

Rachamim

**A Guide to Jewish Practices
on Illness, Death and Mourning**



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This guide is an edited and revised edition of the Guide, written by Rabbi Richard A. Block, 1996, Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, CA, with permission of Rabbi Janet Marder.

Rabbi Debbie Israel also greatly expanded the Guide, adding new information, especially policies that reflect the practices of Congregation Emeth.

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Foreword

Rabbi Alvin Fine's beautiful and inspiring prayer in *Gates of Repentance* reminds us that:

*"Birth is a beginning and death a destination
And life is a journey...
A sacred pilgrimage to live everlasting."*

Between the ages of 24 to 30, I experienced the death of my oldest brother by suicide, the deaths of premature newborn twins, the death of my 60 year old mother, and two miscarriages. It was too much for my young heart to handle, and I simply didn't know how to mourn so many losses. So I attempted to bury my sorrow and grief, noticing it resurfaced at unexpected and unwanted times.

About 13 years later, my father died. I was more mature emotionally, and better able to face the enormity of my losses. So during the year following my father's death, I followed as many of the traditional Jewish mourning rituals as I could. I went to services almost every day, twice a day, throughout the entire year, saying the *Kaddish Yatom*, the prayer for mourners. I avoided entertainment and music. I grieved. And I ended the year feeling more at peace than I had in a long time. During that year, I learned that our ancient Sages were brilliant psychologists, knowing instinctively what humans need to fully experience our losses and to heal from them.

This Guide has been prepared to help our members and your loved ones understand Jewish practices with respect to death, funerals and mourning. The Guide is intended for reading well in advance of death, when the mind is clear and the heart is not heavy. Read it, share your feelings with dear ones and discuss the issues that should be faced during life. This guide also will prove useful when death of a loved one approaches or occurs. Keep it where you will have ready access to it in time of need.

Some of the traditions in this Guide will resonate with you, and some will not. Reform Judaism, with its special sensitivity to individual needs and preferences, empowers us to fashion a response to death that is personally meaningful as well as Jewishly authentic. There is no single correct way. The decisions are yours.

Your Rabbi is ready to assist with the many aspects of preparing for and coping with death. Please contact me with questions and concerns. Notify me when a death is imminent or has occurred. I will respond as quickly as possible with comfort, counsel and the assistance you may need in making necessary arrangements. I will do whatever I can to help you and, ultimately, to bring you closer to the Source of life, in whose unity no one is alone and every life finds purpose.

Shalom uv'racha - in peace and blessing,

Rabbi Debbie Israel

Introduction

The Jewish approach to death and mourning is guided by four basic principles:

1. Recognition of the reality of death
2. Moderation in grief
3. Respect for the dead
4. Equality in death

In accordance with these principles, laws, customs and practices of Judaism have developed. They reflect, in turn, the wisdom and the spiritual and psychological insights of generations of Jewish scholars and lay people. The recommendations and background provided here are a tribute to those who prepared the way for us.

Before Death Comes

Financial Information

To help your heirs and your attorney, make a complete list of all financial assets to include:

1. Location and account numbers of all bank accounts
2. All life insurance policies including numbers and contact information for insurance agent
3. All annuities including policy numbers and contact information.
4. All credit cards with account numbers and contact phone numbers
5. All loans including account numbers and contact phone numbers
6. All investments, stocks, mutual funds, etc., and contact information for each.

Also list out all safety deposit boxes, location and location of keys. Be sure that your spouse, children or heirs are on the list to access them.

Give your spouse and/or children or heirs a copy of this information. A copy should also be at your attorney's office and in your safety deposit box.

Wills

Every adult should have a will, a legal document disposing of one's material assets and addressing property and guardianship issues. A will also can specify your wishes concerning funeral arrangements and organ donations. However, since a will is typically not consulted until after the funeral, record your wishes separately and make them known to those who will be responsible for handling the arrangements at the time of your death. One option is to fill out the family information forms at the end of this guide. Discuss them with your attorney and leave a copy with him or her as well as a copy in your safety deposit box.

Living Will

Jewish tradition affirms the sanctity of life and encourages strenuous efforts to preserve life. It forbids both euthanasia and "assisted suicide," the active taking of life of the terminally ill. However, it affirms that when the attending physicians declare that there is no realistic hope for a patient and death is certain, impediments to death must not be created or should be removed, allowing a patient to die in dignity and peace. Thus, Judaism allows the withholding of treatment when its effect is to delay an impending death rather than to prolong life. It also allows the administration of pain relief medication to a patient with a terminal disease, even if the dosage required to control pain endangers the life of the patient.

Many people do not want to artificially prolong their life in circumstances such as: when they have an incurable and irreversible condition and death is near; when they are in an irreversible coma; or when they exhibit a persistent absence of normal mental or physical functions and are no longer able to make decisions regarding medical treatment. The California Natural Death Act allows a voluntary declaration to that effect to be made in writing by those of sound mind. In addition, the California Probate Code provides for a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Decisions, a document that designates another person to act as your agent if you become incapable of giving informed consent to health care decisions. These documents can guide your loved ones to act in accordance with your values and desires. Please consult your legal advisor.

You should give a copy of the **Advanced Directives – Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST)** – instructions about specific treatments to your primary care physician. You can receive this form from your physician, or go to:

http://www.capolst.org/documents/CAPOLSTform2011v13web_005.pdf

Ethical Will

In contrast to a last will and testament, which disposes of things with material value, an ethical will is a statement to your survivors recording the beliefs and values you wish to perpetuate. It is a mitzvah to prepare an ethical will for the moral guidance of your family, especially for one's children and grandchildren. Preparing such a will is neither a

complicated nor technical process. It can be as simple as writing a letter to those you love, expressing your feelings, advice and hopes for the future, as well as your burial requests and intentions. As with other wills, it is advisable to prepare an ethical will when you are strong and healthy. All wills should be left in a safe place that is known to the family. A copy of your Ethical Will could be left in the Rabbi's confidential files, which will be available to future Congregation Emeth Rabbis. A sample form of Personal Wishes Upon Death is included in the Appendix of this Guide. The form not only records your wishes for burial and mourning, but also has space for personal messages and your ethical will.

Organ Donation

Judaism permits and Reform Judaism encourages organ donation in the hope of saving the life or significantly improving the quality of life of another person or persons. The mitzvah of *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life, takes precedence over virtually all other considerations. Many people who die each year could be saved if a donated organ was available for transplantation. If you wish to donate your organs you should so inform family members, especially those who will be responsible for making funeral arrangements as well as health care decisions for you, should you be unable to do so. The Department of Motor Vehicles provides an organ donation card to be signed and carried in your wallet with your driver's license to make your wishes known to those who would care for you in the event of an accident. Jewish tradition disallows donation of the body to science, but Reform Judaism permits this practice, provided that the body will be treated with respect and the remains are interred when the study is completed. It is wise to discuss your wishes with family members and the Rabbi.

Autopsy

Reform Judaism permits autopsies when legally required or so long as they are performed for the purpose of increasing medical knowledge to help others live. If the deceased has forbidden an autopsy, these instructions should be honored unless an epidemic threatens or they are contrary to law.

Burial, Cremation and Embalming

Jewish tradition prescribes burial as the sole acceptable manner of disposition of the body, in keeping with the belief that "the soul returns to God, its maker; the body returns to the earth from which it came." Tradition regards cremation as an unnatural hastening, and embalming as an unnatural retarding, of the body's reintegration with the natural world. In the modern period, cremation has also become associated with the destruction of Jewish bodies during the Holocaust.

Burial remains the practice of a large majority of Jews, including Congregation Emeth members and their families. Reform practice permits cremation when it has been insisted upon by the deceased. A memorial service can be held in lieu of a funeral and it normally takes place after the cremation has been completed. Ashes may be interred in a cemetery or placed in a mausoleum, which is preferable to scattering as it provides survivors with a place where they can visit and feel a special closeness to their loved one.

Cemetery Arrangements

One of the first things any newly established Jewish community does is provide for a Jewish cemetery, thus consecrating the ground for sacred purposes and undertaking to provide perpetual care to the graves of those buried there. This goes back to the patriarch, Abraham, who purchased a burial place for Sarah and his family in ancient times.

It is prudent to make cemetery arrangements well in advance of the time of death in order to spare loved ones this burden at a most difficult time. Our congregation maintains a Jewish section in Gavilan Memorial Park in Gilroy. Habing Funeral Home, which maintains the cemetery, is familiar with Jewish burial practices. The Habing office can be reached at 408-847-4040. Rabbi Israel officiates only at Jewish and non-sectarian cemeteries. Congregation Emeth's Cemetery Guidelines, approved by the Ritual Committee and the Board of Directors follow.

Cemetery Guidelines

Congregation Emeth's Ritual Committee prepared guidelines for the Jewish section of Gavilan Hills Memorial Park Cemetery, which were approved by the Board of Directors.

This policy recognizes that although the cemetery is a Jewish community cemetery, Congregation Emeth has the responsibility of guiding the religious aspect of the cemetery. The guidelines can be found in the Appendix Section of this Guide.

In Time of Illness

Visiting the sick

One of the acts that Jewish tradition declares to be both an obligation and a deed whose reward is immeasurable is *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick. Those with a life-threatening illness have a special need and desire for the support of loved ones and friends. A smile, a kindly touch, a listening ear, caring words and one's physical presence can ease suffering and bring peace. The Rabbi should be informed of the serious illness of a member of the congregation.

Prayers in time of illness

People who are ill may wish to recite special prayers, and others may wish to do so on their behalf. Samples of appropriate prayers are included in the back of this Guide, including the *Shema* or the 23rd Psalm. There is no particular prayer that is called for; the words of one's own heart directed to God are often the most beautiful and appropriate of all.

Vidui / Confessional Prayer

A long-standing practice of Judaism is a confessional prayer called *vidui*, recited by or for one who is critically ill, that concludes with the *Shema*. This is the prayer's most significant portion. For centuries, Jews have wanted this to be their last words. Those present when death is imminent may help the dying person say these hallowed words or recite them on that person's behalf. The *Vidui* is included in the back of this Guide.

The purpose of the prayer is to enable the dying to reconcile themselves with God by acknowledging and asking forgiveness for past failings. The opportunity should also be taken, if at all possible, to turn to family members and friends with words of forgiveness, understanding and reconciliation.

The Time of Death to the Funeral Service

Prayers after the death of a loved one

When one has been present at a death or is informed of a death, the following prayer is customary, along with such other prayers as the heart may prompt:

Barukh Atah Adonai, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam, Dayan HaEmet.

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, Sovereign of the Universe, the true Judge.

Keriah / Tearing a Garment

According to tradition, when one learns of the death of a close family member, one tears the garment one is wearing to symbolize grief. Most Reform Jews no longer follow this custom. Some choose to wear a black mourner's ribbon, instead. The Rabbi will give you the black ribbon just before the funeral service begins.

Notifying Family Members

It is a mitzvah to notify all members of the family when a death has occurred, even those who are estranged. If possible, this is a precious opportunity to heal wounds by bringing family members together.

Visiting the Bereaved Prior to the Funeral

Unless you are a very close friend or relative, it is best to postpone a visit to the home of the bereaved until after the funeral. Preparations must be made and time taken to begin coping with the loss. Exceptions exist, of course, which are guided by common sense, such as bringing food to the family.

Activity by the Bereaved

During the period before the burial, the bereaved do not engage in business or other activities except those required for the funeral or emergencies. Experiencing this most intense stage of mourning exempts them from all other ritual obligations.

The Body

The body is treated with great respect as the vessel that once contained the soul. By tradition, the body is not left unattended before burial. In some communities, a guard (*shomer*) sits in attendance and reads Psalms, with candles burning to symbolize the soul's eternal flame. Most Reform Jews, however, tend to be satisfied with the care of the undertaking establishment. Pre-funeral visitation at the funeral home is not in keeping with Jewish custom.

Tradition calls for the body to be ritually washed, a cleansing called *taharah*, purification, before the body is laid in the earth. Habing Funeral Home welcomes the Chevre Kadisha Society, the group who performs this service. The body is then traditionally dressed in plain white, inexpensive shrouds, emphasizing the principle of equality in death. Some bury the deceased with a *kippah* and a *tallit* with the *tzitzit* cut off as a symbolic recognition of death. Another practice some follow is to place a small sackful of earth from the land of Israel in the coffin (provided by the Chevre Kadisha Society if they are used). This emphasizes the attachment of our people to the Holy Land, where it was believed the dead would come back to life in the time of the messiah.

The San Jose Chevre Kadisha's phone number is 408-264-3138. No "fee" is charged however donations are appropriate and encouraged.

Death or Burial Abroad

Consult your undertaker. Burial in Israel can be arranged through Sinai Memorial Chapel. Arranging to transport the body back to the United States sometimes requires the intervention of the State Department. When doing so becomes extremely difficult, impossible or prohibitively expensive, some families choose to have the body buried abroad and hold a memorial service at home.

Making Funeral Arrangements

Consulting the Rabbi

When death is imminent or when it occurs, the Rabbi should be informed as soon as possible. The Rabbi will help you and make every possible effort to accommodate your needs. If you wish the Rabbi to be involved in the funeral or memorial service it is essential to consult the Rabbi before arrangements have been completed. No announcement of the day or time of the service(s) should be made before consulting the Rabbi. The Rabbi is available for counsel, advice and help.

Because the Rabbi's primary obligation is to members of the congregational family, our clergy is available to assist non-members and family members outside of the household only as the schedule permits. When that is impossible, efforts will be made to identify another clergy to officiate.

No fee is charged for the Rabbi's services for congregational members. However, one usually offers a donation to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund or to the Congregation.

Cemetery

If you have not already done so, cemetery arrangements must be made at the time of death. Instructions for doing so are found above.

Funeral Director / *Chevra Kadisha*

At the time of death, family members must contact the funeral home they have chosen. The funeral home will perform such tasks as removing the body of the deceased, obtaining the death certificate, placing obituary notices, and preparing the body for burial. Typically, it is necessary to meet the funeral director at the funeral home to select a casket and other services and provide for payment if this has not been arranged in advance. The Chevra Kadisha Society of San Jose (408-264-3138) services South County.

Financial Considerations

Those with limited means should avail themselves of the services of Sinai Memorial Chapel (415-921-3636). As a Jewish community institution, they also can guide you on other funeral-related assistance.

The Coffin

The Jewish value of equality in death calls for the avoidance of ostentation and excessive expense in making final arrangements. An elaborate coffin is not required; on the contrary, Jewish tradition discourages this. It prescribes, instead, a simple, all wood casket.

Floral displays

These are discouraged by Jewish tradition, which favors *tzedakah*, a charitable contribution to assist the living. Flowers soon fade and wither, but an act of lovingkindness can have a profound and lasting effect.

Time and Place of the Services

Jewish tradition advocates that burial takes place as soon as possible, being mindful of travel arrangements for out-of-town mourners. Generally this means no later than the second or third day after death occurs. Funerals never are held on the Sabbath or Jewish festivals and are conducted only during daylight hours.

The Talmud indicates that the funeral service was once held in the home of the deceased or at the cemetery. In modern times, services generally are held at a synagogue or cemetery. When the deceased is a member of Congregation Emeth, the service may be held at the synagogue or graveside.

Children at Funerals

Children are more aware of death than we realize, though their understanding of death evolves as they get older. Between the ages of 5 and 9 children generally are able to understand the meaning of physical death and by the time they are 9 or 10, they often have a realistic concept of the finality of death. The ability of children to understand death varies with age, maturity and intelligence, but regardless of the

variables, children cannot be shielded from death or protected from its reality.

Death is a crisis that should be shared by all members of the family. The needs of children sometimes are overlooked by grieving adults. When death is discussed openly with their children, parents enable them to develop a concept of death in a healthy manner. Attendance at the funeral can aid children in understanding the finality of death and in dispelling greater fears and fantasies that may arise when they are kept away. If they are old enough to attend a synagogue service and comprehend a good part of what is taking place, they should be allowed to attend a religious ceremony to say goodbye to a significant person in their lives. Children should not be forced to attend. If apprehensive children choose to remain at home they should be allowed to do so. Parents may visit the cemetery with them at another time. If children are attending the funeral, explain to them what will take place and make them aware that people may be crying. For more extensive advice on this subject you may obtain a copy of the pamphlet, *Talking to Children About Death*, by Dr. Nechama Liss-Levinson from the Rabbi, who also is available to discuss this matter with you and offer advice.

Levayah – Funeral (Literally, “accompanying”)

The Funeral/Memorial Service and Burial/Interment

The Rabbi normally officiates at the service. The service includes prayers, psalms and a eulogy in memory of the deceased. Participation by family members and/or others and the inclusion of additional readings or music should be discussed with the Rabbi. If individuals want to eulogize the deceased, they should be encouraged to limit their remarks to a few minutes, focusing on a specific memory or attribute.

At the conclusion of the service, it is customary for those in attendance to remain in their places until members of the family have left. Jewish tradition requires that the casket remain closed throughout as an expression of respect for the dead.

If the bereaved wish to view the body a last time, they should arrange to do so prior to the funeral service, however this is not in keeping with Jewish tradition. If the Chevre Kadisha Society is used, the casket may not be opened after they have concluded preparing the body for burial.

When requested by the family, a cantor or cantorial soloist may be asked to participate. The Rabbi can help you find a soloist if one is desired, however the fee is a private arrangement between the family and the soloist.

The Burial Service/Interment

At the cemetery, the casket is carried to the grave either by pallbearers selected by the family, or the funeral director and cemetery personnel. Following the recitation of prayers, it is customary for the casket to be lowered. Family members and friends then are invited to place a shovelful or handful of earth in the grave. Those who are not comfortable participating in this portion of the ritual need not do so or it may be omitted entirely at family's request. Tradition considers participation in the burial to be one of the highest and most selfless *mitzvot* (commandments) because it is an act of kindness that cannot be repaid. The sound of earth falling on the casket can be jarring, but it helps mourners accept the reality of death and, thus, facilitates the healing process. After earth has been placed in the grave, the Mourners' Kaddish is recited and the service is concluded.

Burial Vaults or Liners

Neither is prescribed by Jewish tradition and they are not necessary, but are acceptable where required by civil law or cemetery rules.

After the Funeral and Interment

The Meal of Consolation

Following the interment, the mourners typically return to the home of the deceased or the home of another family member. Those who attended the funeral or burial service usually are invited to join them, especially if they are relatives and/or out of town guests. Customarily, food and beverages are set out by friends of the bereaved so that they may take nourishment after a physically and emotionally exhausting experience. Several foods are served traditionally, including hard-boiled eggs, which symbolize the Jewish affirmation of life, even in the aftermath of death. See Congregation Emeth's Rachamim Guidelines at the end of this Guide for further information.

Other Customs upon Returning from the Cemetery

Habing Funeral Home provides a pitcher of water and paper towels at the graveside to be used as one is leaving the cemetery. Some choose to follow the custom of having a container of water and a towel outside the door of the house of mourning. This is meant to be a spiritual cleansing, separating the pure (living) from the dead.

Mourning Observances

After Burial

After burial or cremation, attention shifts from paying appropriate respect to the deceased to easing the pain of the living. Jewish traditions and practices define periods of mourning and ways for the bereaved to gradually reenter the flow of life.

Who is a mourner?

Judaism recognizes that there is a difference between formal rites of mourning and the very personal grief that cannot be regulated. Reform practice recognizes that one may grieve for any dear person, but it is a religious duty to observe the practices of mourning for a parent, spouse, sibling or child. Those under the age of 13 need not observe the mourning customs. Jewish tradition does not call for mourning observances for an infant less than 30 days old, but Reform Judaism recognizes the devastating character of such a loss by providing for mourning rituals in such cases.

Shiva / Seven days of mourning

In Hebrew, the word *shiva* comes from the word that means seven. When used in connection with mourning it connotes the seven-day period that commences the day of the funeral. During the *shiva* period, mourners customarily refrain from all ordinary activities and occupations and remain at home, except on Shabbat, festivals and the High Holy days. At those times, they attend synagogue services to recite the *Kaddish Yatom*, Mourners' Kaddish, following the reading of the deceased's name which is included in the congregation's memorial list. *Shiva* provides an opportunity for the mourner to begin working through grief and to be comforted while interacting with loved ones and friends.

As a mourner, one wears the black ribbon every day of *shiva* except for Shabbat and holidays. On Shabbat public displays of mourning are suspended, although grieving of course continues. After Shabbat, the black ribbon is put on again until the week of *shiva* concludes.

On the seventh day, around noon, it is customary to go outside, preferably to take a walk around the block, to designate the end of the *shiva* period.

The Memorial Candle

Upon returning home from the memorial service or interment, a seven-day memorial candle, usually provided by the funeral home or the Rabbi, is lit at the home of the bereaved. It should be lit by a mourner as a symbol of the light brought to friends and loved ones during the deceased's life. It recalls the biblical teaching, "The human spirit is the light of the Eternal."

Home Services

Jewish tradition prescribes daily services at home (except for Shabbat and holidays) during the *shiva* period. When mourners are unable to go out to the community, the community comes to them. Members of our congregation follow a variety of practices in this regard. Most have at least one service in the evening on the day of the interment. Some hold services for three days. A few continue to the end of *shiva*. These services are available upon request and are conducted by the Rabbi or by a knowledgeable member of the congregation. Congregation Emeth's Rachamim and Ritual Committees can help arrange for the attendance of supportive members of the congregation to help constitute a *minyan* (10 Jews over the age of 13). Please speak to the Rabbi for assistance in this regard.

Condolence Calls

Friends and members of the Congregation are encouraged to visit the home of the bereaved following the burial and during the *shiva* period. It also is a kindness to visit or call in the weeks and months after *shiva* when the press of family and friends begins to give way to loneliness and when the full impact of the loss is felt. People often are not sure how to conduct themselves during such a visit. Here are some suggestions:

You may not be certain what to say. Jewish tradition encourages visitors to remain silent and wait until the mourner speaks first. There are no words to take away grief. Your presence and acceptance is often more important than advice.

Be willing to simply sit in silence, perhaps holding the mourner's hand, sharing a smile, communicating without words that you care and are concerned.

Allow mourners the opportunity to talk about and express their feelings of loss and the pain of separation from a loved one. Do not attempt to change the subject or divert them from painful, angry or guilty thoughts. If they wish to cry, allow them to do so without discouragement. Tears are not a sign of weakness; they are a healthy and appropriate outlet for grief.

Listen. Ask questions that will allow the mourner to talk with you about their grief and their memories of the deceased. *Shiva* is an ideal time for reminiscing and reflecting on the life of the person who has died. Do not hesitate to talk about the deceased. Share your own stories and recollections. Memories are a precious gift to mourners.

Share your feelings. The paradox of grief is that the very person who would provide comfort in a time of emotional distress is the one who has died. The person who would hug, hold and console the mourner is no longer available to do so. If you have a close relationship with the bereaved, do not hesitate to hold, hug or touch them as you would want them to do were the situation reversed.

Show your acceptance. Grief often makes people feel as if they are losing their minds. Mourners may say and do things that are unusual for them. If you can accept them without passing judgment, you will communicate your unconditional support.

Offer help. Grief can make daily living a burden. During and following *shiva*, you can assist by providing meals, organizing a *minyan*, carpooling, shopping, running errands or helping the mourner obtain legal advice. Help them, but allow them to remain in charge of their own lives.

Be patient. Grief is a process of adapting to change rather than "recovering." Be patient in allowing people to grieve and return to life after *shiva*. It often takes a year or even more for a mourner to feel "normal" again. It may be difficult to be in the company of a person in acute emotional pain. Your patience and compassion will make a difference in their healing process.

After *Shiva*

Sh'loshim – 30 Days

After *shiva*, the bereaved resume normal occupations and family activities. During *sh'loshim*, the thirty-day period that commences on the day of the funeral, it is customary to refrain from public entertainment and parties with music. During this time, mourners attend such events as a family wedding or bar or bat mitzvah ceremony but it is customarily refrain from dancing and exuberant celebration. If you have a family *simcha* (celebration) planned, please consult the Rabbi for guidance.

Kaddish

Jewish tradition establishes one year as the official period of mourning for a parent (thirty days for other close relatives) and calls for daily recitation of the *kaddish* prayer in memory of the deceased at a public worship service attended by a minyan. In our congregation, it is more customary for mourners to attend weekly Shabbat services as often as possible for up to a year, to recite *kaddish* with the congregation. Some find it comforting to recite *kaddish* privately when they are unable to attend services at the synagogue.

Yizkor

On Yom Kippur afternoon a *Yizkor* service is held at the synagogue. This service includes traditional prayers in memory of loved ones. As in the case of the anniversary of death, it is a mitzvah to light a memorial candle at home prior to sundown on eve of each of the four holidays (Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot).

Cemetery Visits

Customarily, one refrains from visiting the cemetery in the month following the funeral in order to spare the bereaved the pain of such a visit. However, it should not be considered an inflexible rule. After the first 30 days, visitation is unrestricted, but it is not customary to visit on Shabbat or Jewish holidays. The month prior to the High Holy days is a common and appropriate season for such visits. The tradition of placing a small stone on the grave marker harkens back to the time when it

was a family responsibility to maintain loved one's graves. Today, it testifies that the grave has been visited by those who remember the person buried there.

Unveiling/Dedication of the Grave Marker

Jewish tradition permits the dedication of a headstone or grave marker any time after the end of *sh'loshim*. However, it is customary to wait approximately 11 months after the death to hold the "unveiling" ceremony, which is so named because the cover is removed from the marker at that time. The ceremony, which is brief and without an eulogy, may take place any day except Shabbat or a Jewish holiday and may be conducted by a rabbi, cantor or a knowledgeable lay person. It often takes at least a year to adjust to a loss and to face the future with optimism and energy. Should you need assistance, the Rabbi can help you choose the wording for the grave marker, which should be ordered about two months before the date of the unveiling ceremony. The cemetery should be notified of the date and time of the unveiling to ensure that the gates are open, that the tombstone or marker is in place and that another funeral or unveiling is not scheduled in the immediate vicinity of the grave at that time. The cemetery can refer you to a reputable monument company that will prepare the headstone or marker to your specifications. It is contrary to Jewish tradition to include a portrait of the deceased on the marker.

Yahrzeit

It is customary to observe the *yahrzeit* or anniversary of the death of a loved one by attending services at the synagogue and reciting the mourners' *kaddish*, and by lighting a small 24-hour *yahrzeit* candle at home at or near sundown on the evening of the anniversary of the day of death.

These candles can be obtained at Congregation Emeth's Gift Shop and most grocery stores. Our congregation's custom is to read the name members' loved ones at the Shabbat services prior closest to the date of death on the Hebrew calendar. If you notify the congregation's office of the date of death, you will be notified each year of the Shabbat when the name will be read. If you cannot be present on at that service, please let us know and we will gladly read the name on a nearby date when you can attend. If you prefer to acknowledge the *yahrzeit* on the Shabbat closest to the English date, please notify the administrator during the preceding month and the name will be read when requested.

It is also traditional to give *tzedakah* at the time of the *yarhzeit* and whenever *Yizkor* is recited to honor the memory of our loved ones.

Memorial Plaque

Congregation Emeth has a *Yahrzeit* Board on a wall in the sanctuary where the names of loved ones are engraved on plaques, with lights to the sides of the plaques. Annually, during the Hebrew month of the deceased's date of death, the lights on either side of the plaque are lit. The entire board also is lit during Yom Kippur, and whenever there is a *Yizkor* service. A copy of the form for ordering plaques is included in the Appendix. If you prefer the plaque be lit during the English month, please notify the Ritual chair during the preceding month.

Resources

Phone Numbers:

Congregation Emeth: 408-778-8200

Emergency Number for Rabbi Debbie Israel: 408-348-5339

San Jose Jewish Burial Society/ Chevra Kadish: 408-264-3138

Non-sectarian Funeral Home That Understands Jewish Burial Customs:

Habing Family Funeral Home

129 4th Street, Gilroy CA 95020

408-847-4040

Cemeteries:

Gavilan Hills Memorial Park, Jewish section

1000 First Street, Gilroy CA 95020

Office: 408-847-4040

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Acknowledgments

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We would also like to acknowledge the following: "How to Explain Death To Children" by Rabbi Earl A. Grollman and "Funeral Etiquette," prepared and published by The Jewish Funeral Directors of America, Inc.

Appendix

Prayers in Time of Illness

People who are ill may wish to recite special prayers, and others may wish to do so on their behalf. A sample of appropriate prayers:

Shema

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.

Baruch shem kavod malchuto, l'olam va-ed.

Hear Oh Israel, God is our God, God is One.

Blessed is God's glorious majesty forever and ever.

Moses' simple prayer to God on behalf of his sister, Miriam

El nah, refah na la, El nah, refah na la, El nah refah na la

Please God, heal her/him (repeated 3 times).

Blessing for Healing

May God who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bring blessing and healing to _____ . May the *Kadosh Baruch Hu* (Holy Blessed One) mercifully restore (him/her/them) to health and vigor. May God grant (him/her/them) physical and spiritual well-being, together with all others who are ill.

Blessing Before Surgery

Oh God, Source of healing, watch over _____ as (she/he) undergoes surgery. Bless all involved in the healing process, be their domain physical, emotional, or spiritual. Grant _____ strength and vigor. Spread over (him/her) Your shelter of peace. Raise _____ up from the darkness to the light, for into Your hands do we place our spirit. Blessed are You Adonai, Healer of Israel.

23rd Psalm

God is my shepherd; I shall not want.

God makes me lie down in green pastures;

God leads me beside still waters.

God restores my soul;

God leads me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of God's name.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will
fear no evil;

for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I will dwell in God's house forever.

Vidui / Confessional Prayer

Recited by the individual

(If the individual is unable to speak for him/herself, the Rabbi will offer the Vidui/Confessional on her/his behalf.)

My God and God of my ancestors, accept my prayer. Do not turn away.
Forgive me for all the times I may have disappointed You. I am aware of
the wrongs I have committed. May my pain and suffering serve as
atonement. Forgive my shortcomings, for against You have I sinned.

May it be Your will, Adonai my God and God of my ancestors, that I live
now with a clear conscience and in accordance with Your will. Send a
refuah shleimah, a complete healing, to me and to all who suffer.

My life and death are in Your hands, Adonai my God. May it be Your
will to heal me. Guardian of the bereaved, protect my beloved family;
our souls are bound together. In Your hands lies my spirit.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.

Baruch shem kavod malchuto, l'olam va-ed.

Hear Oh Israel, God is our God, God is One.

Blessed is God's glorious majesty forever and ever.

Guidelines of the Rachamim (Caring) Committee of Congregation Emeth

The Rachamim Committee of Sisterhood and Congregation Emeth is here to serve members of our Congregation in need. The following are the guidelines followed by the Rachamim Committee.

Mourners

The Rabbi is the liaison between mourners and the Rachamim committee and will communicate the preferences of the mourners to the chair of the committee.

The Rachamim chair will engage a phone tree if needed.

The Rachamim coordinators for the month, or other volunteer(s) from the committee, will order, pickup and deliver a platter for the meal of condolence after the funeral, if desired by the family. This will be a simple platter, intended only for the family and out of town guests; it is not intended as a meal for the entire congregational community.

Providing food for the minyan is not an expectation of Rachamim committee members. However, the email condolence notice to the congregation, announcing when and where the minyans are held, will include a suggestion such as "desserts for the reception appreciated" or "dairy or light snacks appreciated" or whatever the family prefers (if there is a special request).

It is appropriate for congregants and guests to bring reception food and drink items to the mourners' home when attending the shiva minyan (service during which the Mourners' Kaddish is recited). The Rachamim committee will not be responsible for providing food for all of the guests attending the minyan.

If mourners are not able to host a shiva minyan at home and request that the minyan takes place in Congregation Emeth's sanctuary, the use of the temple will be provided at no charge, as a benefit of membership.

Illness

If a congregant expresses a need for support from the congregational community (rides to doctor appointments, meals, etc.) to the Rabbi, the request will be submitted to Rachamim volunteers through the chair. Every effort will be made to honor the request.

Rachamim Committee

Members of the congregation are encouraged to volunteer to serve on this important committee. Donations to support its important activities are needed and appreciated.

Cemetery Guidelines

Created by Congregation Emeth's Ritual Committee and approved by the Board of Directors

This policy recognizes that although the cemetery is a Jewish community cemetery, Congregation Emeth has the responsibility of guiding the religious aspect of the cemetery. Congregation Emeth is a Reform congregation and since it is the only Jewish congregation in the South County area, the membership encompasses people who come from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. In addition to the community, it represents Judaism in the South County. In trying to keep within the Reform guidelines while not offending any of our members or Jews in the community the following guidelines are proposed with regard to the cemetery. These ritual guidelines are divided into five basic questions.

Who is eligible to be buried in the Emeth Cemetery section?

The criteria used should be the same as the criteria used for determining membership in the congregation. Article II section 1 of the By Laws states "Any person of the Jewish faith, or any person seeking to be associated with those upholding the Jewish faith, eighteen years of age or older, may be elected to membership upon approval of application by a majority vote of the Board of Directors present and voting." These criteria as outlined in the By Laws would refer either to the individual to be buried or the family of that individual.

How traditional should the cemetery be?

We should not attempt to meet strict Orthodox burial practices because such a course would not be in keeping with the needs and the wishes of our congregation. This was in keeping with the proposal of not excluding someone from being buried in the cemetery. In this way, if the cemetery was not traditional enough for some people those individuals may choose to exclude themselves.

Who may perform the service at the cemetery?

A rabbi should be involved in the service. Although this will usually be our rabbi, it might not necessarily be the case

since this is a community cemetery. If the family are not Emeth members, they may desire another rabbi to officiate. If the person being buried is not Jewish, the family may use a clergy from another faith. However, that clergy must coordinate with the rabbi of our congregation to assure that the service is appropriate for a Jewish cemetery. The rabbi or, in the absence of the rabbi, the ritual committee must approve of any non-Jewish religious service. A person who is not clergy may officiate at the service but only in consultation with and with the approval of the congregational rabbi or, in the absence of the rabbi, the ritual committee. If the person officiating at the service is not a rabbi, it is recommended that the service should have some Jewish elements.

What symbols and wording may be displayed at the cemetery?

The only religious symbols, religious quotes or other religious writing that will be permitted to be displayed will be Jewish symbols, Jewish quotes or Jewish writings. There may be non-religious symbols, quotes or writings on monuments or markers. Symbols, images, quotes or writings that might be deemed offensive will not be permitted. Designs for markers or monuments must be approved by the rabbi or, in the absence of the rabbi, the ritual committee, before they are placed in the cemetery.

Is burial of cremated remains permitted?

Yes.

Memorial Board Order Form

Remember your loved one in perpetuity. Dedicate a plaque on the Congregation Emeth Memorial Board on the wall of our sanctuary.

The price of each plaque is \$360

When inscribing a name you may either inscribe an English name, a Hebrew name or both. If you need help with the Hebrew spelling, please contact Congregation Emeth's Rabbi.

The inscription will also include both the Hebrew date of the Yahrzeit and the Gregorian date. The Rabbi can help with this as well.

Each memorial plaque will be lit for the entire Hebrew month in commemoration of the Yahrzeit.

Order Form

Please use one form for each memorial plaque

Name of Deceased (English): _____

(Hebrew male): _____ Ben _____

(Hebrew female): _____ Bat _____

If you know the Hebrew names of both parents of the deceased please provide them.

Date of Death (Gregorian) _____

(Hebrew) _____

Remembered by: _____

Please enclose a check for \$360 for each plaque ordered and send to:
Congregation Emeth Memorial Board, 17835 Monterey Street, Morgan Hill, CA 95037

Personal Wishes Upon Death

English Name: _____

Complete Address: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

PART I:

1. Hebrew Name: _____
2. Father's Hebrew Name: _____
3. Was father a Kohen, Levi, or Yisrael? _____
4. Mother's Hebrew Name: _____
5. Was mother a bat-Kohen, Levi, or Yisrael? _____

PART II:

1. Wooden Casket? ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
2. To be washed by the Jewish burial society (Chevra Kaddisha):
☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
3. To have someone sit with the deceased during the evening and to recite from the Book of *Tehillim* (Psalms):
☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
4. To be buried in traditional linen burial shrouds:
☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
5. Children to observe *Shiva* with services at home:
 - a. Morning: ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
 - b. Evening: ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
 - c. How many days: ☐ full 7 days; ☐ lesser number of days (how many?) _____
6. Children to recite mourner's *kaddish* each day for: ☐ full 11 months; ☐ a lesser period of time (how long? _____); ☐ don't care

7. To observe *Yizkor* services 4 times a year: ☐ yes; ☐ no;
☐ don't care
8. Children and/or grandchildren should remain after the burial service to throw some earth on the casket: ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
9. Burial services should be: ☐ graveside; ☐ synagogue; ☐ don't care
10. *Yahrzeit* should be commemorated each year by the recitation of kaddish at night and in the morning: ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
11. Should friends and relatives be encouraged to make a donation to a specific charity? ☐ yes; ☐ no; ☐ don't care
- If so, is there a charitable preference?
- _____

12. Complete Hebrew name including parents' name for headstone:
- _____
- _____

PART III.

Personal Comments to members of the family and/or Ethical Will:
(attach another sheet if preferred)

Signed: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this in a place where it can be found immediately upon death, and send a copy to your Rabbi.

(Based on a form created by Rabbi Jack Segal, Congregation Beth Yeshurun, Houston, Texas)

Blessings for Dismantling the Home of a Parent or Grandparent

Blessings* for when we begin the sacred task of closing down and emptying out our parents' home after they die:

Each time one enters the home to work on this task:

Sovereign of the universe, as we enter the home of our beloved parents (or grandparents), who have left us to be closer to You, please guide our actions to be in accordance with Jewish law and custom, as well as in accordance with their wishes.

Help us to move through their home, which so enriched our lives, in a manner that is a tribute to their teachings and their values. May we perform this sad and wrenching duty with reverence and with dignity.

May we do so with generosity to others in the family, acknowledging their desire for some of these mementos, and with generosity to others in the community who might benefit from these possessions.

Ken yihi ratson (May this be Your will).

**These blessings come from an article by Rabbi Jack Riemer in Reform Judaism Magazine, Summer 2012, reprinted by permission of Reform Judaism Magazine. For the full text of the article, go to:*
<http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3024>.

Remember Congregation Emeth in your Will

Many members and friends of Congregation Emeth wish to support our temple in perpetuity. You can arrange to leave a bequest to Congregation Emeth through your will, trust or other estate planning document.

By deciding to leave a bequest from your will of a specific amount of cash, a percentage of your estate, or the remainder of your estate, you can create a permanent legacy that can help Congregation Emeth continue to be the center of Jewish life in South County. There's no limit on the amount you may set aside from your estate – you make a gift as large or small as you'd like. You may choose to make a gift of cash, securities or other property – and your estate will receive a tax deduction in the amount of your charitable bequest.

You are encouraged to consult your independent tax and legal counsel for legal advice regarding wills and estate planning.

