



## Temple Sinai

### Bereavement and Funeral Guide

***“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die.” Ecclesiastes 3:1-2***

Thousands of years of our rich tradition provide us with a structure for dealing with imminent death, preparation for burial and mourning.

The structure itself provides a vehicle for dealing with immediate grief and trauma and, in doing so, provides a means for the mourners to move slowly back to the routines of normal life.

This is not a rulebook. Each person's response to death is unique and individual. The rituals of death and mourning in Judaism are there to help people face their grief and reconstruct their lives in the face of loss.

## **From death to funeral**

If one is present at the time of death, the following b'racha should be recited:

**Baruch ata Adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, dayan ha-emet.**

**ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם דין האמת**

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

This statement helps us to affirm the ultimate goodness of God and God's will even in the face of grievous loss.

### **K'riah קריעה**

K'riah is a Hebrew word meaning "tearing". It refers to the traditional act of tearing one's clothes or cutting a black ribbon worn on one's clothes on hearing of the death of a loved one. It is usually done at the funeral, before the funeral service begins. This is generally not done at Temple Sinai, but as on every matter, the wishes of the family are paramount.

K'riah is always done standing. The act of standing shows strength at a time of grief. The following prayer is said as the tear is made:

**Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam, dayan ha-emet.**

**ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם דין האמת**

*Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Judge of Truth.*

## טהרה Taharah

Temple Sinai has its own Chevra Kaddisha (burial society).

### חברה קדישא

The Chevra performs Taharah, the ritual preparation of the body for burial. Just as a baby is washed and enters the world clean and pure, so do we leave the world cleansed by the religious act of Taharah.

The practices that comprise the work of the Chevra Kaddisha are:

Shmirah: שמירה Vigil keeping from the time of death until burial

The ritual act of Shmirah (watching or guarding) is performed as a sign of respect for the deceased. The family usually takes this role and the Chevra, along with other Temple members, will support the family if requested.

Taharah: טהרה Ritual purification of the body

Halbashah: הלבשה Dressing the body in takhrikhim/shrouds

The body is washed and dressed in burial clothes, תכריכים plain white garments called a shroud or takrikh.

Hashkavah: השכבה Placing the dead in the casket

Simplicity is the essence of Jewish burial. The plainest coffin available is recommended. "Practice dictates that Jews should be wrapped in a simple white linen shroud and buried in a plain pine box." (From: *To everything there is a season*).

Traditionally we do not embalm. Open casket viewing is not a Jewish tradition. If the family wish to view the body in private, this can be arranged. The casket is always closed before the funeral service.

*Shmirah*, *Taharah*, and *Halbasha* are services that the Temple Sinai Chevra Kaddisha offers. These services are available by request.

## **Burial or cremation?**

It is a mitzvah to bury our dead with all proper respect. Tradition defines this as the interment of the body in the earth. Cremation remains the family's prerogative. Progressive Judaism recognises that burial is the accepted Jewish practice, but does not object to cremation.

## **Timely burial**

Delaying burial is permitted to allow relatives to gather but, traditionally, burial should take place within 24 hours.

## **Autopsy**

Progressive Judaism permits autopsy. The practice is recommended if the purpose is for the increase of medical knowledge. (Rabbi Harvey Fields)

## **Organ transplants and donating body to science**

Progressive Judaism approves of donating parts of one's body for transplantation in order to save another human being. It also permits the donation of the body to a medical institution providing that it is buried after the study is completed. (Rabbi Harvey Fields)

## **The funeral**

Jewish funerals are characterised by brevity and simplicity. They are designed for the honour and dignity of the deceased.

Funerals of Temple members are usually held at Lychgate Funeral Home or the Temple. Temple Sinai has a section at Makara cemetery.

Flowers and music are not customary. Donations to charity are often suggested in lieu of flowers.

Funerals are not held on Shabbat, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, the first and last day of Sukkot, the first and last day of Pesach and Shavuot.

## **The funeral service**

The funeral service is simple: There are three main elements to the service: Psalms, *El Male Rachamim* (*God full of compassion*, a prayer for the soul of the departed) and the *Kaddish* (the traditional mourning prayer).

A eulogy or eulogies are usually given by a relative or family friend. At the cemetery the coffin is lowered into the earth and each mourner puts some dirt into the grave. It is our tradition to recite the Kaddish with additional psalms at the gravesite.

### **After the funeral:**

After the funeral there are three stages of mourning: seven days of complete mourning, 30 days of deep mourning and 11 months of lesser mourning.

The staged observances of the mourning period help the mourner to confront his or her grief, to work through it and ultimately return to normal patterns of life.

### **Shivah: שבועה**

The first seven days after the funeral is the period called Shivah, from the Hebrew word meaning seven. During this period the family may choose to stay at home and be supported by friends and neighbours and members of the Temple family.

During Shivah a minyan or worship service is held at the house of the mourner or another appropriate place. Shivah minyans have taken place at the Temple or at the home of a close relative or friend. This gives the mourners an opportunity to recite the mourners' Kaddish in community.

While traditionally shivah is observed for seven days, the family may choose to observe shivah for fewer days or not at all. Traditionally the mourners do not return to normal life and work during the Shiva period.

A memorial candle is often kept burning throughout the Shiva period.

### **Shloshim: שלשים**

The word shloshim means 30, and traditionally the name of the deceased is read in the Temple each Shabbat during the 30-day shloshim, mourning period.

### **Unveiling**

Within the year of formal mourning, there is a "stone-setting" or "unveiling" of the marker at the gravesite. Temple Sinai provides a small ceremony for this occasion and wider family members and friends are invited to attend.

## **Yahrzeit יאָרצײַט**

The yahrzeit marks the anniversary of a death. The word is derived from Yiddish and means “year’s time”.

It is a custom to light a Yahrzeit candle to commemorate the day. The candle is lit at sunset on the evening before the anniversary and is allowed to burn itself out. Yahrzeit candles are available at the Temple.

At Temple Sinai, mourners are invited to have an *aliyah* (call up to the Torah) at the Shabbat morning service closest to the date of death in ensuing years, to honour the memory of the deceased.

## **Memorial Board**

Temple Sinai has a memorial board where the name of the loved one can be inscribed and then lit up on the anniversary of the death.

*‘Birth is a beginning,  
And death a destination.  
And life is a journey,  
A sacred pilgrimage-  
To life everlasting.’  
Alvin Fine*



### **Steps to take when a loved one dies:**

Contact the Temple Office, (04 385 0720) Sue Esterman, Rabbi, or Mashpiah. One of these people will help you work through the following processes, in consultation with the funeral director:

- Date and time of service
- What part of the cemetery will be used? Traditional or general?
- Notification to the community via Temple electronic news (Temple office will arrange this)
- Decide if Shmirah (watching), Taharah (ritual washing), Tach'richim (shrouds) are desired. If yes, the Chevra Kaddisha will be contacted to make arrangements.
- Discuss funeral service with funeral celebrant: who will officiate? Place of funeral service, Temple Sinai? Funeral home? Eulogies? Pallbearers? Cemetery?
- Are Shiva services required? Where and when?

## Answers to some common questions

- Who can be a pallbearer?  
Any adult, Jewish or non-Jewish, male or female who is capable.
- How many pallbearers do we need?  
Six
- Can I have flowers at the funeral?  
It is not customary, and not encouraged. Donations to charity are often suggested in lieu of flowers.
- What about music?  
Again, it is not customary. If people do want music, we suggest that something is played quietly as people enter and it is turned off before the service begins.
- Does the service have to be in Hebrew?  
No, it doesn't. Most of the service is in English except for two prayers, which are always recited in Hebrew: El Male Rachamim and the Kaddish.
- Is there a fee?  
Not for Temple Sinai members. For non-members it is currently \$1000 which goes to Temple funds.
- Where do I get *Kippot* (head covering)?  
The Temple can supply these.
- Who can give the eulogy (*hesped*)?  
A family member, a close friend, rabbi, celebrant, anyone the family chooses.
- How many people can speak at the funeral?  
Usually one to three. However if the deceased was a member of a lodge, often there will be a request for a brief eulogy in addition to those by family and/or friends.

- Where does the service take place?  
If the deceased was a member, it can take place at the Temple or at Lychgate Funeral Home. For non-members, the service takes place at Lychgate. Other venues are acceptable as well.
- What about refreshments?  
This usually happens at the home of the family member, following the burial. It is possible for the Temple or the Funeral home to deal with this.
- When does the headstone go up?  
Either 11 months or a year after the burial. There is a small ceremony to accompany the stone setting if desired.
- What sort of headstone can we have?  
There is a standard format for our section of the cemetery.
- Can non-Jewish family members be buried in our section of the cemetery?  
Yes. There is a general section of the cemetery where non-Jewish family members may be buried.
- I hear people say 'Long life'. Why do they say that?  
'Long life' is a paraphrase for the Hebrew expression *ad me'a ve-esrim* 'May you live to 120' (120 years, the life span of Moses, is considered the absolute limit of life).

The traditional expression to the mourners at the conclusion of the funeral service is 'May God comfort you among the rest of the mourners in Zion and Jerusalem'.

- What about embalming?  
Traditionally we do not embalm.
- Do we have to bury within 24 hours?  
Delaying burial is permitted to allow relatives to gather, but burial traditionally should take place as soon as possible.

- Do I have to cover mirrors in my house? I hear that is a tradition. No, unless you want to. Covering the mirrors symbolises withdrawal from worldly concerns, when personal appearance becomes unimportant.

### **Questions for the family:**

- What is the full Hebrew name of the deceased?
- What is the full English name of the deceased?
- Does the family want to observe Shmira?
- Does the family want Taharah?
- Does the deceased have a tallit? Do the family members want him or her to be buried in it?
- Any other special requests?
- Would the family be willing to have some siddurim (prayer books) interred in the grave with the deceased? (This is the traditional way of disposing of religious books which are no longer required.)

**Information sources:**

- *To Everything there is a Season: Congregational Funeral and Cemetery Policies and Practices*, Union for Reform Judaism
- *The Jewish Mourners Handbook*, Behrman House
- *For All Seasons, Worship for our homes*, Rabbi Harvey J Fields
- Sue Esterman's Burial and Bereavement FAQs
- *Guidelines for Performing Tahara*, prepared for the Chevra Kaddisha of Northern New Mexico, Los Alamos Jewish Centre
- *A Brief Guide to Death and Bereavement within the Jewish Tradition*, compiled by Rabbi Fred Morgan, Temple Beth Israel
- *Consolation: The spiritual journey beyond grief*, Maurice Lamm
- WJPC Temple Sinai *Chevrah Kadisha Manual*
- *Jewish living*, Rabbi Mark Washofsky