To Everything
There is a Season

A Guide to Jewish Funeral
and Mourning Customs
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Rabbi Jonathan A. Stein
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INTRODUCTION

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven....a time to be born, and a time to die."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)

Like no other human experience, death can rupture our faith in life's meaning. Death is, however, the ultimate fact of the human condition. In Judaism, this reality is acknowledged with traditions providing healing and encouraging honest confrontation with loss. The sadness, the sense of painful separation, the profound loneliness which death brings can be eased by a religious response, by the support of friends, by the slow passage of time and by our openness to the beauty of those memories which keep us from experiencing a narrowing of life brought on by unrelieved sorrow.

Jewish tradition encourages us to accept the finality of death. At the same time, it leads us ritually step by step through the pain of loss and to recover our love of life. Thus we are moved to bless the memory of our departed loved ones by affirming life. To do otherwise would devalue the meaning and contribution of the lives of those who, by their impact on us during their lifetimes, made our lives more significant and worthy.

It is this religious response, seeing death in the perspective of eternity, which enables us to recover a sense of life's worth, and which is the focus and purpose of Jewish tradition surrounding the experience of death. This booklet reviews the Jewish tradition's approach to death and funerals in the context of our historic faith which, while recognizing the heartache accompanying death, also tries to prepare us to live fully again after the funeral and mourning period.
**BEFORE DEATH**

**Wills**

Judaism has a meaningful custom called an Ethical Will, a statement of the accumulated wisdom and values which each of us has attained through our life's experience. Ethical Wills allow us to leave a moral legacy to our family and especially to our children.

Jewish tradition encourages the preparation of a written legal will which is both fair to our families and generous to our community. Consultation with an attorney is recommended.

Living Wills, designed to make our family, physician, attorney and Rabbi aware of our wishes concerning the prolongation of life by medical technology, are also suggested. Judaism takes a balanced approach regarding the issue of euthanasia: we may do nothing to actively hasten death, but neither are we obligated to interfere in the natural processes of life and death.

**Pre-Arrangements for Funeral and Burial**

Although it may be difficult for us contemplate, pre-planning for one's funeral and burial can be helpful to the survivors. They are relieved of the need to make decisions at a time of sorrow and stress without knowing the wishes of their beloved, and they are assured that the arrangements are what the deceased actually desired. One can meet with the Rabbi to discuss funeral services or other matters, purchase burial space from a cemetery or mausoleum, and meet with a Funeral Director to select a casket, etc, all on a pre-need basis.

**When Someone is Dying**

It is traditional to recite both a deathbed confessional (*viddui*) and the *Shema* with a dying person. A suggested text is as follows:

"Our days are like grass; we blossom like a flower of the field; then a wind passes by and it is no more." (Psalm 103:15-16)

"My God and God of all who have gone before me, Author of life and death, I turn to you in trust. Creator of all that lives, although I pray for healing and continued life, I know that I am mortal. Give me courage to accept my kinship with all who have come before me. If my life must soon come to an end, let me die, I pray, at peace with myself, with my family and friends, and with You, O God."

“Alas, over the years I have committed many wrongs. I know, too, that I have left much undone. If only my hands were clean and my heart pure! May my sins be forgiven. Yet I also know the good I did or tried to do. That goodness imparts an eternal meaning to my life. As You are with me at this time, O God, so, I pray you will be with my loved ones. This comforts me, Eternal God, my Rock and my Redeemer. In Your great mercy, grant me the goodness that awaits me in eternal life.”

شعبך ישראלה, אני אלייתך, אני א.scrollTo
Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad!
Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One!

**BETWEEN DEATH AND BURIAL**

"God has given, and God has taken away; Blessed be the name of God."

(Job 1:21)

**Upon Learning of the Death**

Members of the family or friends who are present at the time of death of a loved one, or when they are informed of a death, may recite the prayer:

ברוך אתה אדונא מלך העולם,_DELTA: Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam, Dayan Ha-Emet.

Blessed is Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Judge of truth.

This traditional prayer is called *Tzidduk Ha-Din*, "the justification of the decree," or *Dayan Ha-Emet*, meaning "true Judge." It is an expression of one's faith in God, of acceptance of reality even at a moment of grievous loss, and an affirmation of the inherent goodness of life despite the pain of death.

**Preparing for the Funeral Service**

Upon learning of the death of a family member, the Rabbi should be contacted immediately. The Rabbi will be able to help the family make the proper arrangements for a funeral service.

Funeral services and burial should not be delayed. Jewish tradition teaches that we should bury within a day after death. If it is necessary to delay the ceremony because of transportation, difficulty in reaching family, or other matters, it is generally permissible to do so. Today the practice is to
conduct the funeral and burial as soon as it is practical, generally within two
days of death.

Jewish funerals are not conducted on Shabbat, Rosh HaShanah,
Yom Kippur, or the first and last days of major festivals, including Pesach,
Shavuot and Sukkot. The Rabbi may be consulted if there are questions
about these or other dates in the Jewish calendar.

We recommend that only a Jewish service be held. Fraternal order
services are often derived from non-Jewish sources, and their symbols may
be completely non-Jewish. Such services, when desired by the family,
should take place separately, not as part of the Jewish service.

If the family of the deceased desire the participation of any other
person or any organization during the funeral service in addition to the
Rabbi and/or Cantor, it is important to consult the Rabbi before an invitation
is extended.

Shaaray Tefila’s sanctuary, chapel and other facilities are available
for the funeral services of those who are affiliated with the congregation.

**Organ Donation, Autopsies and Cremation**

Because it is a mitzvah to save a life and a mitzvah to heal the sick,
Reform Judaism approves the donation of the organs of one's body for
purposes of transplantation.

Although some branches of Judaism may object, autopsies are
permitted in Reform Judaism as long as they are performed for the clear
purpose of increasing medical knowledge. If the deceased has left specific
instructions as to organ donation or autopsy, these instructions should be
honored.

According to most Reform authorities, cremation is permissible.
However, it is recommended that all remains be committed to proper burial.
This may necessitate a service at the cemetery or mausoleum.

**The Role of Family Friends**

Close friends of the family may bring in meals and provide other
assistance in accordance with the wishes of the mourning family. Generally
speaking, the mourners should be concerned with the preparations for the
memorial or funeral services and should not be concerned with daily
responsibilities. Shaaray Tefila’s Caring Committee may also be of support
during this difficult period.
The Coffin, Clothing, and Viewing the Body

"As we come forth, so shall we return."

(Ecclesiastes 5:14)

Simplicity and dignity are the governing principles for Jewish funeral arrangements. A funeral should never become an occasion for ostentatious display. It is traditional to use a wooden coffin; in any case, the principle of simplicity should be honored. It is the words, music, tone and atmosphere of the ceremony that can provide the most comfort.

The dead may be buried in traditional linen burial shrouds (tachrichim), but this is not required in Reform Judaism. Ordinary clothing, including a favorite outfit, may also be used. If the deceased wished to be buried with his/her tallit (prayer shawl), kippah (yarmulke) or with a pouch of earth from the land of Israel, these directions should be honored.

Traditionally the body is prepared for burial by the Chevrah Kaddishah, literally "Holy Society," a group of Jews trained in washing and guarding the body. Jewish practice strongly discourages embalming. After the body has been prepared, it should be put into the coffin and the coffin sealed. Jewish tradition strongly opposes the public viewing of the deceased in an open coffin. The family may view the body privately before the funeral service if they wish, but the coffin should be permanently sealed well before the service begins.

The custom of pre-funeral chapel visitation is not in keeping with Jewish tradition and is discouraged. The family should instead receive condolence calls at home during the Shivah (mourning period).

PRACTICES SURROUNDING DEATH UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Infant Deaths

Traditional Judaism specifies that funeral and mourning customs not be observed for a stillborn child or for an infant that does not live for thirty days. However, any infant over a month old who dies is treated as having been a full person in the Jewish legal sense, and is buried with a regular funeral and mourning period.

Reform practice in such instances tries to respond to the emotional needs of the family at this most difficult time, suggesting that any infant who survives birth be buried with a simple graveside service. The Rabbi should be consulted concerning mourning customs for a stillborn child.
Death of A Child

Many people believe that the death of a child of any age puts the greatest strain on survivors. Parents, grandparents and siblings each respond with varying degrees of emotion when confronting this unthinkable trauma.

At such a time, we may feel awkward or inadequate to respond to the grieving family, not sure whether our personal words of comfort or our religious tradition can help. Experience teaches that the love and support given to a family at the time of a child's, or anyone's, death can make a difference as the survivors try to move forward with their lives.

Our individual and collective response need only be thoughtful and compassionate. A family or individual within the family may or may not welcome the congregation’s offer of help. A willingness to be available, to listen, and above all, sensitivity to what is being said by the grieving family will be the greatest help and the greatest *mitzvah*.

Suicide

Reform Judaism supports the belief that all Jews are equal in death, regardless of the style of their lives or the manner of their deaths. All should be treated with the respect due every member of the Jewish community and should be buried in the Jewish cemetery in the midst of their families with a complete funeral ceremony.

Death Following A Prolonged Illness

When death occurs following a prolonged or difficult illness, we are challenged to respond to our inner feelings of both grief and relief. An exploration of these feelings will reveal both a profound sadness now that death has finally come coupled with gratitude that our loved one is no longer suffering.

Conflicting feelings are therefore quite natural under these circumstances. We mourn the death and our loss makes us sad. We do not, however, love someone less when we wish for their pain and suffering to be relieved. When we are told that death is medically inevitable, our hope turns from seeking a cure to a hope for release from the anguish, which too often confronts our loved ones in such circumstances. A prolonged illness also affords the opportunity to express our love and affection and to resolve any conflicts or issues, which might have arisen in our relationships. Following the death, the slow passage of time will ease our grief, and the
love and support of family and friends will allow us to move from mourning to remembering happier times with a loved one whose painful death may have shadowed these memories.

**When A Body Is Lost**

The regular funeral service should be conducted for those whose bodies have been lost or cannot be recovered or identified. The service should be held and the period of mourning begun as soon as it becomes clear that there is no hope of recovering the body.

**TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH**

Students of human development and psychology have studied children's reactions to death and grieving. All of them teach that there are some circumstances which would preclude children from attending a funeral ceremony. In most cases, however, children who are old enough should be allowed to participate. All people, whether children or elderly, go through a process of grieving, expressing their sense of loss, and reconstructing their lives again. Children should not be purposely excluded from attendance at family funerals.

Children's questions about death, funeral and burial should be answered honestly and gently, and they should be helped in every way to accept the reality of death.

Children should be told that their beloved has died. That word should be used. There is danger in using euphemisms like: "He went away." "Grandma is sleeping."

There are a number of books which deal sensitively with this subject. If you find it difficult to explain to your children that your beloved has died, the Rabbi will be ready to assist you.

**THE FUNERAL SERVICE**

*"The dust returns to the earth as it was; the spirit returns to God who gave it."

(Ecclesiastes 12:7)

The funeral service is designed to affirm the holiness and meaningfulness of life. It contains the reading of comforting Psalms and prayers, and a eulogy designed to help the family understand the enduring meaning of the life of their beloved. The *El Malei Rachamim* is recited or sung in Hebrew and English. This is the prayer in the funeral service, which is offered on behalf of the soul of the departed in eternity.
The Eulogy

It is a mitzvah to speak well of the dead. A funeral sermon or eulogy (hesped) is not required, but is included at the discretion of the Rabbi and family. Reform Judaism does not restrict the days on which eulogies may be given, nor recognize certain situations where eulogies are not permissible. Family members and friends are encouraged to deliver the eulogy or to write materials to be read in honor of their beloved. The Rabbi will meet with the family to discuss the service and eulogy and will seek background information and personal input from the family to help him/her prepare.

Music and Flowers

Although traditional Jews do not have music or flowers at a funeral, Reform Jews sometimes do have simple background music. Flowers are permissible, although a Tzedakah contribution is encouraged instead.

K'riah: The Mourner's Ribbon

"And Jacob rent his garments and put on sackcloth, and mourned for his son many days."

(Genesis 37:34)

K'riah, the literal rending of the garments, is a traditional sign of mourning. For many Jews today, it has been supplanted by the cutting and tearing of a black ribbon affixed to the mourner's garments just before the funeral service. This symbolizes the pain and grief, and the life of a loved one now 'torn away' from us. The ribbon may be worn during the Shivah mourning period or even, if desired, through Shloshim.

The use of a K'riah ribbon is left to the discretion of the family with the Rabbi's guidance. The ribbon is provided by the funeral home.

INTERMENT

Disposition of the Body

In-ground burial is the most widely practiced method of disposition of the body among Jews; indeed, it is the only method allowed by Orthodox tradition. However, other methods of interment (e.g. mausoleum caves) were practiced among Jews in ancient times. And so, while burial is the
normative Jewish practice, cremation and entombment in mausoleums are both acceptable practices in Reform Judaism.

Jewish tradition does not prescribe the use of a burial vault, but state or local law or cemetery regulations may. The family should consult with the cemetery to learn if a vault is required.

**Pallbearers**

The family may choose a number of relatives or friends who are given the mitzvah and honor of helping to carry the casket from the funeral service to the open grave. In traditional Judaism only men may participate; in Reform Judaism, women may also be included. According to Jewish law no Cohen (descendant of the priestly class) may serve in this capacity, for Cohanim may not come in contact with a dead body. Reform Judaism does not recognize such a status. It is typical to ask 6 (or at most 8) people to serve as pallbearers. They should be contacted before the funeral to ensure that they are willing and able to accept this honor.

It is traditional for the Cantor to sing or the Rabbi to recite selections from Psalms while walking behind the casket as they accompany the pallbearers and family to the graveside.

**Cemeteries**

In the language of the Bible, at death we are "gathered to our ancestors." Jewish cemeteries are specially consecrated ground devoted to this idea. If possible, therefore, Jews should be buried in Jewish cemeteries or in the Jewish section of community cemeteries or mausoleums. In cases of cremation, the ashes should be buried in a Jewish cemetery or placed in the niche of a Jewish mausoleum. Reform Judaism permits non-Jewish members of Jewish families to be interred in Reform cemeteries or mausoleums, provided that non-Jewish prayers and services are not recited and non-Jewish symbols are not displayed.

**The Interment Service**

The interment service is brief. Comforting Psalms and prayers are recited, followed by the Kaddish prayer. Reform Judaism does not require the presence of a Minyan (ten adult Jews) for the recitation of Kaddish at the graveside.

Jewish tradition prescribes that the family of the deceased remain at the graveside for the lowering of the coffin and the covering of the casket with earth. Family and friends may wish to participate in the ritual of
shoveling earth onto the casket in the open grave, thereby actually assisting in the burial of their loved one. This is a difficult moment for many people. However, it is considered one last act of love and affection for our beloved dead, one final chance to do something for our family or friends. The alternative is to leave the entire burial to strangers. In cases where the family chooses not to remain through the completion of the burial, a representative of the family or the Rabbi may remain until the coffin is covered with earth.

**MOURNING AFTER THE FUNERAL**

“When I cry out in the night before You, let my prayer reach You; incline Your ear to my cry.”

(Psalm 88:2-3)

Judaism has formulated rituals to aid in the mourning process. Realizing the need for catharsis and the danger of excessive, introverted, solitary meditation, Judaism calls for the visits of sympathetic friends who share their memories of the departed and who join with the family in the observance of these various religious practices.

**Mourning Periods**

Jewish tradition prescribes several periods of mourning, differing in intensity and obligation:

*Aninut* - The period between death and burial. During this period tradition prescribes that the mourner be free from ritual and social obligations except the observance of *Shabbat* and the arrangement of the funeral and burial.

*Shivah* - The seven days of mourning following the funeral. Mourners are encouraged to remain at home during these days, to refrain from their ordinary pursuits and occupations, and to participate in daily services in the home.

*Shloshim* - The thirty-day period (including *Shivah*) when normal life gradually resumes and mourners return to their daily activities while still observing certain aspects of mourning. One avoids joyful social events and entertainment during this period.

*Aveilut* - The entire eleven-month period during which the mourner (son, daughter, brother, sister, father, mother, husband or wife) recites *Kaddish* and observes the mourning customs as they see fit.
Washing The Hands

Traditional practice involves the ritual washing of hands before entering the home where the family will gather during the Shivah period. This is a symbolic act which indicates that the funeral is over and the mourners are about to begin the difficult process of reentering the regular patterns of their lives. Family members and friends who wish to observe this ritual can arrange for a pitcher of water and paper towels to be placed outside the door(s) of the home. Some also observe the tradition of washing their hands upon leaving the cemetery.

The Memorial Candle

Upon first entering the home where Shivah is to be observed, it is customary for a memorial candle to be lit. This candle is provided by the funeral director. It is a symbol of our faith and hope. It has been suggested that the flame of the candle reflects the warmth and light of religious faith that dispels darkness, even the darkness of separation.

Some believe that this practice reminds us of the verse from Proverbs (20:27), "The human spirit is the light of God." The candle is thus a memorial to the deceased, symbolic of the soul and the light that he or she brought to the mourners during life. This candle should be put in a conspicuous place so that it may be seen, especially during minyan services held in the home.

The candle should be lit by one of the mourners as soon as the family returns from the funeral. It is traditional to say, Baruch Dayan HaEmet, "Blessed be the Judge of Truth." As the candle is lit, the following verses from Psalms may also be recited:

"God is my light and my salvation...  
Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

The Mourners' Meal

Upon return from the cemetery, families may elect to have a mourners' meal. Traditionally, this meal is composed of dairy and fish products. The mourners' meal includes foods that are the basic staples of life, a visible way to express our belief in the goodness of life. Hard-boiled eggs (symbols of life) are a traditional part of this meal. Some also eat lentils and bread.
In order to spare the mourners the task of preparing food at the height of their grief, it is a mitzvah for friends and neighbors to prepare this first meal eaten by the mourners on returning from the cemetery. This Meal of Consolation (traditionally known as Seudat Havrahah) should not become an occasion for lavish feasting and drinking. The practice of serving liquor to visitors during Shivah is discouraged in Reform Judaism.

The Shivah Minyan

Depending upon the family's preference, the Rabbi and/or Cantor or a trained lay volunteer from our Minyan Committee may conduct a Minyan service in the home after the burial. This service is based upon our Reform Jewish prayerbook, and has additional prayers to be used in the house of mourning. The service is designed to help the family express their feelings and faith in God, and to be comforted by the presence of friends. It is a brief service, lasting about 25-30 minutes. Please contact the Rabbi’s office to help arrange a service in your home.

A traditional minyan, a quorum of ten adults, is not imperative in Reform Jewish practice. Most important, women are always included in the service. If the family desires, these services may be held in the home on weekdays, beyond the day of the funeral, and may be led by any individual with a knowledgeable Jewish education.

How To Offer Comfort To Those In Mourning

"May God comfort you along with the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

(A traditional greeting to mourners.)

The mitzvah of nichum aveilim, "comforting the mourners", is a very important Jewish religious obligation. There are many ways to help family and friends who are in mourning. In general, the best gift we can offer is our presence and our caring. Here are several specific suggestions:

- attend the funeral
- pay a Shivah visit
- help provide a meal during Shivah
- share memories of the deceased
- attend the minyan
- make a Tzedakah contribution in memory of the deceased
- write a personal note about the deceased
- help address thank-you notes
• run errands for the family
• take care of children for a few hours or a day
• assist with household chores
• accompany the family to Temple services
• remember critical times, such as birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, Yahrzeit, etc., and be with the mourners on that day

**OTHER PRACTICES DURING THE MOURNING PERIOD**

Mourners need not remain in the house to which they return after the funeral, but may go to their own homes afterwards. If they live near other members of the family, they should sleep at home, but spend the day and evening together at one family member’s home. If they do not live near each other, they should endeavor to spend at least the first three days together. This three-day period is recognized as the most rigorous part of the period. If a person must attend to business, it is customary to wait at least three days. In Reform Judaism, either the seven-day or the three-day period of mourning is normative. Orthodox custom prescribes that mourners sit on low wooden benches or the floor, do not wear leather, and do not shave or cut their fingernails during this period. Reform Jews generally sit on regular chairs, wear clothing that is appropriate to the circumstances, and attend to personal grooming according to their comfort level.

Traditional Jews abstain from entertainment and any form of music for a full year after the death. Many do not seek public or private entertainment such as radio, television, theatrical productions, or sports activities. Nor do they show vanity in dress, in personal habits, or in foods during the first 11 months of the mourning period. Liberal Jews usually desist from these activities for the first thirty days. Attendance at important civic or congregational functions (aside from the purely social) is permissible after Shivah and during the thirty-day period. We must be guided by our conscience during this time.

There are other customs, such as covering mirrors and not wearing leather, which once were widely observed among Jews, but which Reform Jews have largely abandoned. The Rabbi may be consulted if any questions arise concerning such practices.

**Visiting the Grave**

Traditional Jews do not visit the graves of their departed until Shloshim, the 30-day mourning period, is over. Liberal Jews may visit after the Shivah period. One does not visit graves on Shabbat or festivals. It is...
traditional to visit the graves of parents during the month before Rosh HaShanah, during the High Holy Days, as well as on the day of Yahrzeit.

When one visits a grave, it is traditional to recite the Kaddish prayer. One does not need a Rabbi or any other religious leader to recite this prayer. It is also customary to place a small stone on the marker as a way of indicating that you have fulfilled the mitzvah of visiting a loved one’s grave.

A Simchah During the Mourning Period

"There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance."

(Ecclesiastes 3:4)

Sometimes a death will occur just before a family had planned to celebrate a Simchah (joyous occasion) such as a wedding, Bar/Bat Mitzvah or the birth of a child. The general approach of the Jewish tradition is not to cancel a Simchah. While the joy of the event will surely be diminished, Judaism recognizes that life must go on. However, the family may wish to modify the plans for the purely social part of the celebration. You may consult the Rabbi for advice in specific situations.

THE KADDISH PRAYER

"God heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds."

(Psalm 147:3)

The Kaddish is recited at the close of every worship service and is considered the mourner's prayer. The Kaddish is also recited at funerals and memorial services. However, it is not a prayer for the dead. The prayer that actually mentions the dead is the El Malei Rachamim, "O God, full of compassion," which is also recited at funerals and at Yizkor services.

Actually, there is no mention of mourning or death in the Kaddish. Its theme is praise of God, the affirmation of life, of the greatness and holiness of God, and the quest for peace and holiness in our own lives, and in the lives of the Jewish people and the entire world.

The Kaddish was originally recited at the close of the study session in ancient days. It is written mostly in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud and the tongue used in daily conversation two thousand years ago. As study was considered a prime method to honor the memory of the dead, a study session of the Torah or a religious discourse was conducted for the mourners and ended with the prayer that usually closed such a session. Today, it is customary to include a Dvar Torah (a bit of Torah study) when conducting a minyan in a house of mourning.
Shabbat Services

Traditionally the Kaddish is recited by the immediate mourners (spouse, children, parents or siblings) every day for 11 months beginning with the day of the funeral. Some Reform Jews choose to recite Kaddish at home during private moments of prayer and meditation in addition to a minyan. It is our custom at Shaaray Tefila to read the name of the deceased at the first Friday evening service following the funeral and for several successive Erev Shabbat services during the Shloshim period. It is appropriate for the family to attend services during these weeks and as many Sabbaths as possible during the following year. This may also include attendance at Shabbat minyan or morning sanctuary services as well. Religious worship services may prove to be comforting and educational, and can provide the family with an opportunity to share their feelings with others in the Jewish community.

In most Reform congregations, the entire congregation rises to recite the Kaddish, showing solidarity with those in mourning, acknowledging that all of us have been or will be mourners ourselves, and remembering the historical martyrs of our people. At Shaaray Tefila, it has become the custom to invite the mourners to stand when the name of their loved one is recited, and to remain standing until the entire congregation rises to join them in the Kaddish.

THE TOMBSTONE: MATZEVAH

"And Jacob set up a pillar upon Rachel's grave."

(Genesis 35:20)

Choosing a Stone

It is a mitzvah to erect and dedicate a tombstone or memorial marker, called in Hebrew a Matzevah, in memory of our loved ones. Different cemeteries will have varying requirements concerning such markers. The same principles of simplicity and dignity that govern the choice of coffins should govern the choice of tombstones. The Rabbi can assist families in selecting appropriate traditional inscriptions.

Unveiling: Dedicating the Stone

Tombstone dedications or unveilings are not required by Jewish tradition. However, it is praiseworthy for a family to go to the cemetery together at some time after the monument or marker is set in place for a
memorial service and to dedicate it to the memory of their beloved dead. It has become customary to set a stone after 11 months following a death, though any time following the Shloshim period is acceptable.

The stone setting is a brief ceremony which includes the reading of Psalms and prayers, a brief word about the deceased, recitation of the El Malei Rachamim and the Kaddish prayer. This service can be conducted by the family itself or with clergy leading. Consult the Rabbi for details.

There is also the lovely custom of placing a small rock or stone on the Matzevah, or gravestone. This is considered an act of caring and affection. It is like leaving a calling card to indicate that "someone who loves you came to pay a visit."

**YAHRZEIT AND YIZKOR**

"One generation goes and another generation comes, but the world remains forever."

(Ecclesiastes 1:4)

**Yahrzeit**

The word Yahrzeit is from the German and means "year's time." It marks the anniversary of a death. In Reform Judaism, a family may choose to observe either the Hebrew or the secular date of death. Whichever date is chosen should be agreed to by the entire family, so that all may observe the occasion at the same time and, if possible, together.

It is customary to kindle a candle each year on the Yahrzeit date, again as a symbol of the light and inspiration derived from the deceased. The candle is lit at night when the Jewish day begins. This is in accord with the Jewish practice, dating back to the Bible, which informs us that the day begins at sundown.

It is also customary for the family to attend the Shabbat service closest to the Yahrzeit date. The family thus has the opportunity to recite the Kaddish prayer, traditional during this observance. Congregants can call the Rabbis' office and request their loved one’s name to be read at the service they choose to attend. In this manner, Jews affirm the value of the past and the contribution of their loved ones to themselves and the larger community. Again, our memories can become an impetus for living fully in the present and the future.
"May their souls be bound up in the bond of eternal life with the souls of all the righteous."

(From the Yizkor service)

The word Yizkor has become the title of the memorial service that is integrated into Judaism's liturgical calendar. Shaaray Tefila holds this service four times a year: on Yom Kippur morning, the last day of Sukkot, the last day of Pesach, and on Shavuot. While it is Orthodox practice for those who have not lost their parents to leave the synagogue for the Yizkor service, Reform Judaism encourages everyone to remain. We all have friends or family whom we lovingly recall. And by our presence we honor those who have no one to recite Kaddish for them as well our Jewish martyrs, those who "lie in far-off graves, unknown to all but God."

Memorial Plaques

Shaaray Tefila provides its members with the opportunity to purchase memorial plaques dedicated to the memory of beloved family members who have died. These plaques are displayed in the rear and side of the sanctuary, on seat backs, or written in the Book of Life in the sanctuary lobby. The names of those who are perpetuated in any of these ways are noted in the Shabbat Service pamphlet on the Shabbat closest to their Yahrzeit.
CONCLUSION

"And God will wipe away the tears from all faces."

(Isaiah 25:8)

For Reform Jews, the observance of mourning practices are a matter of individual choice. It must be noted, however, that the practices described in this booklet represent the distilled experience and wisdom of thousands of years of Jewish life in its effort to help the mourner confront death and return to life. Following Jewish customs during a time of mourning can bring healing and comfort to those who have been stung by the pain of the death of a loved one.

Nowhere is the ability of Judaism to serve life more evident than in the spiritually and psychologically healthy traditions it has fostered in facing death. Moreover, through the vehicle of historic tradition, we gain the redeeming conviction of being participants in a plan and purpose that transcends the moment and elevates our existence to a plane of enduring significance.
Below is a brief list of Hebrew terms that are frequently used when discussing Jewish death, funeral and mourning customs.

ALEV/ALEHAH HASHALOM “May he/she rest in peace.” A phrase used after mentioning the name of the deceased.

ANINUT The state of mourning between death and interment

AVEIL A mourner (plural – Aveilim)

AVEILUT The entire 11 month period of mourning

CHEVRAH KADDISHAH Literally, “Holy Society”; The group of Jews who prepare the body for burial and perform the rite of purification in traditional Judaism.

DAYAN HA-EMET The blessing which the mourners recite after learning of a death. Literal meaning: ’True Judge’. See "Tzidduk Ha-Din."

EL MALEI RACHAMIN Literally, "God full of compassion."; A memorial prayer, sometimes referred to as the "El Malei."

HAZKARAT NESHAMOT Memorial prayer for the deceased.

HESPED Eulogy.

KADDISH The prayer recited for the deceased for eleven months from the date of burial, and on Yahrzeit.

K'RIAH The " rending" of the garment of the mourner after death occurs, or wearing the black mourner's ribbon.

KAVOD HAMET Respect for the deceased.

MATZEVAH Monument or tombstone.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MINYAN</td>
<td>A group gathered for prayer; a memorial service held in the home after the funeral.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICHUM AVEILIM</td>
<td>The mitzvah of comforting the mourners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONEN</td>
<td>A mourner between the time of death and interment. (plural - onenim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEUDAT</td>
<td>Meal of consolation usually provided by friends, relatives and neighbors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHLOSHIM</td>
<td>The thirty-day period of mourning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHIVAH</td>
<td>The seven-day period of mourning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TACHRICHIM</td>
<td>Traditional linen burial shrouds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZIDDUK HA-DIN</td>
<td>The &quot;Justification of God&quot; prayer recited first, after hearing of a death, and at the interment or immediately thereafter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIDDUI</td>
<td>A deathbed confession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAHRZEIT</td>
<td>The memorial anniversary of the date of death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YIZKOR</td>
<td>The memorial service recited on Yom Kippur morning, on the final days of Sukkot and Pesach, and on Shavuot.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
KADDISS IN HEBREW AND TRANSLITERATION


Ye-hei she-mei ra-ba me-va-rach le-a-lam u-le-al-mei al-ma-ya.


Ye-hei she-la-ma ra-ba min she-ma-ya ve-cha-yim a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

O-sha-sha-lom bi-me-ro-mav, hu ya-a-sha-sha-lom a-lei-nu ve-al kil Yis-ra-eil, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.
TRANSLATION OF THE KADDISH

The Kaddish prayer does not mention death. It is an affirmation of God and therefore of the essential worthwhileness of life itself, despite the reality of death. An English translation follows:

"Let the glory of God be extolled, let God’s great name be hallowed, in the world whose creation God willed. May God’s kingdom soon prevail, in our own day, our own lives, and the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God’s great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Let the name of the Holy One, blessed is God, be glorified, exalted, and honored, though God is beyond all the praises, songs and adorations that we can utter, and let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen.

May God who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, let peace descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world, and let us say: Amen."

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For additional comfort you may wish to read some of the following Psalms:  2, 15, 16, 23, 33, 37, 42, 62, 73, 84, 86, 88, 90, 91, 121, 130, 144 and 146. Other traditional readings can be found in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 31, as well as Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3. Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes can be found in the third section (Ketuvim, "writings") in any Tanach (Bible).

"May God give strength to our people.
May God bless our people with Shalom"

(Psalm 29:11)