

## **JEWISH MORTUARIES AND MEMORIAL PARKS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>FD#</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
Angeleno Valley Mortuary	1599	800 922-2244
Beth Olam Funeral Home	1651	877 238-4652
Chevra Kadisha Mortuary	1326	323 653-8886
Eden Memorial Park		800-441-7161
Groman Mortuary	1070	800 522-4875
Hillside Memorial Park & Mortuary	1358	800 576-1994
Malinow & Silverman Mortuary	487	800 710-7100
Mount Sinai Memorial Parks & Mortuaries	1010	800 600-0076
Sholom Memorial Park & Mortuaries	1465	818 899-5216

Published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California. The Funeral Practices Committee is jointly made up of representatives from the Board of Rabbis and Jewish cemeteries and mortuaries. This committee works cooperatively to deal with policy issues concerning funerals and burials, ensure respect and cooperation between clergy, families in need and the Jewish funeral industry, and ensure proper Jewish burials for the indigent.

***This pamphlet has been graciously underwritten by Hillside Memorial Park and Mortuary and Mount Sinai Memorial Parks and Mortuaries.***



## ***A GUIDE TO JEWISH BURIAL AND MOURNING PRACTICES***

***"The lamp of the Eternal One is the human soul"***  
***- Proverbs 20:27***

## ***PREFACE***

Death, and its accompanying sense of loss, grief and anguish, poses an intense challenge to the spiritual and psychological state of mind of the bereaved.

Our practices are grounded in the unshakable belief in the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the person, and the emotional and spiritual needs of the mourners.

Traditionally, we believe that human kind is created in the image of God and we are, therefore, mandated to have respect for the deceased and also the body of the deceased. This is called ***kevod ha-met*** and is the guiding principal for Jewish burial and mourning customs.

As these customs vary widely within the Jewish community, this short guide is designed to provide information. Its purpose is to assist in maintaining the customs and traditions of the Jewish People, to help the mourners provide a funeral for their loved ones with the greatest respect and dignity and to help the mourners onto the road of healing.

As this is by no means all-inclusive, specific questions should be directed to a rabbi.

### ***TIMING OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE***

It is most appropriate to bury the deceased without undue delay, taking legal and logistical considerations into account. This accords greater respect to the deceased as well as providing a psychological benefit to the mourners, who do not have to undergo the emotional pain of an unnecessary delay. Setting the time of the funeral requires consultation with the rabbi, the funeral director, and the cemetery.

### ***BURIAL***

Based on the biblical verse "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen.3:19), Jewish tradition has maintained that burial should be in the earth. Most Jewish cemeteries provide crypt entombment as an option that is accepted by rabbinic authorities. Cremation historically has been rejected, but is accepted by some segments of the Jewish population. Questions regarding these matters should be addressed to a rabbi or the funeral director.

### ***AUTOPSIES***

Jewish tradition allows an autopsy when required by civil law, or when the knowledge gained from an autopsy might help save others suffering from the same disease. Routine autopsies where nothing specific will be learned should be avoided because they violate the principle of *kevod ha-met* - respect for the body of the deceased.

### ***EMBALMING***

State law does not require embalming in most situations, and does not permit it without the expressed permission of the next of kin. Embalming is not a traditional Jewish practice.

### ***ORGAN DONATION***

In Jewish law organ donations are permitted to save a life and many authorities consider this act a mitzvah. Check with a rabbi for guidance.

### ***TAHARAH***

When a newborn child enters the world, the baby is washed and purified. "As he came," writes Ecclesiastes, "so should he go" (Ecclesiastes 5:14). Consequently, it is the traditional Jewish way of reverence for the deceased that when a person departs this world, he or she is washed and purified. Persons with special training and religious piety perform the *taharah* - the sacred rites of washing and purification, accompanied by the recitation of prayers and appropriate Psalms. In most cases, *taharah* is accompanied by dressing the deceased in *tachrichim* (burial garments also called shrouds) Such services may be requested through your mortuary.

### ***SHEMIRAH***

Traditionally, the deceased is not to be left alone. A *shomer* (watcher) reads Psalms and recites prayers on behalf of the dead. In this way the deceased is attended at all times.

This service may be requested through your mortuary.

### ***CHOOSING THE CASKET***

In choosing a casket, Jewish tradition mandates that ostentation should be avoided. Jewish tradition maintains that vanity and pride are out of place in the funeral. Caskets used in Jewish funerals are traditionally made of wood.

### ***PUBLIC VIEWING OF THE DECEASED***

Judaism considers it disrespectful to the deceased to have an open casket except for identification purposes.

### ***FLOWERS AND CHARITY***

Greater honor is paid to the deceased by making a donation to charities rather than displaying flowers.

### ***K'RIAH***

The rending of the mourners' outer garment or a *k'riah* ribbon is a Jewish mourning practice, symbolizing the tearing of the heart the mourners feel at the time of loss. When one is mourning for parents, *k'riah* is performed on the left side, over the heart, while when mourning for children, siblings and spouses, it is done on the right side.

### ***PLACING THE CASKET***

The final placement of the casket should be witnessed for psychological and religious reasons. Those present at the interment are afforded the opportunity to place earth on the casket. Jewish tradition considers this a *hesed shel emet*, - an act of true loving kindness and the last kindness we can extend since there is no reciprocal favor we can expect from the deceased.

### ***MEAL OF CONSOLATION***

The mourners' first meal after returning from the cemetery (*seudat havra'ah*) is usually provided by friends, neighbors, or a synagogue committee. The meal generally includes hard-boiled eggs (which symbolize the potentiality of renewal) or other round objects symbolizing the wheel of life, continuity, and the need to move on.

## **SHIVA**

The first, most intense stage of mourning is called *shiva*, the Hebrew word meaning "seven" and refers to a seven-day period of formalized mourning by the immediate family of the deceased. *Shiva* begins immediately after the burial as the mourners to gather together in the home of the deceased or the home of a mourner, cut off from the normal routine of their lives which death has interrupted. A *shiva* candle is lit when the mourners arrive home from the burial and is allowed to burn for the entire *shiva* period. Care should be taken to leave the candle in a safe location. A rabbi should be consulted regarding the details of *shiva* practices.

## **SHELOSHIM**

*Sheloshim* (thirty) ends on the morning of the thirtieth day after the funeral. It marks the end of the traditional formal mourning period for all except parents. The period from the end of *shiva* to the end of *sheloshim* is one of transition from deep bereavement to resuming life's usual routine. Again, a rabbi should be consulted regarding the details of *sheloshim* practices. At the end of *sheloshim*, we encourage family and friends to gather together to read or study appropriate texts, to pray together, and to speak about the deceased.

For the death of a parent, the traditional mourning continues for a year, marked by the daily recitation of kaddish for eleven months of the Hebrew calendar.

## **Yahrzeit**

*Yahrzeit* is observed on each anniversary of the day of death according to the Hebrew calendar. A *yahrzeit* candle is lit at sunset on the evening before the *yahrzeit* date and burns for 24 hours. In addition, some mourners attend services and recite Kaddish, visit the cemetery, give *tzedakah* (charity) or engage in special acts of kindness to others. For clarification, consult your rabbi.

## **YIZKOR**

*Yizkor* ("May God remember") services in memory of our deceased loved ones are held on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, and on the last days of Pesach and Shavuot. A *yahrzeit* candle is lit at sunset on the evening before *yizkor* is recited.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

Death is not the end, but a point in life that goes beyond our reach. The greatest respect we can pay the deceased is to live up to the high ideals of Judaism and to perpetuate their memory by filling the void created by their passing, by finding new avenues to express our love and concern for those who need us.

May the memory of our loved ones be for an eternal blessing.

***PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW  
WHEN SOMEONE DIES***

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1. If the death occurs in a hospital, sign a release form so that the mortuary of your choice will be permitted to transfer the deceased into their care.
2. Make sure that a physician is available to sign the death certificate.
3. Call your Rabbi before setting time of funeral service.
4. Call a Jewish mortuary. See the list for names and telephone numbers.

***SUGGESTIONS FOR  
FURTHER READING***

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Mourning and Mitzvah, Brenner, Anne, (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2nd edition, 2001)

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, Lamm, Maurice. (JonathanDavid, revised 2000)

Saying Kaddish, Diamant, Anita, (Schocken, 1999)

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Kushner, Harold (Avon, reissue 1997)

The Orphaned Adult, Angel, Mark, (Jason Aaronson, 1997)

Living with Loss, Healing with Hope, Grollman, Earl (Beacon Press, 2001)

What Happens After I Die, Soncino, Rifat; Syme Daniel (UAHC, 1990)