

A lit candle is shown in the bottom right corner, with a large, blue flame that rises and curves towards the top left. The background is solid black. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

Guide to
Jewish
Death and
Mourning
Customs

Prepared by the Beth El *Chevra Kadisha*

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Mourning Customs

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The creation of this *Guide to Jewish Death and Mourning Customs* was spearheaded by Joel Rublin in conjunction with fellow members of the Beth El *Chevrá Kadisha* Committee: Laurie Berkman, David Beyth, Johanna Ginsberg, Rebecca Lubetkin, and Lisa Small.

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Beth El Chevra Kadisha
Mission Statement

One leaves the world as one enters the world. Just as newborns are washed and dressed as they enter the world, so too the deceased are cleansed and dressed as they depart.

~Ecclesiastes 5:15

Beth El's *Chevra Kadisha* (holy burial society) is an organization of synagogue lay members and professionals dedicated to assisting congregational members and their families upon the death of a loved one. Its mission is founded upon the traditional Jewish *mitzvot* of *k'vod hameit* (honoring the dead) and *nichum aveilim* (comforting the mourners). Beth El's *Chevra Kadisha* is committed to making the following services available to Beth El members and families:

- Helping with funeral arrangements in consultation with Beth El's clergy and local funeral homes;
- Performing *tabara* (ritual purification of the deceased);
- Performing *sh'mira* (watching over the deceased until the time of burial);
- Helping to arrange condolence meals for the mourners and to be available for support as needed;
- Helping to ensure that a *minyan* (prayer quorum) and *sh'lichei tzibbor* (service leaders) are present at the local house of mourning for all evening services during the period of *shiva* (the week of mourning).

Our *Chevra Kadisha* is equally committed to educating Beth El's members about Jewish laws and customs relating to death and bereavement, and the merits (value) of calling upon the *Chevra Kadisha* in time of need.

The *Chevra Kadisha* Committee welcomes interested volunteers for its subcommittees on: *Tabara*, *Sh'mira*, *Nichum Aveilim* (comforting the mourners), and *Hinuch* (education).

To volunteer, contact the Beth El office at 973-763-0111

Introduction

A Note from Our Rabbi

There is no greater testament to the compassionate nature of Judaism than the laws of caring for the dead and comforting the mourner. Our community has engaged in the study of these laws and traditions and reinvigorated our practices so that we are better able to support each other through grief and loss. Our recently formed *Chevra Kadisha*, literally “sacred society,” will continue to learn and grow as it seeks to accompany and guide the community in its approach to death and mourning. The *Chevra Kadisha* is composed of volunteers who aid the bereaved and participate in the rituals of caring for the dead so that our loved ones are given respectful, caring treatment from death to burial. Assisting in the preparation and burial of the deceased is a *chesed shel emet*, a true act of kindness performed without ulterior motive, for the dead cannot repay this service. It is my hope that this guide helps you to better understand Jewish traditions of caring for the dead and comforting the mourner so that you will be able to practice the traditions and benefit from the support, comfort and respect for life that they offer.

This guide is an attempt to provide our members with helpful resources and give you practical information for everything from planning a funeral and preparing your home for *shiva* to creating a headstone. If you have any questions or any need for the services of the *Chevra Kadisha*, please do not hesitate to contact me or the members of the *Chevra Kadisha*.

The Jewish way of dealing with death is one part of a larger philosophy of life in which all persons are viewed with dignity and respect. Judaism teaches that the human body retains its sanctity even after death because it once held a sacred human life. Our sages compare the sacredness of a body to an impaired Torah scroll. Although no longer usable, it still retains its holiness. Every individual is sacred in life and death, and we care for the deceased in a way that maintains their dignity and honor. As we are all born, we all die. Jewish burial traditions seek to show our equality through practices such as burial in simple shrouds and a plain wood coffin.

When a member of a community dies, it is the community’s responsibility to lovingly assist the family of the deceased. In this spirit, members of the Beth El *Chevra Kadisha* Committee are prepared to help families when they suffer a loss. It is our goal that every mourner feel the comfort and support of the Beth El community through the generous service of our *Chevra Kadisha*.

With Blessings,
Rabbi Francine Roston

Preparing for Death

This guide is focused on Jewish death and mourning customs and is not intended to address the sometimes very difficult medical, ethical and other issues associated with the end of life. Should you need any assistance in this regard, Beth El is here to help you. It is recommended that you designate a healthcare agent to make medical decisions on your behalf, that you create a living will, and that you make family members aware of your general desires regarding your medical treatment and burial procedures.

You should not hesitate to contact Rabbi Roston with any questions you may have. Beth El also has a congregational nurse, Karen Frank, who can provide assistance and support with medical needs and counseling. You can reach Karen through the synagogue office.

Vidui—Confessional

When a person is nearing the end of his/her life, Jewish tradition provides an opportunity for spiritual guidance, comfort and fulfillment. It has become a powerful custom for someone to recite the *Shema* when they feel their life is ebbing away. There is also an ancient custom of reciting the *Vidui*, or confessional. While we are more familiar with confessionals as part of the Yom Kippur liturgy, the deathbed confessional gives the dying person an opportunity to spiritually cleanse themselves and approach death without reservation.

In the event that someone is unable to recite the prayers, there is a version of the *vidui* that can be said on the dying person’s behalf. Below is the English translation of both forms of the *vidui*.

By the individual:

My God and God of my ancestors, accept my prayer. Do not ignore my supplication. Forgive me for all the sins which I have committed in my lifetime. I am abashed and ashamed of these deeds I have committed. Please accept my pain and suffering as atonement and forgive my wrongdoing, for against You alone have I sinned.

May it be Your will, *Adonai* my God and God of my ancestors, that I sin no more. With Your great mercy, cleanse me of my sins, but not through suffering and disease. Send a perfect healing to me and to all who are stricken.

I acknowledge to You, *Adonai* my God and God of my ancestors, that my life and recovery depend on You. May it

be Your will to heal me. Yet, if You have decreed that I shall die of this affliction, may my death atone for all sins and transgressions which I have committed before You. Shelter me in the shadow of Your wings. Grant me a share in the world to come.

Protector of orphans and Guardian of spouses left behind, protect my beloved family, with whose soul my own soul is bound. Into Your hand I commit my soul. You have redeemed me, *Adonai*, God of truth.

*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Adonai Hu haElohim. Adonai Hu haElohim.*

Hear, O Israel: *Adonai* is Our God, *Adonai* is One.
Adonai is God. *Adonai* is God.

Read by another, if individual is unable:

Adonai, our God and God of our ancestors, we acknowledge that our life is in Your hands. May it be Your will that You send perfect healing to (name of infirmed). Yet, if it is Your final decree that s/he be taken by death, let it be in love. May her/his death atone for the sins and transgressions which s/he committed before You. Grant her/him a portion of the abundant good which is held in store for the righteous, and give her/him life replete with joy in Your presence, at Your right hand forever. Protector of orphans and Guardian of spouses left behind, protect her/his beloved family, with whose soul her/his own soul is bound. Into Your hand s/he commits her/his soul. You have redeemed her/him, *Adonai*, God of truth.

*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.
Baruch shem kivod malchuto l'olam vaed.
Adonai Hu haElohim. Adonai Hu haElohim.*

Hear, O Israel: *Adonai* is Our God, *Adonai* is One.
Praised be God's glory for ever and ever.
Adonai is God. *Adonai* is God.

When a Death Occurs

Beth El is prepared to help. When your loved one has died and you want to plan his/her care and burial, please call the synagogue. During business hours, the best course is to call the synagogue at 973-763-0111 to contact the Rabbi's assistant or the executive director. They will notify the rabbi and the *Chevra Kadisha* coordinator. If you are unable to reach someone in the office, please call Rabbi Roston on her cell phone at 973-787-7846. Rabbi Roston and the *Chevra Kadisha* Committee liaison will advise families concerning traditional practices and requirements.

If a loved one dies on *Shabbat*, you may contact the rabbi and you may also wish to contact the funeral home to remove the deceased (the *meit/meitab*). It is inappropriate, however, to make funeral arrangements on *Shabbat*.

Making Funeral Arrangements

Jewish law requires that burial take place as quickly as possible, usually within 24 hours of death. Burial may be delayed for legal reasons, to transport the deceased, to enable close relatives to travel long distances to be present at the funeral/burial, or to avoid burial on *Shabbat* or a holy day. You should contact Rabbi Roston before contacting a funeral home or making other funeral commitments. She will offer assistance concerning traditional Jewish practices, scheduling and will help to notify the *Chevra Kadisha* so that you can be assisted and supported through the funeral and mourning period.

Local Jewish funeral homes that are used by our community and with whom we have arranged, through our *Chevra Kadisha*, to provide *tahara* and *sh'mira*:

- Bernheim Apter Kreitzman Suburban Funeral Chapel, 68 Old Short Hills Road, Livingston, NJ 07039; 973-422-0600
- Menorah Chapels at Millburn, 2950 Vauxhall Road, Union, NJ 07088; 908-964-1500
- J.L. Apter Memorial Chapels, 2122 Millburn Avenue, Maplewood, NJ 07040; 973-376-2600
- Ross' Shalom Chapels, 415 Morris Avenue, Springfield, NJ 07081; 973-665-1800

Cemeteries in which Beth El has plots available for purchase by congregants:

- Mt. Lebanon Cemetery, Iselin, NJ
- Riverside Cemetery, Saddle Brook, NJ
- King Solomon Cemetery, Clifton, NJ

Contact Burt Solomon, 973-763-8077 (home) or 212-808-0700, ext. 8861 (office), or David Mallach, 973-762-7898 (home) or 973-929-3080 (office), for more information.

Caring for the Dead

Autopsies/Organ Donations

The practice of routine autopsy is contrary to Jewish law, since it is viewed as a desecration of the body. In cases where an autopsy is required by law or for immediate medical benefit, Jewish law allows for the procedure, which is customarily performed in a respectful, surgical setting. Rabbi Roston should be contacted for guidance and support.

In 1995, the Conservative Movement adopted a legal position that organ donation is a *mitzvah* (www.uscj.org/images/Organ_and_Tissue_Donation.pdf). Although organ donation may involve some alteration of the body, it is viewed as an example of *k'vod hameit* (respect for the deceased) by bringing healing to the living. Willing certain organs or tissues is recommended and is considered a *mitzvah*. The rabbi should be consulted in all cases to assist and support the family in their decision-making.

Sh'mira – Guarding the Body

Jewish tradition encourages, as an act of great respect, that the *meit/meitah* not be left alone prior to burial. Hospitals should be requested to avoid disturbing the deceased until the arrival of a *shomer/et* (guardian). *Shom'rim* should not be members of the immediate family. Usually the *shomer/et* reads *T'hillim* (Psalms) or other sacred texts, while sitting near the body.

Tabara – Ritual Purification

Jewish law requires, as an expression of respect, that the deceased be washed, purified and dressed according to a prescribed ritual. Members of a group of trained persons from the *Chevera Kadisha* are available to perform this *mitzvah*. *Tabara* is performed soon after a person dies and as close to the time of the funeral as possible, but is never performed on *Shabbat*. Family members do not perform *tabara* for other family members.

For myself and my loved ones, why should I follow Jewish tradition regarding *tabara* and related practices?

Unlike the “death as a business” practices which have arisen in some funeral homes, a properly performed *tabara* follows Jewish law and tradition in treating the body of the deceased with the utmost respect. Care is taken to make sure that the person is treated with kindness, modesty and respect. The *tabara* team is trained to cleanse, ritually purify and dress the body while making sure the body is not harmed. With *sh'mira*, the deceased is never left alone and is surrounded by a spiritual atmosphere of community members reciting sacred texts. It should give a family great comfort to know that members of the community are caring

for the deceased in a way that our ancestors have done from generation to generation. For these reasons, *tabara* and related practices are the appropriate Jewish practices for the last of the life cycle events, death.

Tachrichim – Traditional Burial Attire

If one is being buried according to Jewish tradition, one is buried in *tachrichim* rather than regular clothing. *Tachrichim* are plain white cotton or linen garments, as prescribed by Jewish law, to demonstrate the equality of all individuals in death. A Jewish male is customarily buried wearing a *kippah* and his own *tallit* (with the fringes cut, to show that it will no longer be used). If desired, he may be buried in his *kittel*. If a Jewish woman customarily wore a *kippah* and/or a *tallit*, she should be buried in them as well. It is also a custom to sprinkle earth from Israel into the coffin and onto the *meit/ah* as a way of connecting the deceased to the holy land of Israel. Broken shards of pottery, symbolizing the fragility of life, are laid over the deceased's eyes.

Embalming/Cremation

Jewish tradition does not permit the embalming of the deceased unless it is required by civil law. Cremation is against Jewish tradition because it is considered *nivul hameit*, an act of desecration of the deceased. Should a family ignore Jewish tradition regarding cremation, the rabbi may still choose to officiate in a memorial service at the funeral home prior to cremation. Ashes should be interred in a Jewish cemetery, but the interment should be private without the presence of a rabbi. The urn should have an opening so the ashes come in contact with the earth.

Aron - Coffin

In order to avoid interference with the natural process of returning to the earth, Jewish tradition requires that a coffin be made entirely of wood, without nails or metal decoration. It is suggested that, in keeping with the spirit of modesty in Jewish burial customs, the *aron* be simple yet dignified (e.g., a plain pine box, no metal or decoration). In many areas a vault is required by civil law and is therefore permitted. In the event that a vault is used, a significant amount of earth should be shoveled into the vault before it is sealed.

Honoring the Dead

K'riah - Rending of Garments

Mourners for parents, spouses, children, and siblings participate in the rite of *k'riah* usually just prior to the funeral service. *K'riah* is an ancient tradition which can be traced to biblical times. This rite consists of tearing a visible portion of clothing (lapel, pocket, or collar, for example). The custom today is to cut a

black ribbon which children of the deceased wear on the left side over the heart and other mourners wear on the right. During this ritual, mourners stand to signify strength at the time of grief, and they recite a prayer acknowledging the inevitability of death. The torn garment is worn throughout *sb'loshim*, the 30-day mourning period, except on *Shabbat*.

Who is a Mourner?

Jewish tradition wisely provides us with laws and customs that help us grieve and honor our deceased loved ones. Mourners are those who are immediately related to the deceased – mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife and child. From the moment of death until the burial, each of these immediate relatives is considered an *onen/et*. During this period, the *onen/et* has no religious obligations except to attend to the practical necessities of arranging for the funeral. Once burial has occurred, the seven immediate categories of relatives are considered mourners. Rabbi Roston strongly recommends that Jewish mourning practices be observed for Jewish and non-Jewish relatives. Please call her to discuss any questions you may have.

Funeral Services

In the Beth El community, funeral services are usually held at one of the Jewish funeral homes in the area. Alternatively, there may be instances where they may be held graveside. In the event of a relative being buried far away, sometimes mourners will want a memorial service to honor their deceased loved one. Rabbi Roston can offer you guidance.

The funeral service is usually brief and simple. The bereaved family sits at the front of the chapel or synagogue. The closed coffin remains in view covered by a pall. The service includes psalms and inspirational readings. The eulogy highlights the enduring qualities of the deceased. Often family members offer personal reflections on their loved ones. It is recommended that no more than one representative of each generation speak (or that other appropriate measures be taken to streamline the process) so that the service is not overly lengthy.

The service ends with the memorial prayer *El Malei Rachamim* (literally, “God full of compassion”). It expresses the hope that the deceased will be granted eternal peace. Fraternal ceremonies and instrumental music are generally not appropriate.

Should Children Attend?

The presence of children at a funeral is ultimately a family decision. Recent work in psychology suggests that children may be more frightened by what they imagine occurs at funerals than what actually happens. So from the age of 8 or 10 on, it is generally thought that children should be permitted to attend funeral

and cemetery services. For children younger than this, attending just the funeral services might be a good way to help them say goodbye and be with their family. Often friends or relatives are assigned to support the younger children so that their parents can grieve.

Pall and Pallbearers

The coffin may be covered with a specially prepared cloth called a pall and is accompanied by family or friends (pallbearers) selected by the mourners. Pallbearers can be male or female; usually six or eight individuals are given this honor. Mourners do not serve as pallbearers. As a sign of respect, the coffin precedes the mourners, family and friends. Typically the pallbearers accompany the coffin, assist in lifting it into the hearse and accompany it from the hearse to the grave at the cemetery. The pallbearers customarily stop several times while carrying the coffin to the grave.

Flowers

Flowers are not a customary part of Jewish mourning practices. Friends and associates of the deceased who wish to show some concrete expression of condolence should be encouraged to contribute to a charity which was of importance to the deceased or support the mourners by sending food for meals during the *shiva* period.

K'vura - Burial

In traditional practice, the coffin is lowered into the ground and the grave filled, initially using a reversed shovel, until a mound of earth is formed over the coffin. This practice allows us to perform the last *mitzvah* upon us to care for our loved ones by performing their burial ourselves, and not leaving it to strangers. The burial service is simple, consisting of a psalm, the chanting of *El Malei Rachamim* and the recitation of *Kaddish*. If the deceased was a veteran, arrangements can be made ahead of time for an honor guard to be present at the grave for the playing of Taps and for presentation of an American flag to the spouse or the family. Please discuss this with the funeral director and the rabbi.

What is Kaddish?

An ancient prose poem, *Kaddish* praises God for life and anticipates peace on earth. It has five variations. One is the mourner's *Kaddish*, intended as a statement of faith at a time when we feel most threatened and fragmented. *Kaddish* is said only in the presence of a *minyán*.

Geniza

In Jewish tradition, sacred Jewish texts that bear God's name and have become damaged or unusable are treated with reverence and respect by being buried.

Sometimes texts are buried in a *geniza*, a special burial chamber. Burying sacred scrolls and books with a deceased person is regarded as a special mark of esteem both for the individual who passed away and for the texts.

If requested to do so, the *Chevra Kadisha* can provide specially prepared and wrapped texts awaiting interment to be buried with loved ones.

Leaving the Grave

It is customary for the mourners to pass between two rows of friends and family who recite the traditional expression of consolation, “May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” With this shift from honoring the dead to consoling the bereaved, the official mourning period begins. Before entering the home, mourners and those who have been to the cemetery customarily pour water on their hands as a symbolic act of purification and an affirmation of life after involvement with death. Alternatively, this practice may be performed at the cemetery.

Mourners should not serve as hosts or entertain people after the funeral. It is customary for family and friends to arrange for a condolence meal (which traditionally includes bagels and round foods such as eggs or lentils suggesting the continuity of life) to be served to the mourners when they return from the cemetery. Since eggs are one of the few substances that become harder when subjected to heat, hard boiled eggs are included as a symbol of strength and life. If requested by the family, the *Chevra Kadisha* Committee will arrange for this symbolic meal.

Comforting the Mourners/Stages of Mourning

Shiva – The First Seven Days

Shiva is the seven-day period of intensive mourning observed by family members beginning on the day of burial. During the entire *shiva* period, mourners are encouraged to stay away from work or school, to remain at home, and to use the period of *shiva* to reflect on the deceased’s life and legacy. Public mourning observances are suspended on *Shabbat*. Mourners attend *Shabbat* services, but they are not given an aliyah, do not conduct the services, and do not display the *kriah*/torn fabric or ribbon publicly. A major festival terminates *shiva* (for details consult the rabbi). It is customary at Beth El for the name of the deceased to be read at the *Shabbat* service after the funeral.

It is customary for the mirrors in the *shiva* house to be covered, for the mourners to be provided with lower chairs on which to sit, for a seven-day memorial candle to be kindled, and for the mourners to refrain from wearing leather shoes and from shaving. Conversation should focus on the deceased and on

consoling the mourners. It is acceptable to display some photographs of the deceased. When approaching a mourner, it is customary that you do not ask the person how they are doing and that you wait for the person to speak to you. It is good to ask the mourner about their loved one, their work/interests/family/legacy. It is recommended that you say something like “I am sorry for your loss” or you share your memories or impressions of the deceased.

During the *shiva* period (except on *Shabbat*), *Kaddish* is said daily at home in the presence of a *minyan* – at one’s home and at the synagogue for morning services. The mourners may conduct the services in the home, or they may designate others to do so. If requested by the family, the *Chevra Kadisha* will assist in arranging and leading daily evening services and making sure that prayer books are available for the services.

Sh’loshim – The First Thirty Days

During the thirty days following burial (except *shiva*), mourners return to work and normal activities but refrain from public entertainment or social activities. The *k’riah* ribbon is customarily worn during *sh’loshim* in a hidden place such as the inside of a garment, pocket or in a pocketbook/wallet. If you ripped a garment of clothing, that clothing is no longer worn and can be repaired after the thirty days. In place of home services, mourners attend synagogue services daily to recite *Kaddish*.

The Beth El Morning Minyan

Our congregation has a daily morning *minyan*. On Sunday mornings, the *minyan* begins at 8:15 am. Monday through Friday the *minyan* regularly begins at 7:45 am and concludes by 8:30 am. On national holidays the *minyan* time moves to 8:30 am. On *Rosh Hodesh* and Jewish holidays, services begin at 7:30 am. Check the *Shabbat* handout in synagogue or the calendar on our website to verify *minyan* times.

If you are unable to make the morning *minyan* at Beth El and/or you are looking for additional services during the day, near your home or office, you can check our website to find a list of *minyanim* in the Metrowest area and Manhattan. Rabbi Roston can help you as well.

Shana – The First Year

Rabbi Roston is available to advise on how to observe traditional restrictions of mourning and honor one’s family during the year. Within the Beth El community, Rabbi Roston encourages one who is mourning a deceased parent to attend services daily to recite *Kaddish* for eleven months and one day. She also encourages such mourners to continue to refrain from celebratory activities for a full year.

Memorializing the Dead

Yahrzeit - Anniversary of Death

The *yahrzeit* is the anniversary of a death (not burial) in the Jewish calendar, and is observed each year by reciting *Kaddish* at the synagogue, lighting a memorial candle at home, and giving *tzedaka* in memory of the deceased. Beth El mails out a reminder notice in advance of the *yahrzeit* date. *Yahrzeits* are announced during *Kabbalat Shabbat* services on the *Shabbat* **before** the *yahrzeit*. The *yahrzeits* are also announced at Beth El's morning *minyan* and, if an attendee at morning *minyan* is observing a *yahrzeit*, a memorial prayer can be recited. Those observing a *yahrzeit* at morning *minyan* sometimes host a light breakfast in the synagogue after the service is concluded to honor the memory of their loved one and thank the participants in the morning *minyan* for sustaining the service.

Yizkor - Memorial Prayers

Yizkor, a memorial prayer service, is recited within congregational worship services four times a year: *Yom Kippur* and the three major festivals, *Shemini Atzeret*, which comes at the end of *Sukkot*, the last day of *Pesach*, and the second day of *Shavuot*. A mourner is considered exempt from the first three *yizkor* services after the loved one's death due to the intense nature of grief in the first year of mourning. See the checklist below for how to include the name of a loved one in a Beth El *yizkor* book.

Headstones

Jewish law requires that a grave be marked, but neither the type of marker nor the inscription itself is specified. Cemeteries have varying requirements about size and placement of such markers. Inscriptions usually include the name of the deceased in Hebrew and in English as well as the date of birth and date of death. Sometimes other information is noted or a quotation about the person is added. Many end with five Hebrew letters: הַ נַ צַ רַ הַ, which are an abbreviation for the phrase "*t'hi nishmato/nishmata tzrura b'tzror hechaim*" (May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life). Companies in the headstone business serving the Metrowest area include: Raiken-Epstein Memorials, 908-245-3400 and Eden Monuments, 732-901-3030.

Unveiling

The unveiling is not required by Jewish law, but has become a strong custom in America. The ceremony often includes the recitation of a few psalms, the chanting of memorial prayer *El Malei Rachamim*, mourner's *Kaddish*, and a few words spoken about the deceased. It may be held any time after *sh'losim* and it is often held before and near the first *yahrzeit*. Family members often conduct these simple services. Rabbi Roston has compiled a booklet to help families plan and lead an unveiling service.

Selected Readings

Books, articles and websites that offer fuller discussion of Jewish bereavement and funeral traditions:

- William Cutler, ed., *The Jewish Mourners Handbook* (West Orange, New Jersey: Behrman House Publishing) 1992.
- *Jewish Funerals, Burial, and Mourning* (published by Kavod v'Nichum and the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington) Web. <<http://www.jewish-funerals.org/>>.
- Isaac Klein, ed., *A Guide to Religious Practice* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing) 1979.
- Ron Wolfson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort* (Philadelphia: Jewish Lights Publishing) 1996.

Books that can be a source of comfort:

- Martin Cohen, ed., *Our Haven & Our Strength: The Book of Psalms* (New York: Aviv Publishing) 2004.
- Sidney Greenberg, ed., *A Treasury of Comfort*, (North Hollywood, California: Wilshire Books) 1970.
- Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books) 1981.
- Jack Reimer, ed., *Jewish Reflections on Death* (New York: Schocken Books) 1974.

Appendix A : Checklist of what to do when someone dies

If pre-planning has occurred:

- Contact the funeral director (who should have a list of arrangements).
- If it is during business hours, contact the Beth El office at 973-763-0111 and ask to speak to Rabbi Roston's assistant or to the executive director.
- If it is *Shabbat*, or if it is after business hours, contact Rabbi Roston on her cell phone at 973-787-7846 or home phone 973-763-1379.
- Contact the funeral home again to arrange a time for the funeral service.

If pre-planning has not occurred:

- If during business hours, contact the synagogue office at 973-763-0111 and ask to speak to the Rabbi's assistant or to the executive director.
- If it is *Shabbat*, or if it is after business hours, contact Rabbi Roston on her cell phone at 973-787-7846 or home phone 973-763-1379.
- After discussion with Rabbi Roston, contact a Jewish funeral director to arrange for someone to pick up the body and to discuss available times for the funeral. Contact a Jewish cemetery to discuss burial arrangements.

Whether or not pre-planning has occurred:

Notification:

- Start to notify close family and friends. Try to get a sense of the soonest date/time you can hold the funeral.
- Make a list of people to notify regarding the death. The list should include family members, friends, employers, (of both the deceased and of family members), co-workers, community members, and neighbors. Others to be contacted include (if applicable): insurance carriers, Veterans' Administration, financial consultant and medical providers.
- Have family members, close friends, the synagogue office and/or *Chevra Kadisha* members assist you in relaying information about the death, the funeral arrangements and the *shiva* arrangements.
- Contact the doctor to fill out any paperwork.
- Prepare death notice and any obituary with the funeral director.
- Designate charitable organization(s) to receive donations in the name of the deceased. Please consider including Congregation Beth El.

Funeral and burial arrangements:

- Access vital information, including death certificate, Hebrew name, organ donation request (if applicable), and burial plot information.
- Determine the dates of *shiva* and times for visitation and *shiva minyanim* (traditionally 7:30 pm). Decide how many days you will sit *shiva*.
- Arrange for *shiva minyanim* (contact the Rabbi's assistant at Beth El at 973-763-0111). A leader of the evening *shiva minyan* will be provided by Beth El.
- Confirm funeral and burial arrangements with Rabbi Roston, the funeral home and the cemetery. Confirm *shiva* arrangements with Rabbi Roston and the funeral home.
- If you decide that you would like the Beth El *Chevra Kadisha* to assist you in any way, Rabbi Roston will have the committee get in touch with you as soon as possible.
- If you have elected to have *Chevra Kadisha* involvement, meet with a *Chevra Kadisha* coordinator to explain your wishes/needs.
- If the deceased had a *tallit*, decide if s/he should be buried with it. Alternatively, it may be kept as a family heirloom and the funeral home can provide you with a *tallit* for burial.
- Decide who will participate in the funeral service and consult with the service officiant regarding the eulogy.
- Estimate the number of funeral attendees.
- Appoint pallbearers. If there are individuals who may be unable to physically handle this task, you may appoint them "honorary" pallbearers.
- Arrange for transportation to and from the funeral home and to and from the cemetery. This is often done through the funeral home.
- Some mourners may wish to practice reciting mourner's *Kaddish*.
- If children are attending the funeral, arrange to seat them with a babysitter or other responsible adult who will not mind leaving the service with them if necessary.
- At the funeral, give out directions to the family home.

At the family home:

- Arrangements for the meal of comfort, *s'eudat havra'ah*, can be made by members of the extended family, friends or the members of the *Chevra Kadisha*. Mourners should not have to make arrangements.

- Cover mirrors in the home.
- Place a pitcher of water, a basin, and towel outside the front door, to be used by funeral returnees for washing of hands before they enter the home. If using paper towels, provide a small waste bin. (This may also be done outside the cemetery).
- Designate a friend/relative/*Chevra Kadisha* member who can set a schedule for meal preparation/delivery by friends and extended family. Set a schedule for meal preparation/delivery by friends and extended family.
- It can be helpful to arrange for the delivery of groceries and other necessities during the *shivva* week.
- Low chairs or cushions for the mourners' seating, prayer books for services, and *kippot* (head coverings) for guests can be provided by the funeral home and the congregation. Notify the Rabbi's assistant or the *Chevra Kadisha* coordinator with any special concerns.

Appendix B: Whom to Contact at Different Stages

To notify the clergy, synagogue and *Chevra Kadisha* Committee of the death of a loved one:

- Call the Beth El office at 973-763-0111 to speak to the Rabbi's assistant or the executive director.
- If unable to reach anyone in the office, contact Rabbi Roston on her cell phone at 973-787-7846 or home phone 973-763-1379.

To make arrangements with a local Jewish funeral home with whom we have arranged, through our *Chevra Kadisha*, to provide *tahara* and *sh'mira*:

- Bernheim-Apter-Kreitzman Suburban Funeral Chapel, 973-422-0600
- Menorah Chapels, 908-964-1500
- J.L. Apter Memorial Chapels, 973-376-2600
- Ross' Shalom Chapels, 973-665-1800

To order a gravestone from companies in the gravestone business serving the Metrowest area:

- Raiken-Epstein Memorials, 908-245-3400
- Eden Monuments, 732-901-3030

To inquire about how your loved one can be memorialized at Beth El:

- Contact the Rabbi's assistant at the Beth El office at 973-763-0111.

To include the name of a loved one in a Beth El *yizkor* book:

- Contact the executive director at the Beth El office at 973-763-0111.

Appendix C: Pre-Planning Information Sheet

The following information sheet will help to assemble basic information needed by survivors. The *Chevra Kadisha* Committee encourages families to fill out the form and to keep it available. It is difficult to make decisions when the death of a loved one has just occurred. Preparing a will and advance directives can reduce anxiety and anguish, as can advance purchase of grave sites and planning for burial arrangements.

Full name _____
 Hebrew name _____
 Father & mother's Hebrew names _____
 Kohen, Levi or Yisrael _____
 Mother's maiden name _____
 Social Security # _____

Where card is kept: _____

Bank accounts

Account numbers, type (checking or savings), and location
 (name of bank, local branch): _____

Where passbook(s) is/are kept: _____

Lawyer

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Will/Living will/Organ donation card

Which do you have and where they are kept: _____

Financial adviser

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Life insurance

Company name: _____

Agent: _____

Phone #: _____

Policy #s: _____

Where policies are kept: _____

Health insurance

Company name: _____
Phone #: _____
Policy #s, group #s, etc: _____
Where card/information is kept: _____

Safe deposit box

Box #: _____
Location: _____
Where key is kept: _____

Real estate and how title is held

Securities

What they are: _____
Where they are kept: _____

Military service

Branch: _____
Dates: _____
Service #: _____
VA claim #: _____
Government insurance #: _____
Where papers, including discharge papers, are kept: _____

Date of birth and location of birth certificate

Place of birth

Burial plot

Name of cemetery: _____
Deed number: _____
Location: _____

Rabbi to be notified

Funeral home

Choice, if any: _____
Letter on file, if any: _____

Where charitable contributions should be made

Glossary of Hebrew Terms

Aliyah: The honor of being called to the Torah

Aninut: The period of time between death and the funeral

Aron: Coffin

Aveil/Aveilab: The Hebrew term for a mourner after the funeral. Before burial the term *onen/et* is used

Chesed Shel Emet: A true act of kindness performed without ulterior motive

Chevrá Kadisha: Literally, holy society; a group of individuals who prepare a body for burial

Geniza: Special burial chamber for damaged sacred books and ritual articles

Hinuch: Education

Kippab: Skullcap

Kittel: A white robe worn by some individuals on the High Holidays

K'riab: Tearing of a garment or ribbon as a sign of mourning

K'vod Hameit: Honoring the dead

K'vura: Burial

Meit/Meitab: Literally, the dead one. The Hebrew term for the deceased

Minyan: Prayer quorum, minimum of 10 Jews of *b'nei mitzvah* age or older

Mitzvah: Commandment

Nichum Aveilim: The *mitzvah* of consoling the mourners

Nivul Hameit: An act of desecration of the deceased

Onen/Onenet: Hebrew term for a survivor between the time of death and the funeral

S'eudat Havra'ah: Meal of comfort

Sb'ma: The central prayer in the Jewish prayer book

Shiva: Literally, seven; the name given to the first stage of mourning, which begins after the funeral

Shiva: Evening prayer services during the *Shiva* period, at which a prayer quorum is present

Sb'lichei Tzibbor: Service leaders

Sb'loshim: Literally, thirty; the second stage of mourning, which lasts for thirty days after the funeral

Shomer/Shomeret: Guardian; he/she who watches over the *meit/ab* until the funeral service

Tachrichim: Shrouds; the traditional burial garments

Tabara: Literally, cleansing; the ritual washing of the body, performed by the *Chevrá Kadisha*

Tallit: Prayer shawl

T'hellim: Psalms

Tzedaka: Charity

Vidui: Confessional prayer

Yabrzeit: The anniversary of the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar

Yizkor: The memorial service

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Preserving Tradition...Embracing Change

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