



# **JEWISH BURIAL AND MOURNING PRACTICES**



**TEMPLE SHOLOM**

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## **PREFACE**

Death, and its accompanying sense of loss, grief and anguish, poses an intense challenge to the spiritual and psychological state of mind of the bereaved. Jewish practices, rituals and traditions are grounded in the unshakable belief in the sanctity of human life, the dignity of the person, and the emotional and spiritual needs of the mourners.

When the death of a loved one is imminent or when a loved one dies, we are often in unfamiliar territory. We can be overwhelmed with emotions and unsure of what steps we need to take to take care of them, ourselves and our broader circle of family, friends and community. This guide is intended to help you as you “walk through the valley in the shadow of death.” This brief guide is by no means all-inclusive, and specific questions should be directed to our rabbis or cantor.

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

1. If the death occurs in a hospital, sign a release form so that the Chevra Kadisha will be permitted to transfer the deceased into their care. The Chevra Kadisha is the Jewish burial society; they work in partnership with Temple Sholom to handle all the arrangements and procedures involved in the burial. In short, the Chevra Kadisha will transport the deceased and prepare the deceased for burial.

The clergy of Temple Sholom are responsible for making sure the Temple Sholom Cemetery is ready and prepared for the funeral. The Temple Sholom clergy will also provide pastoral support for the family in planning the actual funeral ceremony and any subsequent *shiva minyanim* and/or memorial service. More details later in this brochure.

2. Make sure that a physician is available to sign the death certificate.
3. Call the Chevra Kadisha to let them know there has been a death at 604.733.2277. Be prepared to provide the funeral director with the Hebrew name of the deceased and their parents (if known) as well as the tallit the deceased used during their life, if they used one. If the deceased do not have their own tallit, one will be provided by the Chevra Kadisha.
4. Call Temple Sholom at 604.266.7190. If it is after office hours, follow the instructions on the voicemail to connect with the member of our *Klay Kodesh* (clergy) on call.
5. If a plot has not been pre-purchased at Temple Sholom or another cemetery in Vancouver, a plot will need to be purchased. The clergy can assist with the purchase of a plot at the Temple Sholom Cemetery. You may wish to purchase a plot for the surviving spouse at this time so that they are located together.

## **TIMING OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE**

It is most appropriate to bury the deceased without delay, taking legal and logistical considerations into account. This accords greater respect to the deceased as well as providing psychological benefit to the mourners, so they do not have to undergo the emotional pain of delay. Setting the time of the funeral requires consultation with the clergy, the Chevra Kadisha, and the cemetery. The Temple clergy will help coordinate the funeral time.

## **MEETING THE RABBI/CANTOR BEFORE THE FUNERAL**

After the death and pick up of the body by the Chevra Kadisha, it is customary to arrange a meeting with the Temple Sholom clergy to provide comfort to the family and to discuss the details of the funeral service. The meeting will take place at a family home or the synagogue, depending on the schedule of the clergy. Usually only close family and sometimes very close friends attend this meeting.

At the meeting with the clergy, please bring the following with you:

- The spelling of the deceased's Hebrew Name (a construct of their first and middle Hebrew names along with the Hebrew names of their parents). If unsure please bring a picture of the Hebrew section of the *ketubah* (Jewish Marriage contract) for the deceased, if they have one.
- Any biographical material that might have been written by or about the deceased, i.e. a tribute book created for a special anniversary, or a family history document.
- A picture of the deceased. This is not for publication; it is just to share with the clergy.

## **COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Temple will prepare an email announcement for the community with the name of the deceased, names of the surviving family members, and the time of the funeral and shiva minyanim.

This announcement will also be shared by the other synagogues in metro Vancouver. Please be prepared to provide this information in writing when you meet with the clergy.

## **BURIAL**

Based on the biblical verse, "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen.3:19) Jewish tradition has maintained that burial should be in the earth. Cremation traditionally has been rejected as a desecration of the body and is not permitted in the Temple Sholom cemetery. Questions regarding these matters should be addressed to the clergy.

## **FUNERAL SERVICE**

Typically the funeral service will take place at the cemetery. Directions to the Temple Sholom

Cemetery can be found on our website: [templesholom.ca](http://templesholom.ca). The clergy will arrive about fifteen minutes prior to the scheduled start of the ceremony, and the family should plan to arrive thirty minutes prior. Parking is not permitted in the cemetery itself (unless there are accessibility needs); please park along the street.

The service will be about thirty minutes, and the clergy will go over all the details of the service with you in the pre-ceremony meeting in the day(s) prior to the funeral itself. Often family members choose to speak, read a poem or deliver a eulogy during the service. Remarks should be written, concise, and respectful of the solemnity and sanctity of the ceremony.

Following the funeral service, all those present will escort the casket to the grave site for interment. Six pallbearers will be needed to assist with this mitzvah. They do not need to be Jewish and can be of any gender identity.

In total, the entire funeral service and interment will take about 45-60 minutes. Temple Sholom has the capability to stream the service from the cemetery ([templesholom.ca/video](http://templesholom.ca/video)) but remote participation (Zoom) is not possible.

## **AUTOPSIES**

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

## **EMBALMING**

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

## **ORGAN DONATION**

In Jewish law, organ donations are permitted to save a life and many authorities, including our Temple Sholom clergy, consider this act a mitzvah and encourage this practice. Check with the clergy for guidance.

## **CHEVRA KADISHA**

The *Chevra Kadisha* or Holy Society is an organization of Jewish men and women who see to it that the bodies of deceased Jews are prepared for burial according to Jewish tradition. The Vancouver Jewish community has one *Chevra Kadisha* composed of members of all the local synagogues.

The primary responsibilities of the *Chevra Kadisha* are the ritual cleansing of the body and subsequent dressing for burial. The *Chevra Kadisha* watches over the body of the deceased until burial.

## **TAHARAH**

When a newborn child enters the world, the baby is washed and purified. “As he came,” writes Ecclesiastes, “so should he go” (Ecclesiastes 5:14). Consequently, it is the traditional Jewish way of reverence for the deceased that when a person departs this world, they are washed and purified. People with special training and religious piety perform the *taharah*, the sacred rites of washing and purification, accompanied by the recitation of prayers and appropriate Psalms. In most cases, taharah is accompanied by dressing the deceased in *tachrichim*, burial garments also called shrouds. This service is provided by the Chevra Kadisha.

## **SHEMIRAH**

Traditionally, the deceased is not to be left alone. A *shomer*, watcher, reads Psalms and recites prayers on behalf of the dead. In this way the deceased is always attended. This service is provided by the *Chevra Kadisha*.

## **CASKET**

Jewish tradition mandates that ostentation should be avoided and that vanity and pride are out of place in the funeral. The Chevra Kadisha provides the same simple wooden casket for all Jewish burials in Vancouver.

## **PUBLIC VIEWING OF THE DECEASED**

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

## **FLOWERS AND TZEDAKAH**

Greater honour is paid to the deceased by donating to charities rather than displaying flowers. You can indicate to the temple if there is a desired Temple Fund or organization to which tzedakah should be directed. This information can be included in the announcement and program.

## **K'RIAH**

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

## **PLACING THE CASKET**

The final placement of the casket should be witnessed for psychological and religious reasons. Those present at the interment can place earth on the casket.

Jewish tradition considers this a *hesed shel emet*, an act of true loving kindness and the last kindness we can extend since there is no reciprocal favour we can expect from the deceased. It is the custom of Temple Sholom that the top of the casket is completely concealed by earth before the conclusion of the interment.

Upon leaving the cemetery, it is customary to wash hands at the fountain near the entrance gate to mark a transition between death and life.

### **MEAL OF CONSOLATION**

The mourners' first meal after returning from the cemetery, *seudat havra'ah*, is usually provided by friends, neighbours, or synagogue volunteers. The meal generally includes hard-boiled eggs, which symbolize the potentiality of renewal, or other round objects symbolizing the circle of life and continuity.

### **SHIVA**

The first, most intense stage of mourning is called *shiva*, the Hebrew word meaning "seven" and refers to a seven-day period of formalized mourning by the immediate family of the deceased. *Shiva* begins immediately after the burial as the mourners gather in the home of the deceased or the home of a mourner, cut off from the normal routine of their lives which death has interrupted. A *shiva* candle is lit when the mourners arrive home from the burial and is allowed to burn for the entire *shiva* period. Care should be taken to leave the candle in a safe location, far away from any flammables. No blessing is required for the lighting of the candle.

It is customary to gather for a service in the home of the family observing *shiva* to enable them to recite the words of *kaddish* in the presence of a *minyan* (ten Jewish adults). It is customary for mourners to sit on low chairs and to cover mirrors in their homes so that our focus is on our memories of them, not our physical presence. It is customary to have a washing basin and a pitcher of water outside the door of the home so that those returning from the cemetery can wash to make a ritual separation between the two places. The clergy of Temple Sholom as well as other knowledgeable members of the congregation can lead the *shiva minyan(im)* and supply *siddurim* (prayerbooks) and *kippot*.

The gathering of friends and family in a *shiva* home is an opportunity to provide support – both emotional and physical – during the first days of mourning. The mourners should not feel pressured to be a social host or hostess in their own home but allow the community to take care of them. The clergy should be consulted regarding the details of *shiva* practices.

### **END OF SHIVA**

At the end of *shiva* it is customary for the family to gather in the morning of the last day at the *shiva* home. They generally recite *kaddish* one more time, then it is customary to leave the

house as a group and to walk around the block/corner to ceremonially “get up from the house of mourning and re-enter the world”. Please contact the clergy if you would like our assistance with this ritual.

## **SHELOSHIM**

*Shloshim* (thirty) ends on the morning of the thirtieth day after the funeral. It marks the end of the traditional formal mourning period for all, except parents.

The period from the end of *shiva* to the end of *shloshim* is one of transition from deep bereavement to resuming life's usual routine. Again, the clergy should be consulted regarding the details of *shloshim* practices. At the end of *shloshim*, we encourage family and friends to come to synagogue to say *kaddish* as part of the shabbat service. Temple will contact you prior to this, offering an opportunity for a family member to share a few brief words about the deceased during the service before the recitation of *kaddish*. This is entirely optional and many have found it a comforting exercise.

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

## **HEADSTONE**

A headstone (*matzevah*) is traditionally placed within eleven months of the burial. At our cemetery, fee for the headstone was included in the fee associated with the burial. The Temple Sholom office will contact you after the end of *shloshim* to make arrangements for the wording of the headstone. At the Temple Sholom Cemetery, all headstones are the same in design and colour. They will contain the Hebrew and English names of the deceased, date of birth, date of death, and a brief epitaph. Consult with the clergy when considering what to inscribe on the headstone.

## **UNVEILING**

It generally takes six weeks from the time of ordering the headstone for it to be placed at the grave site. Once it is placed, a ceremony can be arranged with the clergy for the family and close friends to return to the grave site to dedicate the marker. This ceremony is typically called an unveiling and is led by the clergy. The ceremony is about 20 minutes and does not take place on Shabbat or holidays.

Traditionally, the unveiling is done around the first *yartzheit*, the anniversary of the death, and the availability for family to gather allows for flexibility on the timing.

## **Yahrzeit**

*Yahrzeit* is observed on each anniversary of the day of death according to the Hebrew calendar. A *yahrzeit* candle is lit at sunset on the evening before the *yahrzeit* date and burns for

24 hours. In addition, some mourners attend services and recite *Kaddish*, visit the cemetery, give *tzedakah* (charity) or engage in special acts of kindness to others. For clarification, consult the clergy.

## **YIZKOR**

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

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHT**

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

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

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## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES**

- I. Consult the British Columbia Bereavement Checklist [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/bereavement\\_checklist\\_web.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/birth-adoption-death-marriage-and-divorce/deaths/bereavement_checklist_web.pdf)
  - II. Mourning and Mitzvah, Brenner, Anne, (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2nd edition, 2001)
  - III. The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, Lamm, Maurice. (JonathanDavid, revised 2000)  
Saying Kaddish, Diamant, Anita, (Schocken, 1999) When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Kushner, Harold (Avon, reissue 1997) The Orphaned Adult, Angel, Mark, (Jason Aaronson, 1997)
  - IV. Living with Loss, Healing with Hope, Grollman, Earl (Beacon Press, 2001)
  - V. What Happens After I Die, Soncino, Rifat; Syme Daniel (UAHC, 1990)
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## **IMPORTANT NUMBERS**

Temple Sholom office: 604.266.7190 / info@templesholom.ca  
7190 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC, V6P 3Z9

Temple Sholom Cemetery address: 14965 – 28th Ave., White Rock, BC

Chevra Kadisha: 604.733.2277 / cemeteryboard.com/the-chevra-kadisha

Star Chauffeured Services (Limousine): 604.685.5600 / www.starlimousine.com