



GUIDE TO
THE TRADITIONS AND RITUALS
OF JEWISH BURIAL
AND MOURNING PRACTICES
FOR MEMBERS OF
THE EMANUEL SYNAGOGUE

Prepared by
The Emanuel Synagogue

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**Prepared by
The Emanuel Synagogue
Ritual Committee**

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Jewish tradition teaches that all persons are equal in death. Therefore, it is urged that funerals be of the utmost simplicity, respect, and dignity. In accordance with these values the following guidelines are offered to assist families at the unfortunate time of the loss of a loved one.

1. When the death of a loved one occurs, families are encouraged to notify the funeral home as soon as possible. The *Rabbi* may be contacted to clarify and add insight to points of ritual.
2. Prior to making any funeral arrangements, the funeral home will provide Emanuel Synagogue families, and/or persons responsible for making arrangements for members of the Emanuel, with the Emanuel Synagogue Guidelines to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices. Printed guidelines will be provided to the funeral home by the Emanuel Synagogue.
3. The funeral home will notify the chairperson of the Emanuel Synagogue Cemetery Committee, if burial is at the Emanuel Synagogue cemetery.

4. The persons notifying the synagogue of the death of a loved one will be asked if the family has acquired a burial plot. If not, a member of the Emanuel Synagogue Cemetery Committee will assist in the process.

5. The deceased is not to be moved or disturbed on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*.

6. A member of the Emanuel Ritual Committee, or Cemetery Committee will, on request of the family or person making arrangements, accompany them to the funeral home. This is for support in making ritual decisions only.

7. The body of the deceased will be prepared by a *Chevre Kadisha* (Ritual Burial Society).

8. Traditional Jewish burial practices require *Tahara* (ritual washing/purification of the body), *Tachrichim* (burial shrouds), and *Shmirah* (watching/guarding of the body), which will be explained by the funeral home.

9. a. Embalming is not an acceptable Jewish burial practice; however, embalming may be demanded by civil authorities in certain circumstances. If this occurs, the *Rabbi* may be consulted for clarification and guidance.

b. Cremation is not an acceptable Jewish burial practice.

10. Arrangements shall be made by the funeral home to provide constant *Shmirah* from the time of death until burial. Family members, personal friends, and interested individuals are to be allowed to participate in the *mitzvah* of *Shmirah*, if they request to do so.

11. *Shomrim* (guardians performing the *mitzvah* of *Shmirah*) will be made available through the Synagogue. The Emanuel Burial Guide and *Tehillim* (Psalms) books will also be made available through the Synagogue. *Shomrim* should refrain from smoking and eating in the room which contains the deceased. Unnecessary conversation is also forbidden.

12. Traditional Jewish funeral practice calls for a simple, modest, unlined, wooden casket.

13. The funeral home shall explain the choices of the funeral service taking place at the synagogue, funeral home, or graveside.

14. No funeral will be conducted on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tovim* (*Rosh Hashana*, *Yom Kippur*, *Succot*, *Shemini Atzeret*, *Simchat Torah*, *Pesach*, or *Shavuot*).

15. Viewing the deceased is contrary to Jewish Tradition. Therefore, the casket shall remain closed at all times.

THE CHEVRA KADISHA

To assist in the preparation and burial of the dead is one of the greatest *Mitzvot* in our tradition. The association that is organized to perform this service is called the *Chevra Kadisha*, the Holy Society. Membership in the *Chevra Kadisha* has always been considered a unique privilege. The members must be practicing Jews, of high moral character, and knowledgeable of the laws and customs of Jewish burial practices. Specific regulations must be strictly observed in moving the deceased, guarding the body, preparations for *Taharah* (the ritual washing of the body), the actual *Taharah* procedure, and, the *Tachrichim* (burial shrouds). The funeral home will assist in making arrangements for the *Chevrah Kadisha*. The *Rabbi* can also offer guidance in any specific questions that families may have about the requirements of Jewish law.

TAHARA

Tahara is the ritual washing of the deceased. Just as a newborn baby is immediately cleansed and washed on entering this world, so is the departed cleansed and washed so their exit is as pure as their entrance. *Tahara* is the age-old Jewish manner of showing respect for the dead. It is not merely a custom or tradition. It is an absolute requirement of Jewish law.

The ritual washing is performed by the *Chevra Kadisha* (burial society) as close to the time of the funeral service as possible. In addition to the physical cleansing and preparation of the deceased for burial, prayers are also recited asking for G-d's forgiveness of any sins the deceased may have committed, and asking G-d for eternal peace.

To be a member of the *Chevra Kadisha* is a great honor bestowed on those who are truly pious. It is not for hygienic purposes, it is a Jewish ritual and religious act.

The funeral home will assist in making arrangements for *Tahara* with the local *Chevrah Kadisha*.

For a detailed description of the *Tahara* procedure, please consult

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning,
by Maurice Lamm, PP 242-245.

SHMIRAH

Jewish tradition dictates that the body of the deceased must not be left alone. It is to be watched at all times even during the day and on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. From this requirement, the custom of *Shmirah*, guarding of the body of the deceased, developed. The person honored to guard the deceased is called a *Shomer*, a guardian or watcher. The person who serves as a *Shomer* is exempt from all prayers and other religious duties at that time, as being engaged in a *Mitzvah*, exempts one from performing other *Mitzvot*.

Since the deceased may not be left alone from the moment of death until the burial, arrangements must be made for a *Shomer* to be present at all times. It is preferable for the *Shomer* to be a member of the family or a personal friend. The family may request relatives and friends to act as *Shomrim* in shifts throughout the night. The *Shomer* assures that the body is not disturbed, and treated with respect at all times. Smoking, eating, and unnecessary conversation are forbidden in the room which contains the body. The *Shomer* should remain in the room with the body, if possible. Where this is not possible, such as in a morgue, the *Shomer* should be able to see into the room and observe the body. It is appropriate for the *Shomer* to recite from the Book of Psalms. When a family member or personal friend is not available, the Funeral Director or *Rabbi* can help make arrangements for a *Shomer*.

TACHRICHIM RITUAL BURIAL GARMENTS

Jewish tradition recognizes the democracy of death. Therefore all Jews are buried in the same type of garment. Wealthy or poor, all are equal before G-d, and that which determines their reward is not what they wear, but what they are.

The Garments should be simple, handmade, perfectly clean, and white. These shrouds symbolize purity, simplicity, and dignity. Shrouds have no pockets. They, therefore, cannot carry any material wealth. A person's soul is of importance, not his or her possessions.

Shrouds may be made of muslin, cotton, or linen. The *Tachrichim* consist of the following seven garments:

- a) *Mitznepheth*, a head dress.
- b) *Michnasayim*, lower garment.
- c) *K'tonet*, a chemise.
- d) *Kittle*, an upper garment.
- e) *Avnet*, a belt.
- f) *Tallit*, a prayer shawl.
- g) *Sovev*, a linen sheet.

These garments are placed on the body in a specific order. For a more detailed description, please consult: The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, by Maurice Lamm PP 245 - 247.

The *Tallit* (prayer shawl) is wrapped around the body after it is placed in the coffin. One of the *Tziziot* (corner fringes) is either torn or tied up and placed in a corner of the *Tallit*. It is appropriate for women to be wrapped in a *Tallit* if they used one in prayer. The *Rabbi* should be consulted for clarification.

The funeral home will assist in making arrangements for *Tachrichim* with the *Chevre Kadisha*.

THE CASKET

"Dust you are and to dust you shall return" Gen.3:19, is the guiding principle used in selecting the casket. Jewish funeral practice calls for a simple, wooden coffin. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve hid among the trees in the Garden of Eden when they heard the divine judgment for committing the first sin. *Rabbi* Levy said that this was a sign for their descendents, that when they die, they should be placed in coffins made of wood. Another reason for a wooden coffin is so that the body and shroud should not decompose too much sooner than the coffin (as would be the case with a metal Casket). Caskets with metal handles and nail construction technically may be used, but tradition calls for a simple wooden coffin with wooden pegs for construction. Lined interiors are not considered proper.

KRIAH - THE RENDING OF THE MOURNERS' GARMENTS

Kriah, the cutting of one's garment as a visible sign of mourning, should be performed by the direction of the *Rabbi*. Those obligated to perform *Kriah* are: son, daughter; father, mother; brother, sister; and spouse. There are several instances in the Bible where rending the clothes is referred to. Jacob rent his clothes when Joseph's coat of many colors was discovered soiled with blood. Job, who experienced much grief, rent his garments. There is a psychological relief in the act of tearing that allows one to take anguish out on a physical object rather than on oneself. It can also symbolize physical separation. Mourners should be encouraged to tear or cut an actual garment rather than attaching and cutting the symbolic black ribbon. However, black ribbons will be provided by the funeral home. The rent garment (or ribbon) is not worn on the *Shabbat* during *Shiva* or major holidays. The period of wearing the rent garment (or ribbon) is thirty days. The *Rabbi* should be consulted for specifics or questions.

The following blessing is recited at the time *Kriah* is performed:

*Ba-ruch a-tah Ado-nai, Elo-hay-nu Me-lech ha-
olam, da-yan ha-emet.*

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our G-d, King of the
Universe, the Judge of Truth.

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

Conduct at the funeral service should reflect the sanctity of the moment. Viewing of the deceased and the visitation of the family at the chapel prior to the funeral are contrary to Jewish tradition. Public viewing of the deceased shall not be allowed. The casket should be closed at all times. Judaism does not try to mask death. The funeral service does not attempt to disguise the reality of death. Therefore any attempt to display the body as it was in life, or to make it appear that the deceased were "sleeping" is contrary to our beliefs. The departed are to be remembered as they were in life, both physically and spiritually.

Flowers at the service or chapel are contrary to Jewish tradition. Instead, friends and relatives are encouraged to make contributions to their synagogue, Jewish education, or other worthy causes in memory of the departed.

The service consists of chanting Psalms appropriate to the life of the deceased. A description of the virtues of the deceased is enumerated, encouraging the survivors to incorporate these values into their own lives. *Eyl Maley Rachamim*, the memorial prayer asking G-d to shelter the soul of the departed "on the wings of His Divine presence" is chanted. The most commonly used Psalm at the service is Psalm 23.

The funeral service is a brief and simple, but emotionally meaningful farewell to the deceased. The service is designed for the honor and dignity of the deceased. The worthy values one lived by, the good deeds one performed, and the noble aspects of the character of the deceased are eulogized. The function of the eulogy is not to comfort the bereaved; however, it may afford an implicit consolation for the mourners by highlighting the good and beautiful aspects of the life of the departed. The service enables friends and relatives to participate in the situation of bereavement, and thus in some small way help relieve the loneliness of the mourners. All who attend are confronted with the terrible fact of their own mortality and encouraged to take stock and live fully and creatively.

CUSTOMS AT THE CEMETERY

One of the last acts of loving kindness one can give to the deceased is to accompany him or her to the cemetery. The custom of pallbearers dates back to the time when Jacob was carried to his final resting place. Pallbearers should be of the Jewish faith. Some sources suggest children and brothers act as pallbearers. Others say that friends and relatives should be chosen rather than members of the immediate family.

There is a custom that the funeral procession pause several times on the way to the gravesite to symbolically express the hesitation of removing the presence of a loved one from a family and community. Some pause three times, but seven times is the customary amount. During the procession Psalm 91 is recited.

At the conclusion of the graveside service, the grave is filled in accordance with Jewish Law. This includes lowering the casket to the bottom of the grave, fully covering the casket with earth. The earth should be shovelled by close relatives and friends. This is the last act of loving kindness and respect one can perform for their deceased loved one. The *Rabbis* tell us that this act also has great psychological value. As heartbreaking as it is to hear the sound of earth against the casket, it helps the mourners come to grips with the finality and reality of death and to begin to accept their loss.

The earth that is removed for the preparation of the grave should be replaced. The shovel is not passed from person to person, but rather placed in the pile of earth for the next person to take. Some people use the back of the shovel for this act to indicate a difference from the shovel's use for other purposes.

The burial *Kaddish* is recited after the grave is filled to the surface of the ground with earth. If timing is critical, it is permissible to recite the burial *Kaddish* after the casket is covered with earth, not waiting for the entire grave to be completely filled.

The recessional redirects the sympathies from the deceased to the mourners, changing the theme from honoring the dead to comforting the survivors. Those present at the cemetery form parallel lines, facing one another. As the mourners pass through, those present recite the following words of comfort: "*Ha'makom yenachem et'chem b'toch she'ar avelei tziyon vi'yerushalayim*" (may the Lord comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem)

After the funeral, those who were in attendance wash their hands, a symbolic act of purification. This custom emphasizes the Jew's concern for life rather than death. The washing is done upon returning from the cemetery before entering the home. If this is not feasible, the washing can be performed at the cemetery office. As with the shovel at the graveside, the cup of water is not passed from hand to hand.

Kohanim have special obligations with respect to their involvement in Jewish burial practices. The *Rabbi* should be consulted for specifics. In general, a *Kohen* should not be in the same room as the deceased or participate in the traditions at the cemetery. The exceptions are for the spouse, sibling, child or parent of a *Kohen*.

MOURNING: *SHIVA, SHELOSHIM, AND AVELUT*

The process of mourning, according to Jewish law has three successive stages. The first stage, known as *Shiva*, from the Hebrew word seven, refers to the intensive seven day mourning period that follows burial. The second stage is *Sheloshim* a period of 30 days after the burial. The third stage, *Avelut*, lasts for 12 months. These stages of mourning have been developed to allow the bereaved to return gradually to society and come to terms with a life without their loved one.

The origin of intensive mourning for one week, *Shiva*, dates back to Joseph mourning one week for Jacob. The process of mourning begins after the casket is completely covered with earth. *Shiva* is observed in the house of the deceased. However, if there is a need to sleep in one's own home, mourners should leave after darkness and return early in the morning. There are many customs relating to the house of mourning such as sitting on low stools, covering mirrors, not wearing leather, and wearing slippers. Men refrain from shaving and cutting their hair, and women refrain from using cosmetics. A meal of condolence is traditionally furnished for the family by neighbors, relatives and friends upon returning from the cemetery. It consists of bread, hard boiled eggs, and beverages (no meat products should be served). Candles should be lit and kept burning throughout the entire seven days of *Shiva*.

Services are held and effort is made to secure a *Minyan* (a Jewish quorum of ten worshippers). The Ritual Director, *Rabbi*, or *Hazzan* may be contacted to assist in arranging a *Minyan*. Books (*A Minyan Of Comfort*) and *Kippot* are available from the Synagogue, and a member of the synagogue staff or *Minyanaires* can assist with leading services. The mourners do not leave home during *Shiva* unless a *Minyan* cannot come to the home; in such an event mourners may leave home to attend services only. Working, or doing business is prohibited during *Shiva*. The working poor may return to work after the third day. Also, hardship cases may return to work after three days. When *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* occur during the *Shiva* period, *Shiva* practices are suspended while observing the *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov mitzvot*.

Traditionally, Jews do not extend greetings to mourners. The door of the *Shiva* house is left slightly ajar. Visitors calling during *Shiva* should not encourage an air of festive hospitality. Rather, they should help the bereaved reflect on their feelings and memories about the deceased. Unnecessary conversation and socialization should be avoided.

The second stage of mourning: *Sheloshim* is concluded on the 30th day and constitutes the full mourning period for all relatives other than parents and children. During this period, one should be discriminating about attending social functions. The mourner continues to wear the *Kriah* (cut garment or ribbon) unless business reasons or other circumstances prevail.

The third stage, *Avelut*, terminates at the end of 12 Hebrew months. The *Kaddish*, however is completed at the end of 11 months. It is during this period that the surviving children are obligated to say *Kaddish*. Reciting *Kaddish* on a regular basis helps the mourner adjust to his or her loss. It is a connection between the generations. It is a comforting prayer magnificent in its spiritual concept and psychological insights. The recitation of *Kaddish* at each service is an expression of honor and respect. See page 23 for further comments on the *Kaddish* and *Minyan*.

Yizkor, the memorial prayer for the departed, is recited beginning with the first holiday after death (see Lamm, p. 199). Some do not start to say *Yizkor* until the *Kaddish* period is over. A memorial candle should be lit in the home before the holiday candles are kindled.

A memorial candle should also be lit on the *Yahrzeit* (anniversary) of the death. On the *Yahrzeit*, *Kaddish* is said in the synagogue. Memorial prayers may be read on the *Shabbat* prior to the *Yahrzeit* or on a Monday or Thursday during the week of *Yahrzeit* during the *Torah* service.

In the event a person dies before he or she has children, the parents of the deceased will take on the obligation of saying *Kaddish*.

THE MONUMENT AND UNVEILING

Erecting a monument is a very special tradition. The practice of erecting a monument over the grave has its roots in the Bible. "And Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is in Bethlehem, and Jacob erected a tombstone on Rachel's grave" (Gen. 5:19-20). The monument serves three purposes: to mark the place of burial, to designate the grave properly, and to serve as a symbol of honor to the deceased buried beneath it. The monument can be erected any time after *Sheloshim* and preferably before the first *Yahrzeit* (one full Hebrew year from the date of death). There are special rules for erecting a monument in the Emanuel Cemetery. These can be found in the small handbook given to the family after the burial. It is suggested that no visitations be made to the cemetery until 30 days after internment. Some people prefer not to visit the cemetery until the unveiling or first *Yahrzeit*.

Any dedications in schools or synagogues should also take place at the time of the erecting of the monument. To memorialize loved ones through a charitable cause is always in order; it is a time honored custom to perpetuate a loved one's memory through an act of charity. The synagogue office can assist in dedicating books, memorial plaques, or other contributions for specific purposes in memory of a loved one.

The unveiling is a formal dedication of the monument. It is customary to hold the unveiling within the first year after death. The unveiling is the formal removal of a veil, cloth, or handkerchief draped over the stone. The actual unveiling may be performed by anyone that the family designates. The ceremony consists of the reciting of several Psalms, thoughtful words about the deceased, the removal of the veil, and saying *Kaddish*. A *minyan* is required for the purpose of saying *Kaddish*. However, it should be noted that unveiling ceremonies are a more recent, optional practice and are not a requirement of Jewish Law. In no way should an unveiling ceremony take on the semblance of a second funeral.

Although your Ritual Committee has endeavored to make this guide as all-inclusive and detailed as possible, we recognize that there are bound to be situations involving questions which are not covered. In such situations we respectfully suggest that you please consult the *Rabbi*.

The *Kaddish* and *Minyan*

(From *Likrat Shabbat*, pages 180-181)

"The *Kaddish* is among the best known and most frequently recited Jewish prayers. Even Jews who know or recite few other prayers, know the *Kaddish* and recite it during the eleven months of mourning, on the subsequent anniversaries of the death of a loved one, and at memorial services.

"Interestingly, the *Kaddish* was not originally intended as a prayer for mourners. It was composed for recitation at the conclusion of a lesson in the "house of study." Gradually, it passed into the "house of prayer," and then into the "house of mourning." And so, although it is popularly known as the mourner's prayer, the *Kaddish* does not include a syllable about death or immortality. It makes no reference to the pain of parting or the anguish of sorrow. It seems altogether silent about those thoughts which are likely to fill the mourner's mind and the feelings that the heart is prone to harbor.

"And yet, despite its origins, the *Kaddish* makes several vital affirmations which relate directly to the mourner.

"The first of these is reflected in the name of the prayer. *Kaddish* means 'sanctification.' From beginning to end, the *Kaddish* sanctifies the name of G-d, thus attesting our total submission to, and acceptance of, His will. Despite our loss, we are among those who praise G-d's name. The structure of our faith may totter in the winds of bereavement; the *Kaddish* helps to steady it. It helps to restore our perspective. In the midst of

grief, we maintain a sense of gratitude. Death cannot erase the years of shared experience and adventure; memory remains our eternal possession.

"The *Kaddish* proclaims further that this is a 'world which He created according to His will.' Though sorrow may temporarily dull our vision or threaten to rob life of meaning, we affirm that there is a plan and a purpose to life because there is a G-d at the heart of it. Moreover, if we do not permit sorrow to embitter us, we can use it creatively. Sorrow can help us to become more sympathetic to the hurt of others, more compassionate toward the afflicted, more sensitive to life's spiritual values - realities which never die.

"The *Kaddish* offers the reassurance that G-d can provide inner peace and serenity - the mourner's most desperate needs. 'May He who ordains harmony in the universe grant peace to us ...' The death of a loved one leaves in its wake feelings of guilt and regret, resentment and anxiety. The promise of peace serves as a bright beacon of hope to help dispel the heavy gloom.

"The *Kaddish* challenges the mourner to work for the fashioning of a better world. Reciting the *Kaddish* is a link with the past; but the *Kaddish* itself looks forward. 'May He establish His kingdom ...' This ought not remain a passive hope. The *Kaddish* sounds a call to action on behalf of that kingdom for whose advent we pray.

"By requiring that the *Kaddish* be recited with a *Minyan* (quorum of ten worshippers) our tradition rendered a profound service. A *Minyan* will usually include other mourners. Then, the person reciting *Kaddish* realizes that bereavement is not the malevolent work of a spiteful fate. The mourner is not a lonely traveler in the valley of the shadow. Other people - decent, upright, and kind - are also making the heavy pilgrimage. Death is thus seen for what it is: part of the incomprehensible mystery of human existence in which light and dark, laughter and tears, joy and sadness, birth and death are not only interwoven but inseparable.

"A contemporary writer has noted that the mourner who recites the *Kaddish* feels instinctive solace and release in the act as though for the moment the survivor is reaching out to the far shore and touching the hand of the departed.

"The *Kaddish* does that and more. It joins us to our people. It adjusts our perspective. It fortifies our faith. It reassures us with a promise of inner peace. It summons us to labor for a better world.

"The *Kaddish* itself has acquired a quality of immortality. It is a gracious way to honor the dead and to ennoble the living."

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The above Guide To The Traditions And Rituals Of Jewish Burial And Mourning Practices For Members Of The Emanuel Synagogue represents a working draft of the Ritual Subcommittee: David Wald, Rick Boyar, Faith Helene, Jerry Sperber, Dr. Gerald Pitegoff, and Don Miller, to be reviewed, amended, and approved by Emanuel Synagogue Ritual Committee, *Rabbi* and Board of Trustees.

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