

AHAVATH ACHIM
SYNAGOGUE



IN YOUR TIME
OF SORROW

Funeral and Burial
Guide



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I. INTRODUCTION

“What person shall live and not see death?”

(Ps. 89:49)

***“The Psalmist reflects the understanding that death
is part of the fate of every human being,
the fate of each of us.***

We should never try to deny death.

It is futile to attempt to hide from death...”


(Rabbi Jules Harlow, The Bond of Life)

The Jewish way in death has been called “The Way of Confrontation.” In the absence of grief and confronting our loss, we can find no healing. When we face death directly, God grants us the strength to eventually overcome our loss. Burial preparations and mourning practices encourage loved ones to directly confront their loss.


This booklet outlines the Jewish way in death, burial and mourning. The ultimate goal of Jewish burial and bereavement practices is to aid loved ones in the reparative process of mourning. An important aspect is treating the dead with utmost respect, referred to as *kevod hamet* (“honor due the deceased”). It is our hope that this booklet will help you to understand the practices in that context. If you have a question or require clarification, please contact one of the rabbis.



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II. WHEN A DEATH OCCURS IN YOUR FAMILY: WHAT YOU SHOULD DO



**Immediately contact the Jewish funeral home of your choice:
Be sure to tell the funeral home that you are a member
of Ahavath Achim Synagogue.
They will contact the synagogue and rabbi.**

☒ **Death in a Hospital or Nursing Home**

When a death occurs in a hospital or nursing home, you will be asked to sign a release form so that the body of the deceased may be taken to a funeral home. Please request that your loved one be transported to **the funeral home**.

☒ **Death at Home or Assisted Living Facility**

Hospice Is Involved: If the death occurs at home, immediately contact hospice. Then contact the funeral home. A hospice nurse must make an official Pronouncement of Death prior to moving the deceased to the funeral home.

or

Hospice Is Not Involved: If the death occurs at home, immediately notify the local police department. Contact the deceased's physician and alert the funeral home, which will, upon release by the police, arrange for transfer of the deceased to the funeral home.

☒ **Death Occurs Out of Town *or* Burial Will Take Place Out of Town**

When a death occurs outside of the Atlanta area or burial will take place outside of the Atlanta area, immediately contact the local funeral home to coordinate details.



III. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE FUNERAL HOME



When you go to the funeral home for your scheduled visit, you and your family will be asked to make certain decisions and to provide relevant information concerning your loved one. The following information should inform and guide you.

- ❖ **Tallit:** It is traditional for an individual to be buried in a *tallit*. You should bring the *tallit* with you. However, if your loved one does not have a *tallit* or you prefer to pass it on to another loved one, ask the funeral home if it can provide you with a *tallit*.
- ❖ **Death Certificate:** The funeral home is responsible for completing and filing a death certificate. The funeral home will need the deceased's full name, address, birth date and birth place, Social Security number, occupation, and parents' names.
- ❖ **Involvement of the *Chevra Kaddisha* (Jewish Burial Society):** We strongly urge you to make choices regarding the burial of your loved one that are in accordance with Jewish tradition. Those choices will reflect the value of *kevod hamet* and the ultimate equality of every human being before God.

The deceased's body should be prepared for burial by the *Chevra Kaddisha*. The *Chevra Kaddisha*, a group comprised of volunteers, is a primary way in which the community participates in acts of loving kindness known as *chesed shel emet*.

The *Chevra Kaddisha* washes the body in an act known as *tahara* (purification) and then dresses the body in a white, pocketless shroud known as *tachrichim*. This shroud symbolizes the ultimate equality of all individuals. As we entered this world without material possessions, so we leave this world.

- ❖ **Casket:** As a sign of respect for the deceased, Jewish burial practices encourage the body's return to its natural state... "for from dust were you taken... and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19)

To that end, the deceased should be buried in a casket made entirely of wood. Although a plain pine box is recommended by Jewish tradition, the Jewish funeral homes offer a variety of acceptable caskets. Most cemeteries in Atlanta require a permeable vault, a cement liner that is placed into the grave which houses the casket. The least expensive or minimally required liner of the cemetery should be used.

- ❖ **Cremation:** Jewish tradition strongly discourages cremation as counter to the value of *kevod hamet*. Moreover, following the incineration of countless numbers of Jews in the Holocaust, cremation of Jews has become especially distasteful. Nonetheless, if you or a loved one elects cremation, the rabbis of our congregation will be able to officiate only at a memorial service in the absence of the cremains. Cremains themselves may be buried in some Jewish cemeteries without the benefit of Conservative rabbinic officiation.

- ❖ **Shomer:** Traditionally, from the time of death until burial the deceased is never left alone. This is a sign of respect. It is appropriate for family members and friends to sit next to the coffin or for the funeral home to engage the services of a *shomer*, an attendant.

- ❖ **Pallbearers:** Although not required, you may invite six to eight pallbearers to escort the deceased to the gravesite. These pallbearers should be sufficiently strong and healthy to carry the casket. Other individuals may participate as “honorary pallbearers.” Please give the names of these individuals to the funeral home. The funeral home staff will give instructions to the pallbearers at the time of the funeral.

- ❖ **Obituary:** Bring any and all information relative to the preparation of an obituary to the funeral home; its staff will place the announcement in any newspaper on behalf of the family.



IV. AUTOPSY, ORGAN DONATION AND VIEWING



❖ Autopsy

Routine autopsies are not permitted because they violate the value

of *kevod hamet*. An autopsy may be requested by the family or mandated by the county if a cause of death is not easily determined. An autopsy is permitted when medical professionals think it will help others who suffer from the same condition(s) as the deceased.

✧ Organ Donation

Organ donations are permissible and encouraged because of the emphasis our tradition places on *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) and on bringing healing to the living.

✧ Viewing

Jewish tradition prohibits the public display of the deceased. Open casket funerals are not permitted.



V. INTERFAITH BURIAL



Only Jewish individuals may be buried in the Ahavath Achim Synagogue sections of cemeteries.

Crest Lawn and Arlington Cemeteries have sections designated for the Jewish community which allow for interfaith burial and for interfaith symbols on grave markers. **Greenwood Cemetery** has sections for interfaith burial. However those sections are not specifically designated for the Jewish community.

While Conservative rabbis may officiate at Jewish funerals in interfaith sections of cemeteries, they do not ordinarily officiate at the funerals of non-Jewish individuals. Contact the funeral home for specific information concerning interfaith burial.



VI. PREPARATION WITH THE RABBI



Prior to the funeral, the Rabbi will meet with you to discuss the life of your loved one, the funeral and mourning practices.

Be prepared to provide the Rabbi with the following information:

- ✧ Who, if anyone, among family and friends will speak at the funeral. It is recommended that family/friend participants be limited to two or three individuals.

- ✧ Specific *shiva* plans, including when you would like to have evening *minyán* services in a home. Mourners are urged to observe the full week of *shiva* and to plan accordingly. The synagogue will provide a leader for *minyán* services in *shiva* homes Sunday through Thursday evenings. Mourners are encouraged to come to the synagogue on *Shabbat*.



VII. THE FUNERAL SERVICE AND BURIAL



Jewish tradition encourages us to confront the reality of death. One expression of this value is the absence of flowers at funerals because, we believe, such adornment diminishes this recognition.

✧ Who Are the Mourners?

According to Jewish law, the following are obligated to engage in Jewish mourning practices: son, daughter, father, mother, husband, brother, half-brother, wife, sister, and half-sister of the deceased. Girls under the age of 12 and boys under the age of 13 are exempted from mourning.

✧ *K'riah* – The Tearing of A Ribbon or Rending A Garment

K'riah is a traditional sign of mourning. Our congregation's practice allows for the wearing of a *k'riah* ribbon as a substitute for the traditional rending of garments. Prior to the beginning of the funeral, the Rabbi will tear the ribbon and help you to recite a blessing, "*Dayan Haemet*," recognizing God as the final arbiter of life and death.

Sons and daughters of the deceased wear their *k'riah* ribbon on the left side of the body, above the heart. All other mourners wear the *k'riah* ribbon at the same height on the right side of the body. The *k'riah* ribbon should be worn throughout the week of *shiva*, but not on *Shabbat*. Some people continue to wear the ribbon throughout *shloshim*, the month following the death.

☒ **The Funeral Service**

The funeral service is brief, consisting of psalms, readings, a eulogy and the *El Maleh Rachamim* memorial prayer. The graveside service will also provide the first opportunity for the bereaved to say the *Mourners' Kaddish*.

A member or veteran of any branch of the United States Armed Services may have a U.S. flag draped over the casket. Prior to the beginning of the funeral service, a military memorial in which the flag is presented to the survivors is permissible. The funeral home will make all necessary arrangements.

☒ **Mourners' Kaddish**

This prayer contains no reference to death and was not originally associated with it. Historically, *Kaddish* was recited by students when they completed a period of study. As a way of recognizing and showing appreciation for the opportunity to study, students would say, "Magnified and sanctified be God's great name." When a teacher died, students would honor him by studying his works and reciting *Kaddish*. This was the prayer's first association with death.

The *Mourners' Kaddish* today is a prayer of affirmation. Despite the painful loss the mourner has experienced, he/she affirms belief in God. Our sages require that *Kaddish* be recited in the presence of a *minyán*, a group of ten Jewish adults, in order to emphasize the supportive role the community can play in these circumstances. As the community shares in the loss, so, too, it must help provide consolation to the mourner.

☒ **Conclusion of Burial Service**

At the conclusion of the burial service, family and community members will be invited to begin to fill in the gravesite with earth. For the community members present this is an act of loving-kindness, *chesed shel emet*, as they accompany the deceased to his/her final resting place. For mourners, this stark and often difficult action begins to force a recognition of the finality of death and enables the healing process of grief to begin.

When we participate in shoveling earth at the gravesite it is customary for us to initially use the back side of the shovel before turning it over and using it as normal. We do so to indicate our reluctance to use the shovel for this purpose.

When we are finished shoveling it is customary to place the shovel back in the ground and not hand it to the next person. Again, in this way, we show our reluctance to complete filling in the gravesite.

With the completion of the funeral service, the family members of the loved one become mourners and receive words of comfort. Oftentimes at the cemetery, those gathered for the funeral will form two lines facing each other through which the mourners pass as they leave the gravesite to receive expressions of consolation.

Following burial when mourners first return to the *shiva* home, it is customary to place a pitcher of water and towels outside the front door. This symbolic washing serves to differentiate between death and life.



VIII. *SHIVA*



This seven-day period, which begins immediately after burial, is the most intensive time of mourning. It concludes on the morning of the seventh day after the burial. Mourners do not “sit *shiva*” on *Shabbat*, but do resume all public mourning practices following *Shabbat*.

The black *k'riah* ribbons should be removed from garments before *Shabbat* and placed on them again after *Shabbat*. The only public expression of mourning on *Shabbat* is the recitation of the *Mourners' Kaddish* in synagogue services.

The *shiva* period ends with the beginning of any Jewish holiday (except *Chanukah* or *Purim*) and is not resumed thereafter. For more information about how holidays affect *shiva* and *shloshim*, please contact one of the rabbis.

✧ Kindling the Memorial Candle

Because light is a symbol of the soul, mourners light a *shiva* candle when they return to the *shiva* home from the cemetery. The funeral home will provide a candle. The candle should remain lit for the duration of *shiva*. Mourners may wish to offer the following reading at the time they kindle the *shiva* candle:

O God, Source of all life and love, we turn to You at this time of pain and grief. Give us strength in this hour of sorrow as we light this shiva candle.

*Help us to remember the words of the Psalmist:
"The human soul is the light of the Lord."
In Your keeping, the soul of our beloved still glows,
"as brightly as the heavenly firmament."*

May this faith help to dispel the darkness which sorrow has now cast upon us. By Your light, may we who mourn see light, and may the memory of our loved one abide with us as a lasting benediction. Amen.

✧ Meal of Condolence

The first meal which the mourners eat after returning from the cemetery is prepared by friends/relatives and marks the beginning of the *shiva* period. This meal should include hard-boiled eggs which symbolically represent both life and hope.

✧ Mourners' Responsibilities

The discoveries of modern psychology remind us once again about the intuitive wisdom our ancient teachers of Judaism had concerning human nature. They recognized centuries ago how essential it is to express grief rather than repress it, how important it is to talk about one's loss with friends and relatives, and how necessary it is for mourners to move step by step toward normal activity again.

During the *shiva* period, mourners who have an obligation to recite *Kaddish* may request that an evening *minyan* service be held at the *shiva* residence. The congregation will provide prayer books, *kippot* and a *minyan* leader for services.

The front door of the *shiva* house should remain unlocked so that visitors may enter without ringing the doorbell. A sign may be posted on the door asking them not to ring the bell.

Mourners do not serve guests during *shiva* nor do they partake in festive meals. In general, mourners refrain from normal daily activities such as going to work or school and do not tend to matters of personal business. If the mourner must work for financial reasons, a return to work is permitted after three days of *shiva*.

Mourners give visible expression to their feelings of grief by interrupting and altering their routine. Through these traditional ways of mourning, the bereaved exhibit a temporary lack of self-concern as the loss of the loved one is considered paramount.

We encourage mourners to respect the following traditions:

1. Cover all mirrors.
2. Refrain from wearing cosmetics and perfumes, shaving, having one's hair cut or one's nails manicured and buying new clothes. It is customary to bathe only for purposes of cleanliness during this time and not for pleasure.
3. Refrain from wearing leather shoes since leather is considered a sign of luxury.
4. Refrain from all sources of entertainment and participation in festive occasions.
5. Refrain from conjugal relations.
6. Sit on low stools or cushions as a sign of mourning (it is from this custom that the phrase "sit *shiva*" comes).

Shiva concludes on the morning of the seventh day following burial. The day of burial counts as the first day. If *shiva* is ended by the onset of a holiday, it concludes that afternoon. At the end of *shiva*, it is traditional for mourners to take a short walk outside the home. In this manner, they symbolically signal their return to many normal activities.



IX. VISITING THE *SHIVA* HOME



Beginning with the funeral, community members perform *gemilut chasadim*, acts of lovingkindness, when they attend the funeral and comfort the mourners.

Jewish tradition regards the comforting of mourners as a *mitzvah*, a holy obligation, and an especially meritorious act. Mourners will appreciate words of comfort throughout the entire *shiva* period.

Most often the door to the *shiva* home will be unlocked, and visitors should walk in without ringing the doorbell. Visitors may bring food to the residence so that the mourners will not have to prepare meals during *shiva*. It is not appropriate to send flowers or bring candy. It is most appropriate to make a contribution to the deceased's favorite charity or to the congregation in memory of the deceased.

Greetings are permitted, but should be subdued. It is often best to allow the mourner to open the conversation. Speaking about the deceased, especially to share a significant memory, is most appropriate. In order to avoid a festive atmosphere, visitors should try to avoid crowding the *shiva* residence. The best visit is usually a brief one in which the visitors speak with the mourners and leave shortly thereafter.



X. *SHLOSHIM* – THE FIRST MONTH FOLLOWING BURIAL



The *shloshim* period begins immediately after the burial and concludes on the morning of the 30th day following the burial. After *shiva* is completed, mourning practices become less intense, and mourners begin to return to most normal activities. It is customary for mourners to refrain from taking part in large social gatherings or festive celebrations throughout *shloshim*.

The only relative who is obligated to recite *Kaddish* is a child for a parent. However, today many immediate relatives say *Kaddish* for other loved ones. We encourage this practice born of love and respect for the deceased. Except for those who are mourning a parent, the conclusion of *shloshim* marks the end of the mourning period.



XI. THE FIRST YEAR



The mourning period for a parent continues for a full year after the death. During this time mourners continue to refrain from large social gatherings. A child continues to say *Kaddish* for a parent for a total of eleven months minus one day from the date of death according to the Jewish calendar. If necessary, one of the rabbis can help to determine this date. If there are no children, others can assume the obligation of reciting *Kaddish*.



XII. YAHRZEIT – THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH



Yahrzeit is a Yiddish word meaning “year’s time.” Each year the deceased is remembered on the anniversary of the death according to the Jewish calendar. *Yahrzeit* observance includes:

- ⌘ Lighting a special candle at sunset on the evening the *yahrzeit* begins. It burns for the entire 24-hour period. These candles are available at the synagogue at the entrance to Ellman Chapel.
- ⌘ Attending the *Mincha/Ma’ariv* service at the beginning of the *yahrzeit* and the *Shacharit* service the next morning in order to recite *Kaddish* in the presence of a *minyán*.
- ⌘ Visiting the grave.
- ⌘ Contributing *tzedakah* in memory of the loved one.

✧ **Permanent Grave Marker**

The funeral home will be able to help you in purchasing a permanent grave marker or stone.

✧ **Unveiling**

The Unveiling of the grave marker is a brief ceremony that may be held at any time following the death but usually occurs toward the first anniversary of the date of death. It may be conducted by a lay person. An Unveiling service booklet is available from the assistant to the Senior Rabbi. Our rabbis are also available to officiate. Please remember that a *minyan* is required in order to recite *Kaddish* at the gravesite.

✧ **Pre-Arrangements**

Judaism's approach to death is direct and respectful. Yet the death of a loved one is often disorienting. Though we must plan for a funeral and the associated details, making decisions at the time of a death is clearly a difficult burden. We urge you and your loved ones to make pre-arrangements with the funeral home. Decision-making at such a time will be easier and wiser than at the time of the death of a loved one.

Our cemetery coordinator will assist you in selecting your family gravesites. Ahavath Achim is able to sell plots at Greenwood Cemetery directly to you. We will refer you to Arlington and Crest Lawn Cemeteries, if you desire. Please store your cemetery deed with your other legal papers.

הַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם

Ha-makom y'nahem

May God console the mourners among us.



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