

**TREASURE EACH DAY:  
A GUIDE TO JEWISH RITUALS**  
**of**  
**DEATH AND MOURNING**

edited by

The *Chevra Kadisha* of the Columbia Jewish Congregation

Howard County, Maryland

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"Teach us to treasure each day..."

- Psalm 90

This booklet was reviewed and edited during the Spring and Summer of 2001 by the Chevra Kadisha of the Columbia Jewish Congregation of Howard County, Maryland. Participating at different points in the process were Rabbi Sonya Starr, Rabbi Bob Saks, Cantor Jan Morrison, David Zinner, Jan Dodi, Steve Rothman, Will Krupka and Cindy Zelkowitz.

The Chevra Kadisha welcomes volunteers to help with shiva services, to make minyanim, to provide assistance to families, to help with Tahara and Shmira and many other tasks. Please call the office if you'd like to be of assistance.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Who is a Mourner	2
What To Do When Someone Dies	2
Decisions	3
Funeral Home	4
Shmira - Being with the Body	4
Burial	5
Tahara	5
Dressing	6
The Coffin	6
Embalming and Viewing	7
Funeral Service	7
Graveside Service	8
Memorial Service	8
Eulogy	8
Young Children at the Funeral	9
Kria	9
Burial Service	10
Mourner's Kaddish	10
Shiva	11
Shloshim	13
The First Year	14
Yahrzeit	14
Yizkor	15
The Grave Marker	15
Unveiling	16
Tzedakah	16
Afterlife	17
Concluding Thoughts	17
A Summary of What To Do When Someone Dies	18
Bibliography	20
A Glossary of Jewish Terms	21
Liturgy	23
El Maley Rachamim	23
Mourner's Kaddish	25
Addendum	26
Will	27
Living Will	27
Autopsy and Organ Donation	28
Ethical Will	28

## Introduction

One characteristic that makes us human is awareness of our mortality. Death has much to teach us. It touches every one of us in a number of different ways: we all will die and we all will be mourners. Living in community, we will all have opportunities to receive and offer help at times of loss. When we are touched by death, we are reminded to value the gift of life. Awareness of death can enrich our daily lives by binding us closer to each other and to the continuum of our ancient past and unknown future.

Judaism provides sensitive and gentle guidance for navigating the process of mourning. Its ancient rituals and customs have relevance to our lives today, enriching and expanding our experiences and our sense of connectedness. Our tradition is wise in its understanding of human emotional needs. When a death occurs, the Jewish customs of mourning are a special gift to us. They give the bereaved a process to follow that provides an embracing structure during a time of turmoil. They guide the comforters toward sensitivity and action, reminding us of our profound connection to each other. Through contact with the Jewish community, many mourners feel a deepened appreciation of Judaism. This may lead to an increased sense of wholeness in their lives.

This booklet attempts to explain Jewish customs dealing with death and mourning, and some of the underlying values expressed through them. We hope it answers questions for some, raises questions for others, and generates thought and discussion among family and friends. If you read this booklet thinking only about the death, burial, and mourning of others, you may be missing an important opportunity. We invite you to use it to explore your feelings about your own mortality and your wishes concerning the rituals following your own death.

Reading this booklet may bring up concerns and questions for you. Feel free to contact the Rabbi, the CJC office, or any member of the *Chevra Kadisha* (listed in the committee section of the CJC Directory) for further discussion.

Some important information may have been inadvertently omitted here, and for this the writers ask forgiveness. Although not comprehensive, this booklet is a starting point for educating ourselves about Jewish burial and mourning rituals, and what Columbia Jewish Congregation has to offer the Jewish community.

May you be blessed so that your life is filled with *simcha* (joy) and may the inevitable times of grief serve to heighten your *simchas* in their seasons.

Shalom,

Columbia Jewish Congregation *Chevra Kadisha*

## **Who is a Mourner**

Primary mourners are those who have lost a parent, a spouse, significant other, a sibling, or a child. Clearly we grieve for others we have loved and need to express our grief for them. The formal structure of Jewish mourning is called upon for immediate family. You may wish to follow some of these traditional customs for other losses as well, such as a grandparent, an in-law or a close friend.

## **What To Do When Someone Dies**

In the midst of the many feelings at a time of loss, the initial focus of the survivors by necessity is on the deceased. The first thing to do is to contact the Columbia Jewish Congregation office or, after hours, the on-call person indicated on the CJC phone message. The Rabbi or funeral coordinator (a member of the Chevra Kaddisha) will then contact you and help you make funeral arrangements and some important decisions. It will minimize stress at this difficult time if you have previously selected a funeral home and/or a gravesite. If arrangements have not previously been made, the funeral coordinator will help contact the funeral home and the cemetery. A time for the funeral will be set after checking with the Rabbi. In the event the primary Rabbi is not available there is a backup Rabbi on call. Also contact the congregation if there has been a death in the family out of town; there are things we can do to be of assistance.

*Aninut*, the period between the moment of death and the funeral, is often the most intense period of shock and grief. During this time the primary task for the survivors is preparing the funeral. The survivor (technically, a person is not officially a mourner until after the burial) is, in effect, "pulled out" of ordinary life by the experience of death. He/she may be dazed, angry, tearful, or uncomprehending. At this moment of disruption, Jewish law wisely has the survivor excused from all other responsibilities in order to focus attention on planning the funeral, in conversation with family members and the Rabbi.

In some families there may be complex dynamics or even estrangement. All mourners have the right to be notified of the death and to participate appropriately. A death in the family can provide an opportunity to rise above the conflict and, where possible, to make peace.

For friends of the survivor, the period until the funeral is a particularly delicate time. Friends can help in many ways: driving or accompanying your friend as she/he makes the arrangements, taking care of children or picking up incoming family at the airport. This is a good time to begin arranging for food to be brought to the home, from now through the end of shiva. Your help may be needed to cancel appointments that the survivors, or the deceased, will not be keeping. Above all, you can offer your support. A silent hug or a helping gesture is worth far more than words at this time of peak stress. Do not feel that you are obligated to come up with the one magical phrase that will make everything "all right." There are no such words, but your presence and your concern are of great value.

## **Decisions**

Certain decisions will have to be made almost immediately. Please call the CJC office so we can help you make an informed choice.

Before you call a funeral home to pick up the body of the deceased, you should carefully think through your needs and the cost of various services. We've developed a simple chart in the Appendix that can guide you.

You will need to make arrangements for the funeral and for a cemetery plot. A death notice will need to be written - the Rabbi, coordinator, or funeral home may assist with that task. Many papers will also write an appreciation. Consider both a local and a hometown newspaper. If you have written anything in advance, have it and a photograph available. Decide which type of service you want: funeral and/or graveside, or memorial service. In consultation with the Rabbi, arrange a time for the service, and make arrangements with the funeral home and the cemetery.

Notify family and friends. Some of these decisions and plans may have been made in advance, but CJC's funeral coordinator will be available to help you with decisions you have not previously made. If you need help at home with meals, childcare, etc. this assistance is also available from CJC.

## **Funeral Home**

A funeral home picks up the body from the place of death, provides a place where the body is prepared, transports the body to the synagogue and/or cemetery. Usually the casket is purchased from the funeral home. CJC members have an array of funeral home choices at varying prices. When making a funeral home choice, you may want to draw on the expertise of the Chevra Kadisha or the Rabbi. We can give guidance to families working with funeral homes. See page 30.

In the appendix is a chart showing information on funeral homes and cemeteries in Washington, Columbia and Baltimore. CJC participates in a contract organized by the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington. The text of the contract is published on the Committee's web site at [http:// www.Jewish-funerals.org](http://www.Jewish-funerals.org). In 2001, the contract price of \$1,500 includes the services of the funeral home and a casket.

## ***Shmira* - Being with the Body**

We show regard for the deceased by respectful treatment of the body. This begins at the moment of death. Jewish tradition is that the body should not be left alone until the burial. This expresses the idea that a Jewish funeral is a *I'vayah*, an accompanying, of the body to the grave. Traditionally, the *Chevra Kadisha* observes this custom by having a *shomer*, or guardian, stay with the deceased at all times. At CJC we will work with the family to locate volunteers to help with *shmira* when requested. Paid *shomrim* may also be available. Many families are only able to provide a *shomer* between the *tahara* (ritual washing) and the funeral. Usually the *shomer* sits with the body while reading from the Book of Job, Psalms or contemporary writings on spirituality or the subject of death.

## **Burial**

The deceased is buried as soon as possible, preferably 24-48 hours after death. Prompt burial has psychological benefits. The funeral, the act of burial, and the first recitation of the mourner's Kaddish, which takes place by the grave (and on occasion at the funeral service before the burial), are of great value in beginning the mourning process.

Long delays between death and burial put strain on the mourners, leaving them in emotional limbo. Every effort should be made to expedite the burial. Delays, however, are permitted in order to honor the dead, for example: if we must wait for a proper coffin to arrive, or for close relatives to come from out of town, or for legal reasons.

Traditionally, Jews return the body to the earth and do not embalm or cremate the dead. The body is allowed to decompose in a natural way, in tune with the insight "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). The body is viewed as if loaned to us in life and is to be returned to the earth in as close to its original condition as possible. Any practices that disturb, attempt to preserve, or are invasive of the body are traditionally viewed as not in accordance with *k'vod hamet*, respect for the dead. Nonetheless, some Jews, for a variety of reasons do choose cremation. These are very personal decisions and should be treated with consideration and respect. As the *Chevra Kadisha*, it is our desire to attend to the individual wishes of each member of our community while honoring our history and traditions whenever possible.

## **Tahara**

The *tahara*, performed by members of a *Chevra Kadisha*, is a gentle and respectful ritual honoring the body as the miraculous vessel that housed the soul in life. Care is taken to preserve the dignity and modesty of the *met* (body of the deceased). In addition to washing the body, the *tahara* involves reciting prayers while pouring water in a continuous flow. This is reminiscent of the living waters of the *mikve* (ritual bath) used by traditional Jews to honor occasions of transition.

## Dressing

Traditionally, the Chevra Kadisha dresses (*halbashah*) the dead in simple white burial garments, called *tachrichim*. This is in keeping with the Jewish belief that a funeral should be simple, without display of wealth. Simple services reinforce the Jewish concept that we are all equal before God. The material of the plain linen *tachrichim* remind us of the garment worn by the High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple on *Yom Kippur*. Some people are buried in the kittel, a simple linen robe, they may have worn at their wedding, *seder*, and *Yom Kippur*. Additionally some people are buried with their own *tallit* (which is altered by the removal of one fringe) and *kippah*.

Dirt from Israel is symbolically placed on the body and pottery shards placed over the eyes. Traditionally we are buried without any metal or jewelry.

Dressing in street clothes has recently been practiced by many Jews.

## The Coffin

Burial traditionally takes place in an unlined wooden coffin, or *aron*, with no metal hinges, nails, or fasteners. Simplicity is emphasized, allowing the natural effects of decomposition to permit the return from "dust to dust." Elaborate coffins are seen as undue expense and unnecessary ostentation. In modern Israel the dead are wrapped only in a shroud and lowered into the ground on a bed of reeds without a casket, but in this country a casket is almost always used. As with many aspects of Jewish burial practice, the simplicity of the coffin speaks to the inherent equality and the stark reality of death.

## **Embalming and Viewing**

Embalming and viewing (the public display of the body), are traditionally not a part of Jewish custom. However, prior to closing the coffin, some family members may want to see the body to help in facing the reality of death. In some cases this may be essential to a healthy grieving process, especially for relatives from far away who have not seen the deceased in a long time. Some people may feel that children are too young to look upon the face of death. In some cases, however, children who have a strong need for a concrete sense of closure may find this viewing helpful. During the funeral ceremony, viewing the body is not harmonious with the principles of simplicity, dignity, and naturalness. The emphasis during the service is on memories of the life of the deceased, not their death. Also, to look upon the deceased is seen as disrespectful, creating an unequal relationship, because you are looking upon someone who cannot look back at you.

## **Funeral Service**

The location and content of the service can vary. The funeral service can be held at the funeral home, at the cemetery, at CJC or other locations. The funeral service takes place in the presence of the closed casket. The service consists at a minimum of the recitation of a Psalms, a eulogy, and the *El Maley Rachamim* prayer. Traditionally the mourner's *Kaddish* is not said until the service at the cemetery, but at CJC it is sometimes said at this time as well as at the cemetery.

Traditionally, flowers are symbolic of rejoicing and, therefore, are discouraged at a funeral or house of mourning. If someone who does not know of this custom should send or bring them, it is important to be appreciative of the kind intention. You may keep them or you may wish to ask someone not in mourning to take them.

Some people will have included in the obituary a suggestion of one or more charities so that others may make memorial contributions.

## **Graveside Service**

Funerals are generally followed immediately by a graveside service. Some families choose to have the entire service at the graveside. This may include the eulogy and the entire liturgy mentioned above in the funeral section, or it may be an abbreviated service. A canopy and chairs may be arranged.

The choice to hold a graveside service alone expresses the value Judaism places on simplicity, and it eliminates the expense of renting a space for an indoor funeral. The benefits of an indoor service are that it takes place in a dry, comfortable setting where a large number of people can gather. An amplification system is provided so that everyone present can hear what's being said. This may be particularly desirable for a longer service, in inclement weather, or where older people would be uncomfortable at a graveside service.

## **Memorial Service**

A memorial service is performed without the body present. This is done after a private burial ceremony, in cases of cremation, or if the person died or was buried in another location. A memorial service may be held in the synagogue, at a private home, at the funeral home, at the CJC, or in some larger space if many people will attend.

## **Eulogy**

The eulogy, or *hesped*, is a very important part of the funeral. "Eulogy" means "a good word." It is not an attempt to write an entire biography of the person, but to convey some of the personality and accomplishments of the deceased. There is an emphasis on a person's virtues. The eulogizer also tries to express the sense of loss experienced by the survivors.

The Rabbi or the facilitator, who will generally give the eulogy, will spend time with the family, even if they were well acquainted with the deceased, talking about her/him. This process is valuable not only for the writing of an appropriate eulogy, but also for the mourners themselves. A grieving family, depressed and in shock, may experience some degree of healing through sharing memories of the deceased. This sharing can be valuable, bonding, warm, and even enjoyable for the family.

Sometimes people are spontaneously asked by family members to share. Friends are also welcome to write and share a eulogy.

### **Young Children at the Funeral**

People often wonder if children should be present at a funeral. There is no reason, according to our tradition, for a child to be excluded. Whether a child attends is a family decision based on the child's maturity and wishes. It is important to realize that children also have feelings of loss, as well as all the other emotions of grief. Furthermore, their inexperience may lead them to misinterpret the tensions and grief present in the house and to conclude that they are somehow at fault. It is important that an adult take time to explain what has happened, to listen to children's feelings, and to dispel any mistaken conclusions they may have drawn. The rabbi will be willing to help you talk with the children before the service as well as to share available resources.

### ***Kria***

Death rends the fabric of life. The ritual of *kria*, or tearing the clothing, takes place before the funeral. This is probably the oldest mourning ritual we have, dating back to Biblical days. Some actually tear a garment; others tear a black ribbon, which has been attached to the mourner's garment. The tradition is to tear on the left (close to the heart) for parents and children, and on the right for spouse and siblings. After we tear, we recite the blessing

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם דֵּין הָאֵמֶת.

"*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ho-olam, dayan ha-emet.*"

Praised are You, Eternal our God, the true Judge." The torn ribbon or garment is worn through the shiva period, and some people wear it for a full 30 days (*shloshim*).

## **Burial Service**

The first part of the burial service is the procession carrying the coffin from the hearse to the grave. At least six pallbearers are chosen for closeness to the family, or if needed, members of the graveside *minyana* can help perform this *mitzvah*. The remainder of the service consists of Psalm 23, the *El Maley Rachamim* prayer, lowering the coffin into the ground, covering the coffin with earth, and the mourner's *Kaddish*. In cases where there has not been a prior funeral service, the eulogy would be delivered at the graveside.

It is a *mitzvah* for each individual at the graveside to assist in covering the casket by shoveling earth into the grave. The sound of earth striking the coffin can be stark and harsh; it is a very difficult moment for some people. For many mourners this sound is often the first moment of clear realization that their loved one has died, and therefore the beginning of acceptance and healing. It is only after the burial that the bereaved formally becomes a mourner. Burying our own dead is an act of *hesed*, of loving kindness, we can perform for the deceased. Judaism teaches us that anything we do to accompany the dead to his or her burial is an act of *hesed*, because it is the one thing we do for another person for which we can never be thanked or repaid.

## **Mourner's *Kaddish***

The mourner's *Kaddish* does not deal directly with death but speaks of the power and majesty of God. Perhaps the ancient rabbis understood that it is in the face of death that one is most likely to deny the existence of God. We recite the *Kaddish* to reaffirm our belief. We express our feelings of loss and the hope that God will fill the vacuum that has been created in the world and in our hearts. Some people believe the *Kaddish* is also said for the benefit of the soul of the deceased to help facilitate its journey.

After the funeral it is customary to say *Kaddish* at every service you attend during mourning. Traditionally, *Kaddish* is only said for immediate family, but you may say *Kaddish* for whomever you wish. Some people undertake the *mitzvah* of saying *Kaddish* for a person who left no family. In CJC, the mourners rise first, are consoled, and then the congregation may rise for *Kaddish* if they want to honor the memory of someone who has no one to say *Kaddish* for them.

## **Shiva**

Jewish tradition offers very specific recommendations for gradual reentry into normal life. In the first week after the funeral, the mourners are treated with the utmost care and respect. Their needs are met by the community, both their physical needs, such as meals, babysitting, etc., and their spiritual and emotional needs.

Immediately on returning from the cemetery, mourners should be greeted with a "meal of consolation" prepared by their extended family and/or community. It is traditional to place a pitcher of water, a bowl and towels outside the door of the house for the ritual hand washing.

*Shiva* (literally, seven) is a period of up to a week during which the mourners remain at home. During this time, a service is held daily (often in the evening) at the home, so that the mourners may recite the *Kaddish*. Mourners are encouraged to join the congregation on Shabbat to say *Kaddish*. In some communities services are held in the home both morning and evening. The tradition is that the mourner's *Kaddish* is said in the presence of a *minyan*, to insure that mourners do not grieve in isolation but rather surrounded by members of their community. Friends, relatives, and community members visit and bring some food for the household. It is traditional to include round foods (hard-boiled eggs, lentils, bagels, etc.) that are symbolic of the wholeness of life.

In some instances where there may be very few or no family members, the role of the community becomes central. People are needed to attend *minyanim*, bring meals, help with dishes and other housework, help with childcare and/or pet care. At Columbia Jewish Congregation, the funeral coordinator assists in this process.

The *shiva* period gives the mourners a time to withdraw from the busyness of the world and begin to integrate and accept their loss. Our tradition emphasizes focusing on memory and things of emotional significance, and relieves the mourner from focusing on the external world. For this reason there are traditions that the mourner cover mirrors and need not bathe, shave, change clothes, or use makeup. The aim of these practices is to de-emphasize externals, and to keep the focus on the spiritual and emotional aspects of loss.

Through the prayer services and recitations of the mourner's *Kaddish*, and also through the conversations during the *shiva* period, family and community honor the memory of the dead person. The mourners may reminisce about their times with their loved one, perhaps bringing out old photographs and journals to share.

For the visitors, there is something of an art to paying a condolence call. What is most valuable is your presence. Focus on the mourner and be guided by his/her mood, inclination to talk or be silent, to weep or laugh. In many communities superficial and light conversation is common practice, and even assumed to be the purpose of a *shiva* call. However, it is not the role of the visitor to seek to distract the mourners from their grief process but rather to support them in it. Nor is it the role of the visitor to force the mourner to mourn if they are not so inclined.

As well as sitting in sympathetic silence, one can ask open-ended questions such as "how are you doing?" Your own memories, stories, and reflections about the dead person may provide a complement to those of the mourners. Obviously, if what you have to say is neither discreet nor becoming, this is not the time to share it.

Sometimes one may find one's own feelings opened up in the process of paying a *shiva* call. Grief is part of the human condition, and sharing it highlights our equality in the face of death and loss. At the same time, it is important to remember that the mourner's needs are your primary focus. The support we give each other at such times benefits everyone, mourner and comforter alike.

As a mourner it is important to remember that although people are coming to visit you, you are not their host. You do not need to offer refreshments; visitors are to supply them. You do not need to engage in conversation if you prefer to be silent or alone. In short you are excused from the conventional demands of politeness and hospitality. Feel free to shape the content of the *shiva* to best support your own needs. That may include asking for the company of specific people, asking for specific prayers or readings, or specific foods.

If a funeral and/or *shiva* occur away from Howard County, you may choose to support your own grief process by asking friends to gather with you on your return. This gathering may include prayers and songs, or just be a time for talking and listening. The gathering provides the mourners a chance to tell their story and share their grief when the community might not have known those details or the person who died. It allows the community to support the mourner and benefit from continuing to learn about the mourner, the deceased, and the mourning process itself.

The end of the *shiva* period initiates a new phase in the life of the mourners. One custom is to walk around the block on the last day to symbolize the transition. As the mourners re-enter the world of work and community, their personal reality remains radically altered by their loss. It may take months, or even years, for them to fully experience their grief, and our tradition provides further guidelines for what comes next. It is important to remember bereaved families and individuals at holiday times (which may be particularly poignant) and to phone or visit from time to time, or offer to accompany them to services now and then.

### ***Shloshim***

We observe a further mourning period known as *shloshim*, which means thirty, for thirty days, counting from the day of the funeral. The mourner returns to work but is still not completely back in the world. This is expressed by avoiding parties, concerts and other forms of public entertainment. At the conclusion of *shloshim*, the formal mourning period ends, except for those who are mourning parents. For them, formal mourning, including the recitation of the mourner's *Kaddish*, lasts eleven months. However, many people choose to mourn losses other than parents for a full eleven months. Psychologically and emotionally, such mourning may continue for some extended time, and it is wise to recognize this and permit oneself to continue saying *Kaddish* and avoiding celebrations, crowds, and public events. The choice of how long to mourn is a personal one that will arise out of the nature of the relationship and one's own way of handling loss.

Some people may wish to mark the end of *shloshim* with a special *minyan* at which the mourner or family members speak about the deceased. Also, if there is to be a public memorial service it is usually held at the conclusion of *shloshim*. The memorial service may include several speakers and music or poetry that might not have been included in the funeral service.

## **The First Year**

During the first year (*shana*), mourners may wish to say the mourner's *Kaddish* daily. In our community it may be difficult to find nine other adults to hold a daily service. If you would like a daily *minyan*, please speak to the Rabbi. In larger cities, congregations are able to do this with more ease. At Columbia Jewish Congregation mourners are welcomed and recognized at *Shabbat* services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings where *Kaddish* is recited. Not only is saying the mourner's *Kaddish* valuable, but coming to services and taking time out of the week to reflect on the deceased offers a special period when the mourner knows they will have time and space to reflect. Drawing the mourners into the community to worship may help them return to life, and to the realization that others are sustaining similar losses.

## **Yahrzeit**

*Yahrzeit* means "time of year" and is the anniversary of a loved one's death on the Hebrew calendar. We observe *yahrzeit* at home by lighting a *yarzheit* candle in memory of the deceased. In the synagogue, we observe *yahrzeit* by saying the mourner's *Kaddish* at services. Each year the CJC office will send a reminder of the *yahrzeit* date to the family. In order to do this, the office needs to have on file the date of death and the name and address to which the annual notice will be mailed. On the *Shabbat* services closest to the *yahrzeit*, whether the family members are at services or not, the name of the deceased is read out to the congregation.

The *yahrzeit* itself is a kind of individual memorial day, a time to remember the deceased with whatever activity or observance reflects the person you are remembering. Some examples are: taking a particular hike, participating in a certain sport, gardening, cooking a special recipe, etc. Family members are invited to purchase a *yahrzeit* plaque to honor the deceased. It can be purchased at any time, and many congregants purchase a plaque years after the death of grandparents or other relatives.

## ***Yizkor***

*Yizkor* (memorial) services are held on the three pilgrimage festivals (the last days of *Sukkot* and *Pesach*, and on *Shavuot*) and on *Yom Kippur*. The *Yizkor* prayer recalls by name those who have died, along with others in our community and in our history who have left their mark on the world. *Yizkor* was originally instituted as a regular practice after the First Crusade in 1096, when entire communities of Jews in the Rhineland chose death over forced baptism. The surviving communities instituted a memorial to the pious martyrs on *Yom Kippur*, which was later extended to the three pilgrimage festivals. The service was eventually expanded to include memorials for individual relatives.

No matter what we believe or don't believe about the afterlife, most of us would agree with the statement: "We live on in the memory of those who survive us." *Yizkor* provides us with a framework for including personal and collective memory in our observance of major Jewish holidays.

There is a custom of giving *tzedaka* (charity) and lighting a *yahrzeit* candle not only on the anniversary of the death, but each time we recite *Yizkor*.

## **The Grave Marker**

The gravestone or monument (*matzevah*) can be selected shortly after the funeral, though we usually wait until after the eleventh month of mourning to hold the unveiling. The text on the stone often includes the full Hebrew name of the deceased, as well as the English name. The Hebrew and English dates of birth and death may be included as well as a short Hebrew phrase. The Rabbi can help with this process.

## Unveiling

The basic mitzvah of the unveiling is visiting the grave. The unveiling is simply the first opportunity to do so after the placement of the monument.

Customs differ, but the unveiling is held after shloshim and usually in the month before the first *yahrzeit*. The unveiling service is a relatively recent practice originating in the United States. Technically, a Rabbi need not be present, but it is helpful to have an experienced person officiate. The ceremony is very brief, usually of some psalms and readings, a few words about the deceased, the removal of a covering from the monument, the *El Maley Rachamim*, and, if a minyan is present, the mourner's *Kaddish*. You may ask the Rabbi to assist you in putting together an appropriate service to mark the occasion.

The unveiling reminds us that we will continue to visit the grave on *yahrzeit* and during the High Holiday season, and that the memory of the person will always be with us as our life continues.

## Tzedakah

There is a close connection between *tzedakah* (giving to charity) and the various mourning customs. You may give *tzedakah* at any point in the year of mourning as a tribute to the memory of the deceased. It is also customary at a *yahrzeit* to honor the memory of the deceased by giving *tzedakah*.

## **Afterlife**

This is a deep and complex topic, and one seldom discussed in American Jewish life. One glance at the text of *El Maley Rachamim* reveals that Judaism does indeed affirm the survival of the soul after death:

God full of compassion, Eternal Spirit of the universe, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your *Shekhinah* (Presence) to our loved one who has entered eternity. God of Mercy, let her/him find refuge forever beneath Your wings, and let her/his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

In the light of new attitudes and openness about spirituality, it is certainly a valid Jewish option to believe in an afterlife. Judaism over the centuries has never codified a single vision of the afterlife, and the concept continues to evolve. Our tradition offers many rich resources for continuing the exploration of beliefs in this area.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Below are ten guidelines for the mourner's process that take into account human needs for self-acceptance, emotional expression, support from others, and time.

1. Accept your emotions. Realize that grieving can be an emotional roller coaster, involving shock, guilt, denial, panic, anger, and physical symptoms.
2. Express your feelings. A feeling that is denied remains with you and can erupt at inappropriate times. Acknowledging pain is much better for long-term emotional health. Crying is a natural expression of grief for all people - men, women and children.
3. Heal your grief in your own way and in your own time. Ask that others give you this freedom as well.

4. If you have children, bring them into the grieving process. They should not be shielded from the awareness of death. Silence and secrecy deprive them of an important opportunity to share grief. Your children's most important source of security is you. Stay close to them, hug them, and let them feel the warmth of your body.
5. Allow yourself flexibility. Loss can sap one's energy and affect one's ability to function. Give yourself permission not to do unnecessary tasks. Take one step at a time outside your home.
6. The support of other people is important. Let your friends and family know you need support and feedback. The synagogue has volunteers ready to help in many ways if you ask for them. Ask for what you need.
7. Help yourself and others through support groups. People in these groups understand your fears and frustrations; they have been there, too. Again, the synagogue can refer you to an appropriate support group.
8. Counseling may be beneficial. Seeking professional advice is not an admission of weakness but a demonstration of determination to help yourself during this critical period. This can be a very powerful and fertile time for growth. Therapy, especially with someone attuned to grief issues, can be of great value at this time.
9. Be gentle with yourself. Allow your community to assist. Also be aware that you may need solitude to find yourself. Judaism and your Jewish community may help you face and survive the inevitable moments of despair.
10. Death and grief can be profound teachers. Loss increases our awareness of our own mortality and heightens our appreciation of the gift of life. Death ends a life, not a relationship. Sifting through memories and continued inner conversations help bring about resolution and a sense of peace. Respect for your own grief process and respect for the tradition are ways of honoring the memory of the deceased.

## A Summary of What To Do When Someone Dies

1. Call the office of Columbia Jewish Congregation at 410-730-6044 for assistance. The staff will put you in touch with the synagogue funeral coordinator and the Rabbi to assist you with arrangements and provide all necessary information.
2. We are able to help you select a funeral home.
3. Decide which type of service you want: Funeral and/or graveside, or memorial. Check with the Rabbi before finalizing the time for the funeral.
4. Choose a casket; traditionally it is made entirely of wood. Decide about *tahara*, *tachrichim*, and *shmira*. Decide about burial or cremation.
5. The funeral home will help coordinate arrangements with the cemetery. They will arrange for getting a death certificate. You will need several official copies.
6. You may also wish to write an obituary. The funeral home staff can help with the paper.
7. Your call to the synagogue will set in motion arrangements for a *minyan* if you wish, and the notification of friends and/or community members. Decide on whether you want people to return to your home (or some other gathering place) after the funeral. Decide whether to sit *shiva* or not. Traditionally shiva is seven days, but many people sit for fewer. We can help with creating a *shiva minyan* for as many nights as needed and can coordinate help with meals according to your dietary preferences.
8. If the funeral is out of town, you may still want to notify the congregation. Call the synagogue, and leave a phone number where you can be reached if you would like contact. If you want a memorial service on your return, or a *minyan* or special gathering, the *Chevra Kadisha* can advise or assist you.

## **Bibliography**

There is a vast amount of literature, general and Jewish, on the subject of death and bereavement. The appendix contains a partial listing. See the bibliography at <http://www.Jewish-funerals.org> for a more complete list.

## A Glossary of Hebrew Terms

*Alav ha-shalom* (masculine)/*aleha ha-shalom* (feminine): "May peace be upon him/her"

*Aninut*: the time between death and burial before becoming a mourner

*Aron*: coffin

*Avel*: mourner

*Baruch dayan ha-emet*: "Blessed is the true judge." Traditional exclamation of acceptance upon hearing of someone's death

*Chesed shel emet*: "True loving kindness" Refers to the care of the deceased, since the dead can't reciprocate (tahara, pallbearers, and filling in the grave)

*Chevra Kadisha*: "Holy Society" The group that prepares the body for burial and offers support services to mourners

*El Maley Rachamim*: "God full of compassion" The memorial prayer which mentions the name of the deceased

*Hesped*: Eulogy

*Kaddish* (mourner's *Kaddish*): an Aramaic prayer affirming God's presence even in the face of loss

*Kittel*: simple white garment worn by some for their wedding, *seder*, *Yom Kippur*, and their burial

*Kria*: tearing an article of clothing to express grief and as a sign of mourning

*L'vaya*: funeral (literally: accompanying)

*Matzeva*: gravestone, monument, or marker

*Met*: the body

*Mikva*: ritual bath

*Minyan*: the quorum of ten adult Jews required for saying certain prayers; eg: *Kaddish*

*Mitzvah*: "commandment" an act which fulfills a divine commandment; a righteous deed

*Onen*: a person in a state of *aninut*

*Pikuach nefesh*: "to save a life" The condition under which most Jewish laws are set aside when life is at stake

*Seudat havra'a*: meal of comfort prepared by friends for mourners returning from the funeral

*Shiva*: the period of mourning at home, traditionally for seven days

*Shloshim*: the thirty day period of mourning (includes *shiva*) after the funeral

*Shmira*: Ritual of guarding, or accompanying, the body from the *tahara* to the burial

*Shomrim*: the guardians of the body, performing *shmira*, before burial

*Tachrichim*: burial garments

*Tahara*: the ritual washing and dressing of the body

*Tallit*: traditional fringed prayer shawl

*Tzedaka*: literally righteousness, understood as giving to charity

*Yahrzeit*: the anniversary of a person's death on the Hebrew calendar

*Yizkor*: the memorial service in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, and the last days of Pesach, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*

*Zichrono Pvracha* (masculine)/*Zichrona Pvracha* (feminine): "May his/her memory be for a blessing"

**EL MALEY RACHAMIM**

(for a female)

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים. הַמְצִיא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת  
כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה. בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ  
מְזַהְרִים אֶת נִשְׁמַת \_\_\_\_\_ בַּת \_\_\_\_\_ שֶׁהִלְכָה  
לְעוֹלָמָהּ. בְּגֵן עֵדֶן תִּהְיֶה מְנוּחָתָהּ. אָנָּה, בַּעַל הַרַחֲמִים  
הַסְתִּירָהּ בְּסֵתֶר כְּנַפֶּיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים. וַצָּרֹר בְּצָרוֹר הַחַיִּים  
אֶת נִשְׁמַתָּהּ, יְהוּהָ הוּא נֶחֱלָתָהּ: וְתַנּוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל  
מִשְׁכָּבָהּ. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

El maley rachamim shochen bamromim, Hamtzey menucha nechona tachat kanfey hashchina, bemaalot k'doshim u't-horim kezohar harakeea mazhirim, et nishmat (name) shehalcha l'olama, baavur shenadvoo tzedaka bad hazkarat nishmata, b'gan ayden t'hay menuchata. Lachen baal harachamim yastireha b'seter k'nafav l'olamim. Vyitzror bitzror hachayim et nishmata, Adonai hu nachalata, Vtanuach b'shalom al mishkava, V'nomar Amen.

(for a male)

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בַּמְרוֹמִים. הַמְצִיא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת  
כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה. בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ  
מְזַהְרִים אֶת נְשִׁמַת \_\_\_\_\_ בֶּן \_\_\_\_\_ שֶׁהֵלַךְ  
לְעוֹלָמוֹ, בְּגַן עֵדֶן תְּהֵא מְנוּחָתוֹ. אָנָּה, בַּעַל הַרַחֲמִים  
הַסְתִּירָהוּ בְּסֵתֶר כְּנַפְיֶךָ לְעוֹלָמִים. וְצָרֹר בְּצָרֹר הַחַיִּים  
אֶת נְשִׁמָּתוֹ. יְהוּה הוּא נִחַלְתּוֹ: וַיְנַוַח בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל  
מְשַׁכְּבוֹ. וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן:

El maley rachamim shochan bamromim, Hamtzey menucha nechona tachat kanfey hashchina, bemaalot k'doshim u't-horim kezohar harakeea mazhirim, et nishmat (name) shehalach l'olamo, baavur shenadvoo tzedaka bad hazkarat nishmato, b'gan ayden t'hay menuchato. Lachen baal harachamim yastireyhu b'seter k'nafav l'olamim. Vyitzror bitzror hachayim et nishmato, Adonai hu nachalato, Vyanuach b'shalom al mishkavo, V'nomar Amen.

God filled with mercy, dwelling in the heavens' heights, bring proper rest beneath the wings of your *Shechinah*, amid the ranks of the holy and the pure, illuminating like the brilliance of the sky the soul of who has gone to his/her eternal rest. May you who are the source of mercy shelter him/her eternally, and bind his/her soul among the living, that he/she may rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

## MOURNER'S KADDISH

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֲלָמָא דֵּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ,  
וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.  
בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי וְלְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא:

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה  
וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְעַלְמֵי (Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur)  
add: מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא, תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחֲמַתָּא,  
דְּאִמְרֵן בְּעֲלָמָא, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמֵיָא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,  
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yit-ga-dal v'yit-ka-dash sh'mei ra-ba, b'al-ma di-v'ra chi-ru-tei, v'yam-lich mal-chu-tei b'chai-yei-chon uv'yo-mei-chon uv'chai-yei d'chawl-beit

Yis-ra-eil, ba-a-ga-la u-viz-man ka-riv, v'im'ru: A-mein.

Y'hei sh'mei ra-ba m'va-rach l'a-lam ul'al-mei al-ma-ya.

Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach, v'yit-pa-ar v'yit-ro-mam v'yit-na-sei, v'yit-ha-dar v'yit-a-leh v'yit-ha-lal, sh'mei d'ku-d'sha, b'rich hu, l'ei-la min-kawl-bir-cha-ta v'shi-ra-ta, tush-b'cha-ta v'ne-che-ma-ta, da-a-mi-ran b'al-ma, v'im'ru:

A-mein.

Y'hei sh'la-ma ra-ba min sh'ma-ya, v'cha-yim, a-lei-nu v'al kawl-Yis-ra-eil, v'im'ru: A-mein.

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu v'al kawl-Yis-ra-eil, ve'al kol yoshvey tevel v'im'ru: A-mein.

Let God's name be made great and holy in the world that was created as God willed.

May God complete the holy realm in your own lifetime, in your days, and in the days of all the house of Israel, quickly and soon. And say: Amen.

May God's great name be blessed, forever and as long as worlds endure.

May it be blessed, and praised, and glorified, and held in honor, viewed with awe, embellished, and revered; and may the blessed name of holiness be hailed, though it be higher than all the blessings, songs, praises, and consolations that we utter in this world. And say: Amen.

May Heaven grant a universal peace, and life for us, and for all Israel. And say: Amen.

May the one who creates harmony above, make peace for us and for all Israel, and for all who dwell on earth. And say: Amen.

## **Addendum**

There are several other subjects that we believe each congregant should be thinking about in advance of her/his death. Although these issues are not specifically Jewish, they affect us all, and so we include them.

The values we are dealing with basically reflect:

1. How I want to be treated before death, and how I want to treat others as they move towards death;
2. What I want done with my property, my donations and bequests, and what values I want to pass on to others.

**Will:** We encourage everyone who has not yet done so to prepare a will. It is crucial to have a well written, notarized will that establishes how worldly goods, etc. are to be dispersed. The will should be revised regularly. An effective will eliminates tremendous work and strain for the survivors, and becomes a great gift to them.

**Living Will: Medical Power of Attorney and Directive to Physicians:** In this day of modern medicine, it is imperative that each individual have a medical power of attorney and an advance medical directive regarding how they would want to be treated in various medical circumstances. Without these documents, the physicians or hospital can make decisions about a treatment that may contradict the patient's or the family's wishes. What level of intervention might you want regarding life-sustaining medical procedures? Do you want to be resuscitated? If you become mentally incompetent, who is it you want to make medical decisions for you? These directives can be changed but they should be in writing now.

**Autopsy and Organ Donation:** Tradition has prohibited the desecration of the body of the deceased. However, autopsy and organ donation are permissible, and may even be mandatory, in order to save a life (*pikuach nefesh*). Autopsies to investigate genetic causes of death or the effects of experimental treatments may be permissible because they assist family members or those suffering from the same illness. Organ donations, including cornea, skin, kidney, heart, liver, stomach, pancreas, intestines, lungs, and others are also considered to fall within the concept of *pikuach nefesh*. In cases where advanced consent of the deceased has not been obtained, the next of kin must choose whether to permit organ donation and/or autopsy.

**Ethical Will:** An ethical will is an opportunity for direct personal communication of your values to loved ones. It may be written to children, spouse, family members, and/or friends. You can reflect on what you have achieved and learned in your life, and the values you cherish and live by which you wish to transmit to your survivors. Essentially, it is a commentary on your ethics and a message of your hopes and dreams for your family and friends in the future. You can address specific individuals, encouraging them to develop in ways you think important. You can encourage your survivors in their paths, vocations, goals, social endeavors, etc. The intention of an ethical will is to be loving rather than critical or controlling. It may contain instructions on how you would like to be remembered, including specific instructions for your funeral, burial, eulogy, *shiva*, *tzedaka*, etc.

As with a legal will, the ethical will needs to be revised from time to time. It encapsulates what you believe now, and what you want survivors to remember, cherish, and embrace. As your values change over time and as you come to see people differently, the ethical will can be rewritten. It can either be filed with other important papers until after your death, or shared with loved ones at any time you choose.