

## Information about Death and Bereavement

*This information serves to provide a basic understanding of customs as observed at Temple Beth-El. It is offered to guide our members and explain our traditions. If you have any specific questions or would like to speak with a member of our clergy, please contact the Temple Beth-El Office at 933-2740.*

**Death and Mourning Customs** In Judaism, death is a natural part of the lifecycle. Many laws and customs govern the process of death, burial and mourning. As are many Jewish practices, the Jewish death rituals show a healthy practicality. They exist to honor and show respect for the dead and to assist and comfort the living. **Who to Call**

**When a Death Occurs** 1. The Chevra Kadisha, the Holy Society, is the first to be notified upon the death of a Temple Beth-El member. *When a death has occurred, please notify one of the following people:* Eph Mazer, Co-Chair Chevra Kadisha – 967-5733, 870-1112 Virginia Heiman, Co-Chair Chevra Kadisha - 967-5669 Micky Rubenstein - 967-4679

2. The funeral home is contacted to arrange for proper transportation and care of the deceased:

- John-Ridouts Southside – 251-5254

3. Call a member of our clergy to discuss funeral arrangements:

- Rabbi Goldsmith – Office: 933-2740, Cell: 267-8355
- Cantor Gale – Office: 933-2740, Cell: 453-2293

If death occurs in a hospital, the hospital staff can help make some of these calls. If funeral prearrangements have not been made, it might be helpful to ask someone, perhaps a close friend or family member, to help make decisions and arrangements.

**Before the Funeral** Set the time and place of the funeral. In conjunction with Rabbi Goldsmith and the Chevra Kadisha, set the time and place of the funeral. Although our tradition encourages having the funeral as soon as possible after death occurs, there are times when a delay is proper. The service can be held at graveside or the chapel at John-Ridouts. It is the policy of Temple Beth-El that funeral services are not held at the synagogue. However, for those who have had a special relationship with Temple Beth-El, the hearse may drive by as the front doors to the Temple are opened in respect.

Preparation of the obituary. Once the funeral time has been set, it is time to prepare the obituary. Items to consider including are: age,

place of birth, occupation, college degrees, membership in organizations, military service or noteworthy achievements. The time and place of the funeral should be provided as well. Suggest where memorial contributions may be made. The funeral home will assist you in preparing and submitting the obituary. Temple Beth-El will also send an email to the congregational email list. Please provide the Temple Office with Shiva information to be included in the email announcement.

Pallbearers are Chosen. Six people who can carry the casket are needed. Although it is customary not to choose immediate family members, such people may be chosen if needed. You may choose others as you wish to serve as honorary pallbearers. Non-Jews may also be chosen for this honor.

Rabbi Goldsmith will meet with members of the immediate family to gather information for the preparation of a eulogy. In the event that Rabbi Goldsmith is out of town, Cantor Gale will fill this role. **The Mourner** The period of time between death and burial is called *anninut* and the bereaved is called an *onen*. The prime responsibility of the *onen* is to make funeral arrangements. During this time, an *onen* is exempt from positive religious obligations. As such, prayer is not obligatory at this time. However, an *onen* who finds it helpful to express feelings through prayers may do so. Only relatives or very close friends should visit during this time, primarily to help make arrangements for the funeral and *Shiva*. After the funeral, a mourner is known as an *avel*. One is a mourner by obligation for parents, children, siblings or spouse. However, anyone is allowed to observe the mourning rites. **Preparation for Burial** Our tradition has long stood for simplicity in funerals and mourning. A standard wooden kosher casket is used when funerals take place under the auspices of Temple Beth-El. Cremation is strongly discouraged as it is not in keeping with Jewish tradition. Temple Beth-El clergy will not officiate at the funeral of someone who has chosen to be cremated. Before the deceased person is dressed for burial, the ritual of *tahara*, ritual washing, is performed by the Chevra Kadisha. The body is dressed in traditional burial shrouds, *tachrichim*, which are simple white garments. **Autopsy & Embalming** As a general rule, Jewish tradition does not allow autopsies. However, there are times when an autopsy might be required by law or is needed for other reasons. Each case must be reviewed independently. You may consult Rabbi Glusman for further information. Jewish tradition discourages embalming except in rare circumstances at which time it might be required by law. The Funeral Director can help determine if embalming is required.

**Flowers** Flowers are not part of Jewish mourning practice. In the spirit of honoring the memory of the dead by helping the living, suggest in the obituary that in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to an appropriate charity. If flowers are sent, they should be shared with the living. Consider giving them to a local hospital or other institution where they could give some joy to others. **Kriah** A few minutes before the funeral service begins, the first formal act of mourning takes place. This act is known as, *kriah*, and includes the tearing of a ribbon. For parents, the ribbon is worn on the left side. For all others, the ribbon is worn on the right side. *Kriah* is a centuries old symbol of inner grief and mourning. The Mourners stand as this ritual is performed to show that grief is faced directly. First, the Rabbi helps the mourners recite a blessing and then the ribbon is torn. The ribbon is worn for *Shiva*, except on Shabbat.

**The Funeral Service** A funeral service may be held at graveside or the Chapel at John-Ridouts. Generally, the funeral service is brief. Selections are read from Psalms and a eulogy is presented. If a family members or friends would like to offer some remarks, please consult and discuss with the Rabbi prior to the service. **Shoveling Earth**

After the casket is lowered, interment is begun by shoveling some earth into the grave. This *mitzvah*, is known as *chesed shel emet*, true lovingkindness. This mitzvah demonstrates our continuing concern for the deceased as we make sure the final journey is completed. Although this practice may at first seem uncomfortable, it is actually based on much wisdom. For the bereaved, the sound of the earth on the casket has an undeniable finality that may help them accept the reality of their loved one's death. At the conclusion of the funeral service, all are invited to participate in this holy act.

**Children at a Funeral** There is not a definite rule about children's attendance at funerals. If a child is old enough to understand death and the purpose of a funeral, that child should be considered for attendance. The child should sit with an adult that he or she knows during the service. Children also need the opportunity to say "good-bye" to a loved one. A child who is old enough should be given an opportunity to say farewell and begin the grieving process. **After the Funeral** Immediately following the funeral service at the cemetery, the Rabbi and Hazzan will conduct a Mincha (afternoon) service at the *Shiva* house. There is a custom to rinse one's hands with water after leaving a cemetery. A pitcher of water and paper towels is usually made available as one enters the *Shiva* house. Following the Mincha service, the *seudat havra'ah*, the meal of consolation, is served. The meal is provided by friends and neighbors to relieve the bereaved of

the need to prepare food. The meal customarily includes hard-boiled eggs, which are an ancient symbol of fertility and which signify the continuation of life in the face of death. The atmosphere in the *Shiva* house should be one of respect and appropriateness. The Temple Beth-El Chesed Club will provide and deliver a platter of cake to the *Shiva* house. **Shiva** *Shiva* is a seven-day period of initial adjustment to the death of a loved one. Many customs and laws define *Shiva*, all designed to assist the bereaved through the most difficult stage of mourning. Traditionally during this seven-day period, the mourners do not leave the house but are sheltered from everyday concerns by friends and relatives who come to visit. Visiting during *Shiva* is considered an important *mitzvah*. During *Shiva*, friends, relatives and neighbors bring food to the mourners, console and bring comfort to them in their grief. After the funeral, a *Shiva* candle traditionally is lit. This special memorial candle symbolizes the soul of the deceased and burns throughout the seven days of *Shiva*. In traditional Jewish homes, mourners do not use cosmetics, shave or cut their hair, which are considered signs of vanity. Mourners do not wear leather, which was thought a luxury in ancient times, nor do they engage in sexual relations. Mirrors are removed, turned to the wall or covered with white sheets to prevent one from an act of vanity. Those "sitting *Shiva*" sit on low stools or the floor rather than chairs, as an expression of their grief. The *Shiva* period lasts for seven days, counting the day of the funeral as the first day. On the seventh day it is only necessary to sit for one hour in the morning. *Shiva* is suspended at 1:00 Friday afternoon and is resumed after Shabbat is over. If a major holiday, such as Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur falls during the *Shiva* period, *Shiva* is concluded at 1:00pm on the eve of the festival. Today, there are many people who observe a shortened *Shiva* of three days or end *Shiva* early on the first Shabbat after the funeral. **Shiva Services and Daily Kaddish** Following the initial afternoon service at the *Shiva* house, it is the custom at Temple Beth-El that mourners and friends attend daily morning and evening services at Temple Beth-El. This has become the practice to ensure that there is always a daily minyan at Temple Beth-El. The service schedule is as follows:

Daily Morning Minyan: 7:00am Sundays & Holidays: 8:00am Daily Afternoon Minyan: 5:30pm Friday Evening: 5:45pm Saturday Morning: 9:30am Saturday Afternoon: 5:30pm (4:30pm during Daylight Saving Time) If a family desires to hold services at a *Shiva* house, Temple Beth-El will provide *siddurim* and *kippot*. However, family members or friends are responsible for leading the services. During *Shiva*, mourners attend Shabbat services at the Synagogue. The name of the

deceased is called from the bimah during the Shabbat following burial. **Shloshim** With the conclusion of *Shiva*, a period of mourning called *shloshim* begins and continues until the thirtieth day after death. Mourning for spouses, children and siblings ends after thirty days; when the deceased is a parent, the state of mourning lasts for eleven months. During *shloshim*, the mourner returns to work and everyday life but refrains from attending festive gatherings such as weddings or parties. Mourners are also prohibited from visiting the grave of the deceased because, at this stage of mourning, it's important for them to get past their grief. **Kaddish** Anyone who feels close to the deceased may wish to say *kaddish*. However, children are obligated to say *kaddish*, as are parents who lose a child. Saying *kaddish* is especially helpful to surviving spouses since it offers both regularity in life and social contact with others. While the mourning period is for a full year, *kaddish* is only recited for eleven months and a day. If it is not possible to attend services twice daily at Temple Beth-El, efforts should be made to say *kaddish* as often as possible. The obligation to say *kaddish* cannot be transferred to another person.

**Unveiling / Dedication of a Grave Marker** A formal unveiling service is not necessary. If a dedication is desired, it may be led by a friend and/or member of the family. The Temple Beth-El Office will provide you with appropriate prayers and readings which can be recited at the graveside. The information is also available for [download](#). A monument may be unveiled at any time after Shloshim (thirty days). **Yahrzeit** Yahrzeit is observed each year on the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar. Therefore, the timing of Yahrzeit on the secular calendar will vary from year to year. The Synagogue notifies members of the date if the Yahrzeit records are on file. The names of the deceased are read at the appropriate evening service and at the Friday evening service the week of Yahrzeit. The Yahrzeit observance lasts a full day and it is customary to attend services on the evening Yahrzeit begins as well as the morning and afternoon of the next day. Those who come to observe Yahrzeit recite *kaddish*. It is traditional to make contributions to tzedakah in honor of the observance of a Yahrzeit. A Yahrzeit candle is lit and burns for at least 24 hours. The candle is lit the evening Yahrzeit begins. If Yahrzeit falls on Shabbat or Yom Tov, the candle is lit before the Shabbat or holiday candles. Although there is no formal blessing when lighting the candle, the following meditation may be used. As an alternative, one can use his or her own words in place of the meditation. *Dear God,*

*I light this candle on this the Yahrzeit of my dear\_\_\_\_\_ . May I be inspired to deeds of charity and kindness to honor his/her memory. May the light of this candle be a reminder to me of the light my dear*

\_\_\_\_\_ brought to my life. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. Amen. **Yizkor** Yizkor, the congregational memorial service, is recited four times a year: on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret and the last days of Pesach and Shavuot, during the morning service. Our tradition included this service on these days since it recognized that holiday times bring with them reminders of loved ones no longer with us. It is most appropriate to come to the Synagogue on those mornings and join with the congregation in reciting Yizkor.

**Yahrzeit Plaques** The Synagogue has Yahrzeit tablets with plaques recording the Hebrew and English name of the deceased and the date of death. For further information about Yahrzeit plaques, contact our Temple Beth-El Office. **Conclusion** This pamphlet is intended to provide some basic information for mourners, not to be a comprehensive description and explanation of traditional customs. As always our entire staff are ready to serve you as necessary.

## **Glossary**

*Anninut:* The period of time between death and the funeral.

*Avel:* The Hebrew term for a mourner after the funeral. Before burial the term

onen is used.

*Chevra Kadisha:* Literally, The Holy Society. A group of individuals who prepare a body for burial. Temple Beth-El is blessed to have a group of dedicated volunteers who perform this holy mitzvah.

*Kriah:* Tearing of a garment or ribbon as a sign of mourning.

*Nichum Avelim:* The mitzvah of consoling the mourners.

*Onen:* Hebrew term for a survivor between the time of death and the funeral.

*Shiva:* Literally, seven. The name given to the first stage of mourning which

begins after the funeral.

*Shloshim:* Literally, thirty. The second stage of mourning which lasts for thirty

days after the funeral.

*Tahara*: Literally, cleansing. The Ritual washing of the body, performed by the

Chevra Kadisha.

*Tachrichim*: Shrouds.

*Yahrzeit*: The anniversary of the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar.

*Yizkor*: The Memorial service.