mislo'ach Manot Gifts	Send but not receive	Send but not receive

<b>CHANUKAH PARTY</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Do not attend	Permitted

<b>SHABBAT KIDDUSH</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Do not attend	Permitted briefly for greetings on special occasions

## Mourners for relatives other than parents: Social Occasions

<b>BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES, HOUSE PARTIES ETC</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Do not attend	Do not attend

<b>CHARITY BANQUETS AND GRADUATIONS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Do not attend	Permitted only for honouree, but without music

<b>INVITING GUESTS TO ONE'S OWN HOME</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Weekdays	Not permitted	Not permitted
Shabbat	Not permitted	Permitted

<b>DINING OUT</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Not permitted	Permitted with family only

<b>PLEASURE CRUISES AND GROUP TOURS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Not permitted	Not permitted

<b>FAMILY HOLIDAYS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Not permitted	Permitted



<b>RADIO AND TELEVISION</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	News, education, drama and sports programmes are permitted. No music is permitted except as background or adverts	News, education, drama and sports programmes are permitted. No music is permitted except as background or adverts

<b>THEATRES, CINEMA AND SPORTS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Not permitted	Avoid public events and organised entertainment

<b>LISTENING TO MUSIC</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Dancing and listening to dance music	Not permitted	Not permitted
Classical music	Not permitted	Permitted only in private
Concerts	Not permitted	Not permitted
Cantorial singing and concerts	Singing permitted only at services	Permitted

<b>COMPUTER/INTERNET</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
	Permitted	Permitted

<b>BUSINESS</b>		
	during shiva	during shloshim
Travel	Not permitted	Permitted
Entertainment	Not permitted	Not permitted*

\*Unless job requires it

## Personal Details

Name of Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrew Name \_\_\_\_\_

Yahrzeit (Hebrew Date and Year) \_\_\_\_\_

(English Date and Year) \_\_\_\_\_

Burial Plot \_\_\_\_\_ Name of Cemetery \_\_\_\_\_

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## Resources

### Important Contact Information

**Bushey Burial Office** 020 8950 7767

**HGSS Shul Office** 020 8455 8126

**Rabbi Marc Levene** 07989 538 525

### For more explanations & further insights

**1. NASCK: The National Association of Chevra Kadisha:**

[www.nasck.org](http://www.nasck.org)

**2. United Synagogue Burial:**

[www.theus.org.uk/burial](http://www.theus.org.uk/burial)

### For further support around bereavement

**1. Grief Encounter: Supporting bereaved children & young people**

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk)

**2. Jewish Bereavement Counselling services**

[www.jbcs.org.uk](http://www.jbcs.org.uk)

**3. Jami: Mental Health for our Community**

[www.jamiuk.org](http://www.jamiuk.org)

**4. Paperweight: Help with financial, legal, benefits or any other practical issues**

[www.paperweight.org.uk](http://www.paperweight.org.uk)

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*This world is comparable to the antechamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in a corridor, so that you may enter the banquet hall.*

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*Pirkei Avot 4:16*

# Never Forgotten

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**“ There is a time for every experience under  
heaven. A time to be born and a time to die...  
A time to weep and a time to laugh. ”**

*King Solomon, Kohelet*

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The HGSS Rabbinic Team is here to help you in these challenging times. We understand that there is a lot to process. If you have specific questions or needs, or if you encounter difficulty using this guidebook, please reach out for further guidance and support. Nothing will ever replace a personal conversation.

