

# A Time to Mourn

Laws and Customs of Jewish Mourning

הלכות ומנהגי אבילות



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Many thanks to Beth El Synagogue of St. Louis Park, MN for their generosity in allowing us to use this helpful guide for mourners.

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Sorrow and grief are the price we pay for love and devotion. These reactions are both normal and healthy. When a loved one dies, the world often seems dark and the mourner frequently feels alone. Over the years, Judaism has amassed a wealth of life-affirming traditions that can help guide us as we confront the loss of a loved one. These customs challenge us, comfort us, educate us, and enable us to return to a normal life without the ones we love.

The Jewish way of mourning is based on two principles: 1) כבוד המת *k'vod ha-met* (honoring and respecting the מת *met*, the deceased), and 2) ניחום אבלים *nihum avelim* (consoling the mourners). Jewish religious rituals and practices surrounding death and mourning help individuals accept the reality of death, express rather than repress their grief, talk about their loss with friends, and move step by step from bereavement back to normal living.

**Note from Rabbi Rubenstein:** Congregation Beth Ahm thanks Beth El Synagogue of St. Louis Park, MN for their generosity in allowing us to use this helpful guide for mourners. Readers will note that the information in the appendix has been adjusted to reflect helpful information for those in Metro-Detroit. In addition, I have edited some of this guide to reflect the current customs of Congregation Beth Ahm and Metro-Detroit.

The following guide to mourning practices was created by Beth El Synagogue with the assistance of Rabbis Kassel Abelson, Hayim Herring, Paul Drazen, and Alan Lucas. The guide was edited by Sarah Freidson in 2003.

We pray that this guide will answer many of your questions about the Jewish customs surrounding death and mourning.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

*ha-Makom y'nahem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar aveilei tziyon virushalayim*

We pray that God comforts you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

## Preparing for a Funeral

### **Upon Hearing the News**

If one is present at the time of death or when one hears of a death, the following blessing is recited:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם דין האמת  
*Barukh ata Adonai, Elohenu meleḥ ha-olam, dayan ha'emet*  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, the true Judge.

This response helps us begin to answer the unanswerable. The words affirm one's awareness that God's governance of the universe includes both life and death; and that death is, in its own way, a manifestation of this governance.

### **Timing**

Jewish funerals are traditionally held as soon after the death as possible because it is considered dishonorable to leave the dead unburied. Shortly after the death, the funeral home and synagogue should be contacted. The numbers to the Jewish funeral homes in Metro-Detroit can be found on page 19. Some time prior to the funeral, it is customary for the family to meet with the officiating rabbi to talk about the life of the *מת met*, the deceased. This sharing of a life story is designed to comfort the family, to help the rabbi learn about the deceased and to discuss funeral arrangements. Family members are welcomed to speak at the funeral and/or *shiva minyan*.

The period of time between death and burial is called *אנינות aninut* and the mourner is called an *אונן/אוננת onen(et)*. At this time, the *onen's* primary responsibility is to arrange the funeral. The *onen* is exempt from positive religious obligations during this preparation, such as daily prayer or laying *tefillin*. During the time of *aninut*, it is appropriate for family and close friends to visit the mourners to help the bereaved with arrangements for the funeral and *shiva*.

## **Who is a Mourner?**

According to Jewish law, the obligations and customs of mourning apply only to seven primary relatives: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and spouse. One may, however, choose to “take on” the mourning rituals for someone else (i.e. for a grandparent, aunt, uncle, in-law, close friend, life partner, etc).

Until modern times, the rate of neonatal death was extremely high. In part, to prevent families from spending great amounts of time in mourning, Jewish law stated that the mourning rituals do not apply to babies thirty days old or younger. This also serves to distinguish a viable life from one not viable. While at the time this practice was an act of kindness, now the opposite may be true. Today, we are more able to recognize the pain and grief that follow a miscarriage, stillborn birth, or the loss of an infant. Should one of these tragic events occur to you or to someone that you love, please speak with the rabbi who will help you confront your loss and arrange an appropriate ceremony.

## **Caskets**

Jewish tradition commands modesty and simplicity in funerals and burials. This is based on the precedent set by Rabban Gamliel (one of the leading rabbis of Talmudic times) and reflects the teaching that all people, rich and poor, are equal before God. Therefore, a simple wooden casket should be used. Rather than investing in an expensive coffin, it is appropriate to give *tzedakah* to a cause close to the deceased’s heart. This is a way to honor the memory of the dead.

## **Cremation and Organ Donation**

In accordance with the principle of *כבוד המת* *k’vod ha-met* (honoring to the deceased), remains are to return to the earth in a natural process. This is as Ecclesiastes said, “from dust you came and to dust you shall return” (3:20). Cremation is thus not allowed in Judaism. While the entire body is to be interred, because Judaism places utmost value on life, organs may be donated if they directly save a life. The *mitzvah* of organ donation is yet another way that the *met* (deceased) can help the living and thus allow his/her memory to live on. Jewish law discourages embalming and autopsies are performed only in limited circumstances. If these issues arise, contact the rabbi for guidance.

## **Viewing the Body**

Viewing the body of the deceased is discouraged in Jewish tradition. The sight of a loved one lying in a coffin frequently burns an indelible picture on the minds of the viewer. It is far better to remember the departed as they were in life. The casket should certainly not be available for viewing in the time leading up to the funeral.

## ***Taharah and Takhrikhim***

The body of the *met* (the deceased) is treated with dignity and care, reflecting our respect for the life that has left it. Based on this principle, a שומר *shomer* (guardian) remains with the body at all times, often reciting psalms. טהרה *tohorah* (ritual washing) is performed before the *met* (deceased) is dressed in תכריכים *takhrikhim* (white shrouds). Jews are buried in the same simple garment to show that we are all equal before God. In addition to the *takhrikhim*, it is customary for a person to be buried in the *tallit* that s/he wore during his/her life. One of the fringes is cut to make it ritually unfit.

## **Explaining Death to Children**

Explaining death to a child can be extremely challenging. The decision about what to tell children and whether to have them present at the funeral depends on the age and sensitivities of each individual child. In general, we should not try to shield children from their grief; we should also allow them ample time to grieve. Like adults, they too need an opportunity to mourn for loved ones. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children and explain the death simply and honestly as soon after death as possible. It is best to avoid euphemisms, such as “Grandma is sleeping” or “We lost Uncle Saul,” as they can confuse the children. It is helpful for adults to explain what will happen at the funeral and during *shiva*, and to allow the children to decide whether or not they would like to attend.

The following are age-appropriate guidelines: children under the age of two will have no concept of death but will sense the turmoil and commotion in the house. They need attention, love and time. Children age’s three to five will understand that something bad has happened, but have trouble grasping the concept of finality. Six-to-eight-year-olds will ask many questions about death. They have some understanding that it is physical and final, but may have vivid fantasies

about the deceased transforming into a skeleton, ghost or angel. After age nine or ten, children have a realistic understanding of death, its universality and finality. For children of all ages, it is important to maintain a dialogue and “check-in” with them regularly. Older children, especially teenagers, may withdraw. Every effort should be made to reach out to them and provide them with opportunities to express their feelings. If a parent is too upset to give the child the attention s/he needs, another adult, whether it be a relative or family friend, can help out by talking and listening to the child.

## The Funeral

### **Rituals of burial**

A few minutes before the funeral begins, the first official act of mourning is performed.

קריעה *K'riah* is the tearing of a garment that serves as a visible sign of grief. The ritual performed by the *avelim* (primary mourners) while standing, symbolizes our willingness to face grief and confront our sorrow directly. The *avelim* first recite a *brakha* (blessing) that affirms our faith in God and the value of life, even in such a difficult time:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם דין האמת  
*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, dayan ha-emet*  
Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, the true Judge.

Then the words of Job are recited:

ה' נתן וה' לקח, יהי שם ה' מברך  
*Adonai natan vAdonai lakah, y'hi shem Adonai m'vorah*  
Adonai has given, and Adonai has taken, blessed is the name of Adonai.

Traditionally the mourner's garment (i.e., a shirt, jacket, tie or scarf, etc.) is torn. Some people choose to tear a black ribbon. The torn garment is worn throughout *shiva* and may be worn throughout *sh'loshim*, the first thirty days after the funeral. However, since there are no public signs of mourning on Shabbat, it is not worn on Shabbat or holidays. For a parent, *k'riah* is performed on the left side, closest to the heart, and for all other mourners, *k'riah* is performed on the right side.

While it is very common in our community for the mourners to greet family and friends prior to the funeral service, this custom is not found in Jewish tradition. Our tradition teaches us that our first opportunity to offer condolences to mourners is following the burial. Nevertheless, the desire to be with friends is understandable. However, it is important to know that families who would prefer privacy in those moments prior to the funeral need only request that from the funeral director.

The funeral service focuses on the life of the deceased and offers words of comfort to the mourners. Traditionally, psalms emphasizing human mortality are read. Family members and



close friends have the opportunity to speak about their loved one and the rabbi will give a eulogy describing the deceased. קל מלא רחמים *el malei rahamim*, the memorial prayer is recited. In this prayer, we express our faith in the immortality of the soul, and pray that it “will be bound up in the bond of the living.”

### **The Cemetery**

According to tradition, Jews are to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. The custom goes back to Abraham who purchased and created a separate plot for Sarah and generations of his family to come. Known euphemistically as a *beit hayim* (House of Life), a Jewish cemetery is the place where our loved ones are "gathered unto their people."

### **At the Cemetery**

At the cemetery, pallbearers are given the honor of carrying the coffin from the hearse to the burial site. Occasionally at a graveside funeral, the coffin is already placed at the grave and no pallbearers are used. Traditional custom is to lower the coffin into the earth as soon as possible, after which prayers are recited. The first of these prayers is צידוק הדין *tzidduk ha-din*, which stresses our acceptance of God's will. It is followed by the recitation of the *kaddish* and *el maleh rahamim*, the memorial prayer.

It is traditional for the community to help in the burial process. This is an act of חסד של אמת *hesed shel emet*, an act of truthful and pure loving-kindness since the dead can never repay the community members for their assistance in his or her burial. There are several traditional ways that of showing our reluctance in performing this important, yet difficult *mitzvah*. The current custom at Beth Ahm is for the first person performing the burial to use the back of the shovel to begin the burial, and to then use the face of the shovel for the remainder of the burial. In order to demonstrate that we do not wish to pass our grief onto others, the shovel is not handed from person to person. Rather it is placed in the mound of earth when one has finished with his/her turn. This *mitzvah* demonstrates our continuing concern for the deceased. It also provides a psychological benefit to the mourners by providing a sense of finality and closure and diminishing the likelihood of denial.

After the conclusion of the service, it is customary for those in attendance to form two parallel lines between which the mourners pass. This symbolizes the community support for the mourners. The traditional words of condolence are spoken at this time:

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים  
*Ha-makom y'naḥem etkhem b'tokh sha'ar aveilei Tziyon virushalayim*  
May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

### **Flowers**

Traditionally, flowers are not part of a Jewish funeral or rituals of mourning. In the spirit of honoring the dead by helping the living, it is appropriate to suggest in the obituary that in lieu of flowers contributions be sent to a designated charity such as Congregation Beth Ahm. If flowers are sent, consider sharing them with residents of a hospital, nursing home, or other institution where they could give joy and comfort to people in need.

### **Returning Home**

Upon returning from the cemetery, it is customary to wash one's hands before entering the home. Ancient Jewish tradition directs us to cleanse ourselves after being in close proximity with the dead. Through this act we affirm life by separating ourselves from death. A bowl, pitcher of water, cup, and towel are placed outside the house, and mourners wash their hands. There is no blessing recited over the hand washing. The cup of water is not passed directly to the next person. As with the shovel at the graveside, this is a symbol that we do not want grief and tragedy to continue from person to person. Inside the home, mourners light a candle that lasts for all seven days of *shiva*. There is no blessing recited over the candle, but any thoughts someone wants to share are appropriate. A traditional phrase that is often recited is:

נר ה' נשמת אדם  
*Ner Adonai nishmat adam*  
The candle of Adonai is the soul of a human being.

### **Meal of Consolation**

After the funeral, it is customary for relatives, friends and/or neighbors to prepare a simple meal for the mourners called סעודת הבראה *s'udat havra'ah* (meal of consolation). The meal traditionally includes round foods such as hard-boiled eggs, rolls, or olives, to represent the cycle and continuity of life. Bread is also customary as it is the “staff of life.” It is not appropriate to serve wine or meat, as both are symbols of joy. This *s'udat havra'ah* is not meant to be festive, and a party-like environment should not be allowed to develop. The meal is meant for the mourners. It is not for visitors making *shiva* calls.

Some people find it helpful to have a friend stay at the home to prepare the house for *s'udat havra'ah* and *shiva* while everyone else attends the funeral. To enable the mourners to process their grief, these details should not be the concern of the bereaved.

## *Shiva*

### **Sitting *Shiva***

Mourning a death can be an emotionally draining, long and difficult process. Returning to normal life takes time and, according to Jewish tradition, unfolds in stages. After the funeral, the mourner is no longer an *onen* (the preparatory state prior to mourning), but is now referred to as an *avel* or *avelet* (mourner). The length of the mourning period varies depending on the relationship of the mourner to the deceased. For primary mourners (with the exception of children mourning the loss of a parent), mourning officially ends thirty days after the burial. This period is called שלושים *sh'loshim*, which literally means “thirty” in Hebrew. When mourning the loss of a parent, *aveilut* (mourning) lasts for one year.

The first stage of mourning is a week of intense mourning called *shiva*. The word שיבעה *shiva* means “seven.” We learn in the Torah that when Jacob died, his son Joseph “wailed with a very great and sore wailing, and he made a mourning for his father for seven days” (Gen. 50:10). Based on this passage, for the first seven days after the burial, the mourner remains at home surrounded by friends and family, removed from his/her daily routine.

The burial day counts as the first day of *shiva* and one hour of the seventh day counts as the last. For instance, if a funeral was held on a Wednesday, the first day of *shiva* would be that day. *Shiva* would continue until Tuesday morning, but would end after the *shaharit* service. Shabbat counts as a day of *shiva* even though the public rituals of mourning are not practiced. If a major holiday falls during *shiva*, *shiva* is suspended and not resumed after the holiday. If the death occurs on a *hag* (the holidays of *Pesah*, *Shavu'ot*, *Sukkot*), *shiva* does not start until after the conclusion of the holiday. Please speak with the rabbi if you have specific questions.

## **Practices in a House of *Shiva***

The following practices of a *shiva* house are designed to help mourners reflect on the life of their loved one and to express their mourning.

- It is customary to have mirrors in the house covered. This practice reminds us of the secondary importance of the physical self. It demonstrates to everyone present that physical appearance is of little consequence after the loss of a loved one.
- Traditionally, mourners sit on low chairs or a couch whose cushions have been removed. Sitting lower symbolizes the state of our spirits which have been brought down. We read about this custom in the book of Job where friends, comforting Job after the death of his children, “sat beside him on the ground for seven days and seven nights” (Job 2:13). It is from this passage that the term “sitting *shiva*” is derived.
- Cloth shoes or slippers are worn in place of leather shoes. In addition to being a sign of luxury, leather comes from the hide of an animal, and at a time when we mourn the loss of life, it is viewed as inappropriate to wear clothing that comes by taking the life of another creature. Not wearing leather shoes also shows that we alter the way we live to reflect the ways our lives are altered as a result of our loss.
- During the *shiva* period, music (a sign of joy) should not be played, nor should television or computer entertainment be played or watched. It is also customary that mourners refrain from sexual relations and from wearing make-up, perfume and jewelry during this time.
- Mourners should stay together at the designated *shiva* home to enable them to comfort one another and to reaffirm family ties. If it is difficult for the mourners to be housed together, they may leave the house of mourning in the evening to go to their own homes or to where they are lodged, and return the next day to rejoin the family. Mourners should make arrangements not to go to work during this period.

Today, some families choose not to sit *shiva* for the full seven days for a variety of reasons. However, many bereavement experts have recognized the value of the seven day period of intense mourning as a time for loved ones to address their grief and bond as a family. During the first few days following a death, the mourner often experiences shock and numbness. It is only later in the week that the bereaved can begin to accept the consoling actions and words of the comforters. Judaism recognizes that the grieving process has many stages, and the time of *shiva* is an important first step to returning to normal living after losing a loved one.

### ***Shiva* “calls”**

Community members pay *shiva* “calls” to fulfill the mitzvah of נִחֻם אַבְלִים *nihum aveilim*, comforting the mourners. These visits demonstrate the communal support at the time of loss and help the mourners overcome feelings of isolation or desertion. It is important to note that the mourner is in no way to act as a host or hostess nor the visitors as guests. A party-like environment should not be allowed to develop. This can be achieved by the mourner remaining seated, not answering the door or telephone, by having someone else prepare a plate for him or herself. It is also appropriate for conversation to center on memories of the deceased. This helps the mourner to begin the process of dealing with his/her grief. The mourner sets the tone during the *shiva*, and visitors take cues from the behavior of the mourners.

### **Food**

There is a tradition of bringing food to a house of mourning so that the mourners do not have to worry about preparing meals. The food is intended for those in mourning and not to be served to entertain visitors. While it is customary not to remove food from a *shiva* house, if food is left over, it may be donated to a food organization as a way of helping the living in the name of the dead.

### **Reciting *Kaddish***

The recitation of the *kaddish* is one of the central acts of mourning in the Jewish tradition. By holding services at a *shiva* house, mourners can fulfill their obligation to say *kaddish* surrounded by the comfort of family and friends without yet having to enter the “real world.” When possible, family members or friends are encouraged to lead the services themselves. If the mourners only hold an evening *minyan* at the house, they should attend morning services at the synagogue to recite *kaddish*. Services are not held in the home on Shabbat; instead, the mourners attend services at the synagogue because there is no public mourning on Shabbat.

### **Concluding *Shiva***

At the conclusion of *shiva*, on the morning of the seventh day following *shaharit* (morning services), it is customary for the mourners to gather at the house of *shiva*. They then walk outside and walk around the block to symbolize their re-entrance into the community. A prayer may be recited to mark the transition. See page 20 for an example of such a prayer.

## Returning to Life: *Sh'loshim* and Beyond

### **What is *Sh'loshim*?**

שלושים *sh'loshim* is the second, less intensive stage of mourning during which mourners return to many of their regular activities at work, in the home and in the community. At this time, it is appropriate for mourners to refrain from festivities and activities such as attending movies, the theater, parties or dances. Mourners are permitted to attend a *bar* or *bat mitzvah* on Shabbat and to attend an *oneg shabbat* or *kiddush* after services because public mourning on Shabbat is forbidden. If family or personal obligations require attendance, mourners may attend a wedding ceremony, dinner or other celebratory occasion, but should refrain from dancing as a sign that one is in mourning. It is also customary for the mourners to refrain from shaving or getting a haircut during the period of *sh'loshim*.

### ***Kaddish***

Following the death of a loved one, we are often overcome by grief. Jewish mourning rituals provide opportunities to accept and manage the sorrow and pain resulting from the loss. One of the most comforting and beautiful traditions is the daily recitation of the קדיש יתום *kaddish* for mourners. According to Jewish tradition, it is the duty of primary mourners to recite the *kaddish* three times a day, at the *shaharit* services in the morning and at *minha/ma'ariv* service in the evening. Primary mourners, with the exception of children mourning the loss of a parent, are to recite the *kaddish* throughout *sh'loshim*, although they may opt to continue reciting the *kaddish* for eleven months. According to Jewish tradition, while mourning for a parent, children recite the *kaddish* daily for eleven months. This is based on an ancient belief that divine judgment for the deceased takes a full year. Since we are confident that our parents will be judged worthy of God's reward before this period, and to demonstrate this fact to the community, we stop saying *kaddish* short of one year. If it is not possible to attend services twice daily, every effort should be made to recite the *kaddish* on a regular basis.

The word *kaddish* comes from the Hebrew root 'קדש' *k.d.sh.*, connoting “sanctified” or “separated.” It is written in Aramaic and even though few people today understand Aramaic, nevertheless, the sounds and rhythms of the *kaddish* remain quite comforting. The prayer itself



does not mention death or the dead. Rather, it is an affirmation of life in the face of death and an expression of faith in God in the face of an act that may appear senseless. It speaks of our responsibility to work for a better world, and to establish peace in our hearts, families, and ultimately in the world that surrounds us.

The obligation to say *kaddish* cannot be transferred to another person. One is not allowed to pay another person to say the prayer for him/her. The regular recitation of *kaddish* allows the mourner to grieve and heal, and this cannot occur by transferring the obligation. It is better to have a loved one recite the *kaddish* as frequently as possible than to have a stranger recite it three times a day mechanically. In addition, a parent cannot *halakhically* (or “according to Jewish law”) release a child from the obligation of saying *kaddish* by telling him/her that it is unnecessary for the child to recite it.

*Kaddish* can and should be recited for non-Jewish parents or relatives. A Jew should honor his/her loved ones in a Jewish way. Furthermore, the recitation of *kaddish* greatly benefits the mourner and Jews should find comfort in the tradition.

*Kaddish* can only be recited within a *minyan*, a quorum of ten Jewish adults (above the age of bat/bar mitzva). In addition to being required by Jewish law, the regular recitation of *kaddish* in the synagogue is a meaningful religious experience in which one demonstrates respect for the memory of a loved one by affirming solidarity with the congregation and with the Jewish people past, present and future. In addition, it encourages the mourner to be a part of a community, preventing the isolation and loneliness that can result from the loss. It is comforting to recite the *kaddish* in a community with others who have also suffered a loss. Though initially the mourner may be unfamiliar with the people and the service, over the course of a year both become comforting and well-known.

If attendance at a public service is impossible on a certain day, the mourner may recite a psalm such as the Psalm 23 (see appendix page 20 for the text of the psalm) or spend a brief time studying Torah.

The psalm or study may then be followed by the concluding verse of the *kaddish*:

עושה שלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל  
*Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom, aleinu v'al kol Yisrael*  
May the One who brings peace to the universe,  
bring peace to us and to all the people Israel.

### **The Year Following the Death**

In the year following the death of a loved one, the mourner is to behave in a way that honors the dead. This includes the regular recitation of the *kaddish*. Many people refrain from major celebrations, attending live concerts, going to theater performances, etc., since they are not in keeping with the somber mood of mourning.

### **How to Plan an Unveiling Ceremony**

The *הקמת מצובה hakamat matzeivah* (dedication of a tombstone) or unveiling ceremony is a tradition that has become popular in recent years. While the ceremony is not mandated by Jewish law, families find it a meaningful step in the mourning process. The timing of the unveiling ceremony is flexible; it can be done any time following *sh'loshim*. While the custom has developed to wait approximately one year, there is no need to wait that long for the unveiling, and you are encouraged to erect the tombstone and plan the unveiling sooner. The service itself generally consists of the recitation of a psalm, remarks about the life of the deceased, a prayer of dedication, *kaddish*, and *el maleh rahamim*. At the conclusion of the service, the cloth covering the tombstone is removed and the marker is “unveiled.” At the ceremony, care should be taken to avoid the extremes of another funeral or of a festive family reunion.

### **Visiting a Loved Ones Grave**

When visiting a grave, it is customary to leave pebbles or small stones on the headstone in place of bringing flowers. This is because flowers can wilt or die, but the stones last forever, representing the soul of the departed. The custom may have started in ancient times because a grave was marked by a pile of stones. When a person would visit the grave of a loved one, s/he brought stones with him/her to reinforce the marker. It is also customary to place blades of grass on a gravestone, demonstrating the fragility of life.

### **Observing *Yahrzeit***

The anniversary of the death on the Hebrew calendar is called the יארצייט *yahrzeit*.

Congregants receive a letter from the synagogue a few weeks prior to the *yahrzeit* notifying them when the *yahrzeit* falls on the civil calendar. The observance of the *yahrzeit* lasts a full day and it is customary to attend all three daily services, beginning with *ma'ariv* (evening service) and continuing the following day with *shaharit* and *minḥa* (morning and afternoon services). On the evening of the *yahrzeit*, it is customary to light a candle that burns for 24 hours. On Shabbat and *yom tov*, the candle is lit prior to the time the candles are lit for the holiday. There is no set blessing that is recited over the candle, but one can share stories and memories about the deceased. A sample reading said when the *yahrzeit* candle is lit can be found in the appendix on page 20.

The *yahrzeit* is a day to remember and honor the ones we have lost. It is customary to set aside time for reflection and study and to give *tzedakah* (charity) to perpetuate the memory of our loved ones.

The faithful observance of the *yahrzeit* is an affirmation that the lives of our loved ones continue to have meaning. We set aside a 24-hour period to reaffirm our love for them and to attune our spiritual lives to the ideals and values that they sought to teach us.

### ***Yizkor***

At the יזכור *Yizkor* (memorial) services, we remember and honor our loved ones by reciting psalms and prayers as a community. *Yizkor* is recited in the synagogue four times a year during the morning services on *Yom Kippur*, *Sh'mini At-zeret*, the eighth day of *Pesah*, and the second day of *Shavu'ot*. The service also provides an opportunity to honor those we as a Jewish people have lost, victims of the Holocaust and other martyrs of Jewish history.

The *yizkor* service enables us to come together with the other members of the Jewish community to reaffirm our continuity with past generations and our determination that the ideals of the past will continue to live and function in our lives and in the lives of our children. Mourners may

participate in *yizkor* during the year following the death of a loved one, and individuals with living parents can attend and participate in the service.

### **Conclusion**

Every person has different reactions to situations of stress, grief and loss. It is not unusual for a mourner to feel depressed one day and happy another, or for periods of depression to come and go for an extensive length of time following the death of a loved one. These ups and downs are part of the process of returning to normal living. Our tradition understands that life will never be the same again after the death of a loved one; however, it is important to try to regain a sense of normalcy as one moves through the mourning period. Judaism provides this in the stages of mourning of varying intensity, rituals surrounding mourning, and in the regular recitation of the *kaddish*. In cases of extreme depression or long-lasting grief, mourners are encouraged to speak either with a counselor or clergy, and/or to attend a grief support group which will help them through their difficult time.

The death of one close to us makes a major difference in our lives. How we honor the memory of our loved one affects us as well as our children. Hopefully this guide will support you through your difficult time. “May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

## Appendix

### Phone Numbers/Resources

Congregation Beth Ahm	(248) 851-6880
The Dorfman Chapel	(248) 406-6000
Ira Kaufman Memorial Chapel	(248) 569-0020
Hebrew Memorial Chapel	(248) 543-1622
Jewish Family Services	(248) 592-2313

Daily Services at Congregation Beth Ahm are held:

- Monday through Thursday: 7 a.m. & 7 p.m.
- Friday: 7 a.m. & 6 p.m.
- Saturday: 9:30am
- Sunday & Legal Holidays: 9 a.m. & 5 p.m.

Shabbat Minha is at 4:30 pm Saturday most of the year. During the winter months Shabbat Minha is followed by seudah shlishit (the traditional third meal of Shabbat), Ma'ariv and Havdalah. For Shabbat Minha-Ma'ariv service times during the winter months, please check the shul website [www.cbahm.org](http://www.cbahm.org) or contact Nancy Kaplan at 248-737-1931 or [nancyellen879@att.net](mailto:nancyellen879@att.net).

### Prayer for Getting Up from *Shiva*

Almighty and merciful God who heals the broken-hearted, do not permit death or grief to ruin our lives. Grant us strength to face life even as we remember all that is good and true in the life of our beloved, \_\_\_\_\_. Bless all members of our family with health, with love and with the ability to give of themselves to each other. May the memory of our beloved \_\_\_\_\_ continue to be a blessing in our midst, inspiring us to deeds of charity and loving-kindness.

### Prayer for a *Yahrzeit* Candle

God, I light this candle on this, the *yahrzeit* of my dear \_\_\_\_\_. May I be inspired to deeds of charity and kindness to honor her/his memory. May the light of this candle be a reminder to me of the light \_\_\_\_\_ brought to my life. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. Amen.

### Psalm 23

ה' רֵעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר:  
בְּנֵאוֹת דְּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מֵי מְנוּחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי:  
נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:  
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶּךְ בְּגֵיא צְלָמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הַמָּה יִנְחַמֵּנִי:  
תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן נֹגֵד צִרְרֵי דִשְׁנֹתַי בְּשִׁמּוֹן רִאשֵׁי כֹוֹסֵי רְוִיָּה:  
אֵךְ טוֹב וְחֹסֵד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־ה' לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:

Adonai is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Adonai gives me repose in green meadows, and guides me over calm waters.

Adonai will revive my spirit and direct me on the right path—for that is God's way.

Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no harm, for You are at my side.

Your staff and Your rod comfort me.

You prepare a banquet for me in the presence of my foes;

You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and kindness will be my portion for all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the house of Adonai forever.

--Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, p. 197.

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\*\* Books used as resources in creating this guide

## Glossary

<i>Aninut</i> אנינות	the period between death and burial
<i>Aveilut</i> אבלות	the formal period of mourning beginning after burial
<i>Avel</i> אבל	the primary mourner over a father, mother, son, daughter, sister, brother, spouse
<i>El Malei Rahamim</i> קל מלא רחמים	the memorial prayer expressing faith in the immortality of the soul
<i>Kaddish</i> קדיש	the prayer praising God's name recited by mourners beginning with the burial service and continuing at daily services throughout the period of mourning
<i>K'riah</i> קריעה	the tearing of a garment or ribbon as an external symbol of grief
<i>K'vod Ha-met</i> כבוד המת	respect due to the deceased
<i>L'vayah</i> לווייה	funeral; literally "accompanying" to the grave
<i>Met</i> מת	the deceased
<i>Nihum Aveilim</i> ניחום אבלים	the practice of comforting the mourners, especially during the seven days of <i>shiva</i>
<i>Onen/Onenet</i> אונין/אוונת	the term used to describe a primary mourner in the time between death and burial
<i>S'udat Havra'ah</i> סעודת הבראה	the "meal of consolation" prepared for the mourners upon their return from the funeral
<i>Shiva</i> שבעה	the initial intensive, seven day mourning period following the burial
<i>Sh'loshim</i> שלשים	"thirty;" the second, less intensive period of mourning, lasting thirty days after the burial (including the seven days of <i>shiva</i> )



<i>Takhrikhim</i> תכריכים	a simple, inexpensive white linen shroud in which the deceased is dressed for burial
<i>Tohora</i> טהרה	ritual bathing of the deceased
<i>Tzidduk ha-Din</i> צידוק הדין	a prayer recited at the cemetery that stresses our acceptance of God's will.
<i>Yahrzeit</i> יארציית	the anniversary of the death in the Hebrew calendar
<i>Yizkor</i> יזכור	the memorial service recited on behalf of the dead on Festivals and Yom Kippur