

Avelut Mourning

Upon leaving the gravesite the immediate family commences the seven-day Shiva period of mourning. They light the Shiva candle and are served the *Seudat Havra'a*, the traditional meal of condolence; meals are usually prepared for the family during Shiva to allow them to focus on mourning. Mourning continues during Shloshim, with mourners reciting the Kaddish for a total of thirty days. The giving of tzedakah, charity in memory of a loved one, is also traditional.

At the conclusion of Shloshim, a representative of Mount Sinai will contact the family to assist in creating a memorial tablet, a *matzevah*, as a permanent symbol of remembrance. Mount Sinai will also assist in arrangements for the unveiling ceremony to dedicate the tablet.

Yahrzeit, the Hebrew anniversary of the death of a loved one, is observed each year; a calendar of Yahrzeit dates is available from Mount Sinai. Additionally, mourners recite Yizkor prayers of remembrance and visit gravesites as part of Mount Sinai Kever Avot Memorial Services held on the Sunday between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

These longstanding rituals and traditions enable the bereaved to acknowledge their loss and receive the love, guidance and support of their community.

A Glossary of Traditional Terms

Aninut: Time period from death to burial.

Avelut: Hebrew for mourning.

Aron: Casket carrying the physical remains.

Eil Malei Rachamim: The memorial prayer recited at the funeral service, on visiting a gravesite, and during Yizkor services.

Hesped: Eulogy of tribute to the deceased.

Chevera Kadisha: A burial society, a dedicated group of men or women who wash and clothe the deceased in keeping with Jewish tradition.

K'riah: Tear in a garment of a mourner, or in its place a ritual ribbon, worn as a symbol of the rending of the heart at a loss.

K'vod Hamet: Respect for the deceased.

Kaddish: Prayer in praise of the Eternal, recited for 11 months for parents and 30 days for all others.

Kever Avot: Mount Sinai Memorial Service held at the traditional time to visit the graves of loved ones, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Levaya: Hebrew for the funeral service.

Seudat Havra'a: Meal of condolence served to mourners, traditionally including eggs as a symbol of the cycle of life.

Shiva: The intense seven-day mourning period which begins after burial.

Shiva Candle: Candle to be lit upon return from the cemetery which burns for the seven day mourning period.

Shloshim: A less intense thirty-day period of mourning including the seven days of Shiva, and ending in full integration of mourners back into society.

Shmirah: Attending to the deceased's body so that it is never alone from death to burial.

Shomer: Person "guarding" the body who recites Psalms to honor the deceased.

Tachrichim: White linen shroud worn by the deceased to indicate purity.

Tahara: Ritual washing of the deceased by a burial society or Jewish mortuary. Psalms are recited as part of this ritual.

Tzedakah: Charitable acts in memory of the deceased.

Yahrzeit: The Hebrew anniversary of the death on which a memorial candle is lit.

Yizkor: Memorial prayers recited on Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot and Yom Kippur at a synagogue or temple service.

For general information please contact us at (800) 600-0076 or visit our website: www.mountsinaiarks.org.

For immediate assistance please contact Mount Sinai Memorial Parks and Mortuaries at (800) 600-0076.

The Mount Sinai Guide to Traditional Jewish Funeral Practices



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*Dedicated to the entire Jewish community
as a service of Sinai Temple of Los Angeles*

Guiding Principles

When a loved one dies, Jewish tradition suggests a course of action shaped by one fundamental insight: human beings are sacred. The body is the vessel in which the spark of divinity resides. When a soul departs, the laws and customs of Jewish burial are dictated by *k'vod hamet*, honoring the deceased, with rituals of washing, dressing, caring for and guarding the body. These rituals lead up to the funeral itself and are sacred rites that invest, with dignity and simplicity, a profound respect for the deceased. These historic, fundamental principles find expression in every aspect of Mount Sinai's service.

Traditional Jewish funerals are marked by simplicity: family and visitors reflect a restraint in both dress and behavior befitting the solemn emotions of a loss. Traditional practice avoids both embalming and public viewing, and interment takes place as soon as possible after death, while still providing time for distant relatives to arrive.

Ritual commandments for the preparation and burial of the body are highly valued mitzvot, good deeds. Members of the Mount Sinai staff and traditional burial societies, in Hebrew called *chevra kadisha*, which may be members of synagogue-based groups, take responsibility for the ritual bathing and dressing of the deceased. Mount Sinai performs the service and interment.

Aninut Between Death and Burial

During this time, when a family is in a fragile state, tradition carries them forward. The closest relatives: spouse, parents, children and siblings, attend to the funeral and the burial since they are exempt from most other religious obligations.

Tahara Preparation

This ritual preparation, or purification, is a centuries' old detailed procedure performed by a *chevra kadisha*, a holy society. Psalms and prayers are recited as the body is bathed in warm water and purified for its return to the Eternal.

In keeping with traditional standards of modesty, *tahara* is performed by men for men, by women for women. *Tahara* is an optional service that Mount Sinai can make available to families.

Tachrichim Burial Garments

The Rabbis of the Talmud observed differences between burial rituals for rich and poor, and to preserve equality evolved the two thousand-year-old tradition of using *tachrichim*, simple white linen shrouds, as burial garments. Over time, the use of burial garments has expanded to allow for the deceased to be buried in clothing.

Shmirah Guardianship

This practice of *Shmirah*, or guardianship highlights the respect and caring that Jewish tradition accords the individual. A Shomer is a guardian who stays with the deceased at all times prior to burial, reciting Psalms chosen from the Book of Psalms, or readings from the Book of Lamentations, and engages in other study. A family member, friend, fellow congregant, or an individual designated by Mount Sinai may serve as Shomer.

Aron The Casket

The inner holiness of the individual finds outer expression in the casket. The biblical teaching, "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19), calls for the use of caskets made entirely of wood.

Wood is a product of the earth and as a part of nature promotes the quick and natural return of the body to the earth. Caskets made of pine, mahogany, walnut, cherry and other woods lend warmth, beauty and a sense of timelessness.

Caskets with appropriate Jewish symbols, such as a Star of David, are available; family members may place mementos of loved ones within. Earth from Jerusalem placed under the head symbolizes our shared longing to dwell in Israel.

Levaya The Funeral Service

A traditional Jewish funeral service is brief and simple, providing comfort by creating time and space for the mourners and the community to recall memories of the deceased and to express their sorrow. The service may be held in a chapel at the memorial park, in the synagogue, or at the gravesite.

The basic elements of a traditional service include the chanting of Psalms and the recitation of a *hesped*, a eulogy honoring the deceased, followed by the Eil Malei Rachamim prayer. Select family members and friends may act as pallbearers to carry the casket, with others following.

At the end of the service, typically at the gravesite, mourners recite the Kaddish. Those grieving for a spouse, parent, child or sibling also participate in the rite of *k'riah*. The torn clothing, and/or a *k'riah* ribbon, symbolize that a part of their souls has been torn from them and is worn during the mourning period. It is traditional for everyone to wash their hands when leaving the cemetery and again prior to entering the house of mourning.

