

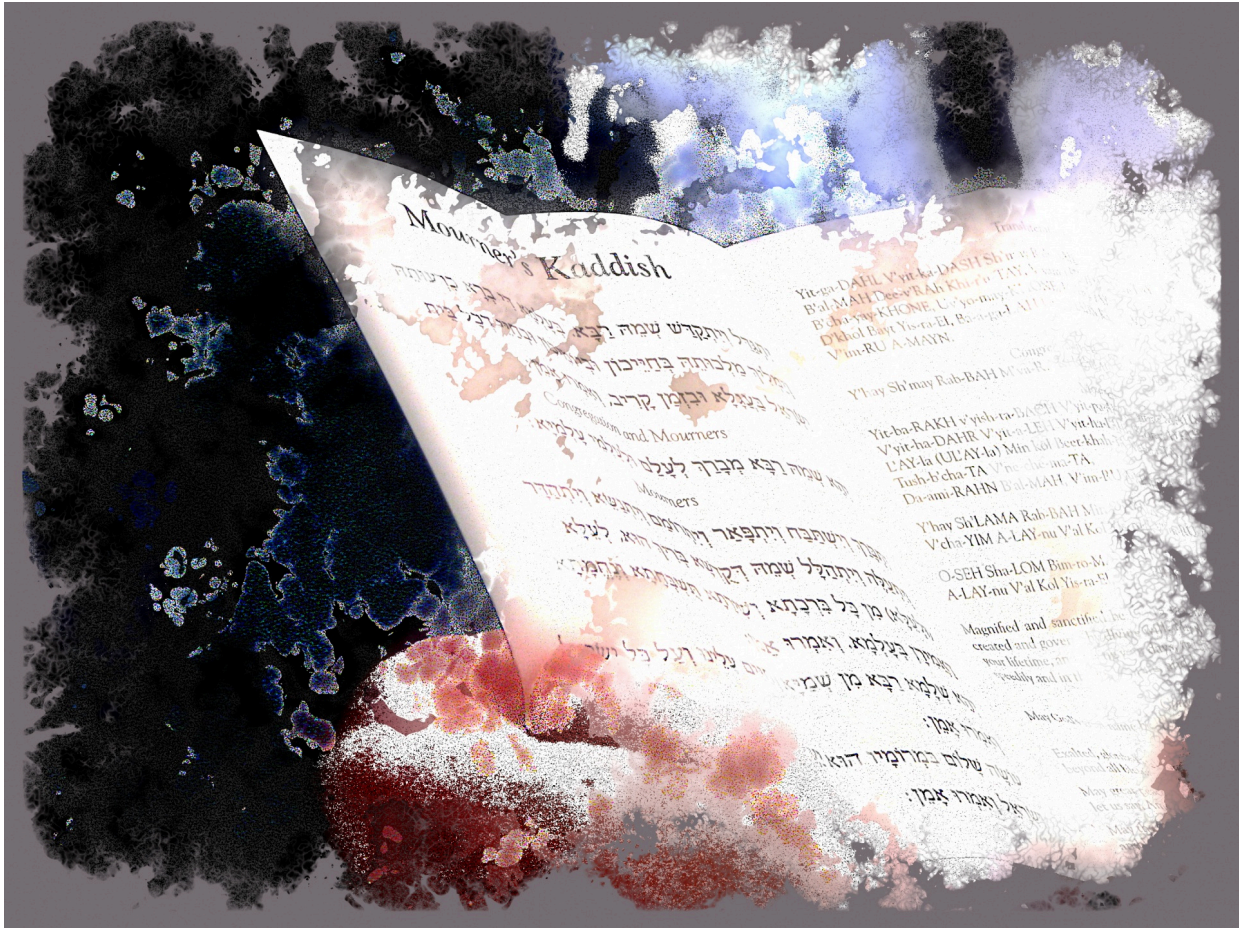


Guide for Jewish Mourners

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*"For as long as we live, they too will live, for they are now a part of us as,
We remember them"* – From a poem by Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer



The Path of The Jewish Mourner

“Sorrow comes in great waves...but it rolls over us, and though it may almost smother us it leaves us on the spot, and we know that if it is strong we are stronger, in as much as it passes and we remain. It wears us, uses us, but we wear it and use it in return; and it is blind, whereas, we after a manner see... everything will pass, and serenity and accepted mysteries and disillusionments, and the tenderness of a few good people, and new opportunities and ever so much of life, in a word, will remain.”

Henry James, in Mishkan T'filah – For A House of Mourning

Some sources consulted:

- www.Reformjudaism.org
- Transitions & Celebrations: Jewish Life Cycle Guides, by Rabbi John L. Rosove
- NVHC Bereavement Guide, 2007 and the NVHC Guide for Jewish Mourners, 2019.

Jewish Mourning Rituals Can Provide A Comforting Framework and a Guiding Path

Grief is universal. While death touches us as individuals, leaving pain and loneliness in its wake. Jewish tradition provides a way for us to be accompanied through and back from the darkness of loss. Jewish burial and mourning customs are rooted in antiquity and have been enriched through the generations and around the world, adapting to circumstances. The NVHC community is here to help you determine what will best comfort you in your time of sorrow.

Reform Judaism supports and encourages us to understand Jewish tradition and history; and make informed choices about what we as individuals practice and how we find meaning. Traditional Jewish practices and rituals give us a framework to cope, to show respect and honor for those who have died (*kavod ha-met*), support for those who are grieving, and guide us toward ways to re-embrace life going on without our loved one. This guide is meant to help us gain that knowledge, so we can then choose which practices will best bring us meaning and comfort.

Periods of Jewish Mourning:

- ◆ *Aninut*: From the time of death to burial ([page 5](#))
- ◆ Funeral Service and Burial ([page 10](#))
- ◆ *Shiva* (the first 7 days after burial) ([page 14](#))
- ◆ *Sheloshim* (the first 30 days after burial) ([Page 187](#))
- ◆ The Year Following the Burial (Eleven months) ([Page 18](#))
- ◆ *Yahrtzeit* observance (annualized memorial on the anniversary of death) ([Page 20](#))

Resources and other information can be found in the appendices:

- [Checklists](#)
- [Useful Contacts](#)
- [Further Reading](#)

Contacting Clergy

Call the Temple Office **703-437-7733**. During office hours someone will be able to immediately help you contact clergy. After hours, you can Temple Office phone number and follow prompts to get clergy voice mails. Temple members can also find clergy cell phone numbers in the Temple directory (<https://nvhc.shulcloud.com/member/directory>). Alternatively, you can send an email to: Clergy@nvhcreston.org.

As Death Approaches

Death is often unpredictable. Some people die suddenly. Some people can linger “at death’s door” for weeks or even months. Some people may seem very close to death and then bounce back. Some people face difficult illnesses and battle them for years with many ups and downs along the way.

The support from our NVHC community and our clergy can begin even before someone’s passing, no matter what the circumstances. Our NVHC Cares team is here for you and ready to offer support no matter the phase of life’s journey. It can be incredibly comforting to bring *kedusha*—holiness—through ritual to the final moments of one’s life. At someone’s bedside, we can recite (or help them recite, if they are unable to speak) a traditional confession (*viddui*) or give word to other last thoughts and wishes.

Loved ones can recite the *Shema* prayer thus, even at the moment of death, to affirm hope and hold faith.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad

Hear O Israel, the Eternal is our God. The Eternal is One.

Please reach out to NVHC to let us know when you need support. This might be for reciting your loved one’s name in our prayers for healing (*Mi Shebeirach*) before they pass, or in receiving a call or visit from one of our Clergy. Contact the NVHC office at (703) 437-7733.

If you are with a loved one but not near our synagogue in Virginia, we can help connect you to a local chaplain, rabbi, or cantor for assistance in ritualizing these final moments.

Aninut: From the Time of Death to Burial

The moment of learning of a death of a loved one can be a truly emotional time in which family members are often vulnerable, and despair is most intense. Jewish tradition encourages us to work through its structure to accept the finality of life and the determination of death by immediately beginning to organize one's community for a funeral and burial.

Contacting the Clergy

Please contact the NVHC clergy as soon as a death occurs. You can include the clergy contact information to give to the Funeral home in your funeral arrangements. One of the NVHC clergy will coordinate with you to set the time for the funeral service in coordination with the cemetery/mortuary. Please do not finalize funeral arrangements with the funeral director before confirming with our clergy to make sure they are available. Our clergy will also make arrangements to speak with or to meet with you before the funeral service. For information on how to contact the clergy see page 3.

Condolence Email

At NVHC, we inform our congregation of your loss through an email of condolence, sent to our community. Our clergy will ask you for pertinent information so that our community can support you in your grief, beyond *shiva* and throughout your life. That information will include:

- Name of the deceased
- Date and place of death
- Date and place of funeral, if appropriate
 - Time of service, if it is local
- Plans for *shiva* (days, times, locations)
 - If out of town, any planning for *shiva* here upon your return
- Directions for donations in memory of the deceased

Contacting the Funeral Home

It is the task of the mourners to notify the funeral home that will care for the remains. The personnel from the funeral home will quickly send representatives to collect the body. When possible, it is best if this can be arranged in advance, so that you do not have to plan these details when you are most bereft. (See [To Do Lists](#) and [Appendix B](#) for resource notes).

Please note, regarding these circumstances:

- If someone dies at home or at work, call 911 first. Any death that occurs without a doctor or medical personnel present must be reported to the police and an investigation will be held by the coroner's office.

- If the deceased person has a pre-arranged burial and funeral plan, find the necessary information.
- If the person who dies was under medical care, be certain to notify the primary care physician as soon as possible. If you do not know the physician's name, check the deceased's records, prescription bottles or medical bills.
- When someone dies in a hospital, nursing home, or other care facility, you can ask the staff of the establishment for assistance with contacting the funeral home. Some facilities require the patient to designate a funeral home as a condition of entry or care. Confer with the facility to determine if any action was taken.
- If the person who died was an organ donor, this may delay burial and should be factored into the planning time frame.
- If the person who died is to be buried in a different state/country than where he or she passed away, the funeral home will assist you with the extra paperwork and regulations for the transport of the person's remains.

You will need the following information about the deceased when planning a funeral:

- Social security number
- Date of birth
- Names of family members
- Place of birth
- Health Care Directive (if you are not the legal next of kin)
- If applicable, Veteran's discharge papers (form DD214) to enable a complimentary American flag and if desired a flag ceremony for the funeral
- The number of death certificates you will need. They are harder to get later on, so ask for 8-10 official copies.
- Consideration of clothing, cosmetics, and hair style in preparing the body for burial.

Jewish tradition calls for the deceased to be buried with his/her *tallit* (prayer shawl). If there is no directive to follow tradition, you can decide if it should be buried with the individual or if you would prefer to keep it and pass it to others in the family as an heirloom and keepsake.

NVHC Chevra Kadisha

The NVHC *Chevra Kadisha* (sacred community) is a group of members committed to assisting and supporting our clergy and our members as they walk the path of the mourner. A member of the *Chevra Kadisha* may lead one of the *minyanim* memorial services at your home as part of your *shiva* observances, as well as be a supportive and knowledgeable presence for you.

Burial Arrangements and Timing of Funeral

Jewish tradition urges that the funeral and burial take place within twenty-four hours of the death out of respect for the dead (*kavod ha-met*). The body begins decomposition immediately upon death and burial is the first step in the mourner's grieving process. Funeral homes can delay this process to enable family coming from far away to make travel arrangements and arrive in time for the funeral, or for other extenuating circumstances, such as for scheduling interment in a national military cemetery. According to Jewish tradition, burial takes place in either a Jewish cemetery or a designated burial ground for members of the Jewish community in a secular cemetery.

It is recommended that all aspects of funeral arrangements be governed by the principles of respect for the dead and simplicity. Funerals are permitted most days of the year, provided the availability of the funeral home and cemetery to arrange for burial. However, funerals are not conducted in Jewish tradition at any point during Shabbat (Friday afternoon through sundown Saturday), the High Holy Days (*Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*) or the first and last days of the Jewish festivals of *Sukkot*, *Pesach* and *Shavuot*.

A funeral service may take place in the NVHC sanctuary, provided the necessary arrangements are made with the clergy and Executive Director. It can be meaningful for many to come to their familiar synagogue settings to host loved ones and friends of the person who has died, before proceeding to a cemetery for burial. One may also choose either a simple graveside service or utilize the facility of one of the local funeral homes for funeral followed by procession directly to the cemetery.

Burial for Non-Jewish Relatives

Many Jewish cemeteries are restricted to burial for Jews only; there are Jewish cemeteries in our area which have adjacent properties as part of the larger park where Jewish and non-Jewish family members can be buried side by side. Please see the [resources section](#) for a list of local funeral homes and cemeteries.

Whether it is before or after a death occurs, it would be good to discuss with our clergy whether Jewish clergy officiation is appropriate for a non-Jewish relative, or whether another alternative is the best approach for your family. It is important that those with non-Jewish immediate relatives contact various cemeteries regarding policies on burial of non-Jewish members of the family, in advance of purchasing burial plots.

Caskets

Jewish tradition advocates for a simple casket with Jewish law stressing the simplicity and utility of the casket. The fanciest and most expensive caskets available on the market are not necessary, and they delay the process of the natural decay of the body. You may speak

with a funeral home to arrange for a typical Jewish casket—often made of untreated pine wood, with no metal parts.

A traditional burial will dress the body in a plain white shroud (*tachrichin*). Other than the shroud, the only item that is customarily buried along with the dead person is a *tallit* (prayer shawl) with one of its corner fringes (*tzitzit*) cut. The *tzitzit* are removed because the dead cannot fulfill the *mitzvot*. (The Biblical basis for the *tzitzit* is in the book of Numbers 15:38 where it is written, “Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes (i.e. *tzitzit*) on the corners of their garments throughout the ages...look at it and recall all the commandments of Adonai and observe them...”) These rules enable a natural return of the body to the earth and emphasize the irrelevance of wealth and stature in death.

Some families prefer to dress their loved ones in the deceased’s favorite clothing. You may also wish to include photographs or personal items in the casket. It is also a tradition to include a bag of earth from the Land of Israel in the casket, based on the tradition that it is a great honor to be buried in the land of Israel. Please let the officiating clergy know and they will arrange for that with the funeral home.

Cremation

In Judaism, it is a *mitzvah* (sacred obligation) to bury the dead and return them to the earth. This allows loved ones to have a place to return to honor the dead with visits to their grave marker.

Cremation after death is a controversial topic in Judaism; it has become a growing practice among Jews. On one hand, both traditional Jewish law and the recent history of crematoria utilized on Jewish victims of the Holocaust indicate an ethical prohibition against cremation. On the other hand, there are a number of reasons that people may choose cremation, including cost and environmental concerns. Our clergy would be glad to discuss the merits and drawbacks of burial or cremation with the mourners. Although burial is preferred, our clergy will officiate without judgment both at funerals with standard burial or upon cremation.

Preparation of the Body

The funeral home will prepare the body for burial with trained employees who will bathe and dress the body with care and respect, according to traditional Jewish law (*halachah*). No natural or chemical agents are used to preserve the body. However, if the burial is to be delayed, embalming may be required by some local laws. Some funeral homes are amenable to contemporary requirements and others are not. You should choose the funeral home with which you are most comfortable.

Someone to Watch Over the Body

Customarily, a Jewish body is not left alone before burial. A *shomer/shomeret*, or watchperson, can be engaged through a Jewish funeral home to recite Psalms while sitting with the body. Family members may be willing to serve in this role; it is not necessary that the *shomer/shomeret* know the deceased person.

Funeral expenses

Unfortunately, funerals can be expensive. There are many options available to mourners when planning a funeral. It is best to have this frank conversation with the funeral home. Expenses will vary with the choice of casket, decor, and/or other ritual additions to the service.

The Hebrew Free Burial Society provides free funeral service and burial at the Chesed Shel Emes Cemetery for indigent Jews:

(<https://www.chesedshelemesaid.org/hebrew-free-burial.html>).

Flowers

It is not customary in Jewish tradition to send flowers to mourners. In lieu of flowers, mourners often suggest that money for *tzedakah* be given in memory of the deceased to causes that he/she valued. Some mourners choose to designate NVHC or a specific donor designated fund at NVHC.

Funeral Service and Burial

Who are the “Mourners”?

Though recognizing that an individual’s impact extends beyond his/her closest family, the Jewish definition of a “mourner” focuses only on first-degree relatives—parents, children, siblings, and spouses. These are the people bound to the obligations of mourners under Jewish law and tradition.

Closed Casket

The casket is closed before Jewish funeral services begin out of respect for the deceased, so that he/she should not be viewed as an object. In addition, once the funeral service begins, the process of mourning your loved one begins, which is often very painful and emotional. The closed casket helps us to face the heart-breaking closure of death.

Actions to Honor the Deceased at the Funeral

It is customary for people to make donations as *tzedakah* to a charity favored by the deceased, in their memory. We will ask you to specify where you would like donations to be sent so we can inform the community. Some people also choose to put out a picture of the deceased at the funeral service, which is fine, and can help to remember the fullness of the person’s life, especially after a long illness.

A condolence book may be set out in a prominent spot. This can be a useful record if family members wish to write thank-you notes to visitors. Condolence books and thank-you notes are American secular and Christian customs that have been adopted by many Jews. Though traditionally one would never thank someone (or expect to be thanked) for fulfilling a *mitzvah* [commandment] as profound as honoring the dead or comforting the bereaved, many people find that writing to visitors and answering sympathy cards are part of the healing process. The funeral home will usually provide a book for you.

While cut flowers are beautiful, they are not traditionally part of Jewish mourning customs as they represent the cutting of life. If someone sends flowers, you could ask the funeral director to donate them to a hospital or nursing home following the funeral and burial.

For Veterans and Active-Duty Military

If desired, the Veterans Administration will provide a burial flag and an honor guard to perform a flag ceremony. With a copy of the (DD214 or other discharge papers) the Funeral Home can make the appropriate arrangements. A burial flag ceremony is a solemn, military-authorized honor featuring the folding and presentation of the U.S. flag to the next of kin. It includes, at minimum, a two-person honor guard and the playing of “Taps”. The burial flag is a keepsake for the family and is not intended for outdoor flying. The flag

ceremony is usually at the start of the Funeral Service. More information at:
https://www.cem.va.gov/military_funeral_honors.asp.

Our Clergy's Role in the Funeral Service

Our clergy will lead the funeral prayers and deliver a eulogy. In order to prepare for these tasks, our clergy will meet with you and other family members before the funeral, either in your home or at the synagogue. This meeting helps them to prepare a communal eulogy on your behalf, retelling about some of the characteristics of the deceased, and guiding the community to remember the deceased in a way that befits their highest values. Sharing memories in this pre-funeral conversation can be very healing. In addition, at this meeting the clergy will gather information from you to help announce to NVHC members and funeral guests your family's plans and wishes for the funeral and *shiva* memorial observances.

***K'riah* (Literally, "Tearing") Ribbon for Mourners**

Tearing a garment or ribbon is a tradition of ancient origin signifying that the individual is a first order relative of the deceased. If as a mourner you would like to rip a garment in the traditional manner (e.g., a shirt or sweater) for *k'riah*, then you should wear that article to the funeral (with appropriate garments underneath, for the sake of modesty).

More often, instead of tearing one's clothing, we provide you with a black ribbon that you can pin to your garments to wear, to tear for *k'riah*. This custom is generally reserved for immediate mourners (i.e., spouse, parent, child, and sibling). The garment/ribbon is torn before burial and the saying of the Mourner's *Kaddish*. One tears and says:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, דִּין הָאֱמֶת.

Baruch Atah Adonai, dayan ha-emet.

Praised are You, Adonai, the true Judge.

The *k'riah* garment/ribbon is worn over the right breast by the spouse, parents and siblings, and over the heart by children of the deceased. It is worn every day during the *shiva* period (seven days), or *sheloshim* (thirty days), depending on your wish. It is an emotional release to demonstrate one's grief through *k'riah* and wearing the ribbon signifies to your community that you are in grief and in need of special care.

The Eulogy (*Hesped*)

The eulogy (Greek for "nice words" or "praise") or *hesped* (Hebrew for "beating the breast") is among the most important elements in a funeral service. A eulogy is meant to evoke the deceased's essential qualities and virtues, passions, interests and hobbies, community involvement and contributions. The *hesped* is expected to honestly evoke the character and nature of the deceased.

Although members of your family may wish to share additional eulogies at a funeral, it is strongly recommended that, if there are additional speakers, that they keep their remarks focused. Also, because emotions are high at such moments, it is important that such additional remarks be written out in advance of the service.

Prayers Said at the Funeral and Burial

At NVHC, a funeral service incorporates both traditional and modern readings, in addition to the eulogy. The memorial prayer (*El Malei Rachamim*) will be chanted, in which we ask God's merciful blessing for the one who has died, affirming that the soul of the departed has been gathered to God. This prayer includes the recitation of the deceased's Hebrew name, so it is important to try and locate records of their Hebrew name and their parents' Hebrew names to assist in this prayer. The Mourner's *Kaddish* is said at graveside.

Pallbearers

It is a tradition to choose six or eight people (usually excluding the immediate mourners) who were close to the deceased to serve as pallbearers to help carry and escort the casket from the funeral service to the gravesite. In addition, honorary pallbearers may also be chosen, who are not required to physically escort the casket, but to walk alongside it to the hearse and graveside. Both men and women may be pallbearers.

Graveside

Whether the entire funeral has been conducted at graveside, or if it is after a procession from the funeral, it is customary in Judaism for the casket to be immediately lowered into the ground in the presence of the mourners, which can be a heart-wrenching moment. However, witnessing this act promotes the acceptance of the finality of death. Those assembled wait for the casket to be lowered, listening as additional psalms and poetry are shared.

Filling the Grave

Family and friends are invited to share in the burial of the deceased. Jewish tradition praises this act as *chesed shel emet* (a final kindness) that a person is offered from one's community, the ability to be brought to a final resting place. Whether family and friends shovel earth into the grave or take some in their hands and spread a small amount back into the grave, this ritual helps the mourners to accept the reality of death and to honor those who have died to not have burial completed only by strangers.

There is a custom of mourners and attendees filling the entire grave as an act of respect for the deceased. If you wish to do this, please let the clergy and funeral director know in advance. There is also a custom that each person who places earth on a grave turns the shovel upside down for the initial shovelful. This act reflects the deep reluctance a loved one feels to perform this *mitzvah*. Customarily three handfuls or shovels of earth are the

minimum per person. If using a shovel, the person placing earth returns the shovel to the earth and not directly to the next mourner signifying that he/she has performed the complete *mitzvah* in burial. All are welcome to perform the *mitzvah* of burial.

The mourners usually begin the burial by placing earth either by hand or by a shovel as a final act of kindness for the deceased who can no longer care for him/herself. After the immediate family begins the burial process, other family members and friends in attendance may also follow suit.

It is common for the service officiant to place a small amount of soil, rock or earth from Israel on the casket, which is usually available from the funeral home.

The Mourner's *Kaddish*

Once the casket is completely covered, the mourning period officially begins, and the Mourner's *Kaddish* can be recited. This prayer is a declaration of faith and is often necessary for mourners at the time of the loss of their loved ones when there is a tendency to deny God's presence and goodness. There is no mention of death in this prayer. Rather, it affirms God's Name as manifest in every place and at every instant, even at our darkest moments of loss, anger, fear, despair, and confusion. It expresses our obligation to nurture a world that is filled with holiness. The prayer is written in Aramaic using Hebrew letters, the colloquial language of Jews during Talmudic times.

Following the *Kaddish*, often, non-family members who are in attendance at the burial will form two lines to allow the mourners to process through and quietly receive their community's comfort as they pass through the lines and return home.

Children at Funerals and Burial

It is important that children of sufficient age and maturity attend funeral services and burial. If very young children are to attend the funeral, however, parents should arrange to seat them with a babysitter or another responsible adult who will not mind leaving the service if the children are restless or upset. It is recommended that children over the age of eight years old in most cases are capable of attending funeral services and burial and should do so. Our clergy can speak with the children before the funeral to explain what they will witness. Jewish obligations of mourning, though not required of children, can be a meaningful way for them to learn about Judaism and how to cope with loss.

SHIVA

Shiva, which stands for seven in our tradition, is observed as seven days of memorial rites for one's parent, sibling, spouse or child. As we learn from Torah, the way in which our patriarch Abraham proceeded through grief for our matriarch Sarah, the first three days ("mourning") are considered the most intense days of grief, followed by the next four days ("bewailing") as an additional period before beginning to return to life.

Shiva is a time of intense but sheltered and controlled grief. It is the next stage of the "grief work" done by the mourners over a prolonged period of time. *Shiva* affords the mourners focused time to remember the deceased and to share stories of his or her life with friends and family.

An individual may choose to sit *shiva* for the entire seven days or any part of it, sometimes in a public, and often in a private way. It is highly recommended to take some significant period to conduct such memorial rites, and you may consult with the clergy for advice as you make these determinations after a death has occurred.

After the Funeral

Washing Hands: It is customary to wash one's hands when leaving a cemetery (most Jewish cemeteries have a water fountain at the exit for this purpose – no blessing is said when doing this act). Before you enter the home of the mourners, it is customary to place a pitcher of water, a basin, and towel outside the front door to be used for handwashing before entering. This custom is based on an old superstition that demons lurk in cemeteries and seek to attach themselves to the living under their fingernails. This water is called *nagelwasser* (literally, "nail-water"). It is also a symbolic washing of *tum-ah* (ritual impurity caused by contact with the dead) from one's own body and soul. In modern times, washing one's hands represents a transition from one state of being to another.

Meal of Consolation (Seudat Havra'ah): Many families, including some who are not observing *shiva* (the traditional seven days of mourning that commence immediately after burial) welcome visitors at the family home after the funeral service for a traditional meal, called a Meal of Consolation or (*Seudat Havra'ah*). Hard-boiled eggs are a traditional food for this meal, as they symbolize the cyclical nature of life. Lentils are also traditional food at the house of mourning.

This meal is intended for the mourners. If the family is observing this custom, members of the extended family or friends (but not the mourners) should make arrangements for a light meal. It is best if mourners do not have to arrange for the food themselves, nor have to greet or entertain guests.

If no one is available in your family or group of friends to organize these meals, please let the synagogue know so that we might do our best to enlist the assistance of our NVHC community members, who are often honored to make such arrangements.

If you are helping to plan this meal for someone else, or you are asking them to plan it for you, suggest that they provide printed directions to the family home for everyone at the funeral.

***Shiva* Customs**

Mourners are not hosts for *shiva* observances. The synagogue does not customarily provide meals for you or your loved ones; members of NVHC *Chevra Kadisha*, NVHC Cares, friends, and family members can guide you or your loved ones in the basic tasks involved with having others visit your home.

Shiva is an important opportunity to talk about and remember the life of a person who has died; sharing memories and wishes of condolence can be very helpful and healing to those who are in mourning.

During *shiva*, brief memorial services are held each evening in the homes of the mourners, to assist them in continuing to recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* in the presence of a community. This could be led by one of our clergy or one of our *Chevra Kadisha* members leading a service (memorial prayer books and kippot will be brought to your home from the synagogue). Or you might choose to have a 'remembering' gathering, involving the sharing of pictures, memories, poetry, etc., shared by those who come to support you in your grief. It is always appropriate for visitors to share their remembrances of your loved one, to help you continue to tell the stories of their lives so that they live on in memory.

One does not sit *shiva* on Shabbat, instead coming to synagogue to recite *Kaddish*. The opening day of a festival (*Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*) concludes any formal period of mourning.

During the *shiva* period (which includes the day of funeral/burial), mourners often refrain from work or school, remaining at home to be able to grieve. Other traditional customs include sitting on low chairs/stools or covering mirrors, both of which were historically meant to assist you as the mourner in remembering to honor the low place you are feeling and not to feel you must make yourself look good for visitors. Visitors during *shiva* should be coming to support you, and to help them know the blessing and support of community.

It is best for visitors to respond to the needs of the mourners, to talk about the deceased, or to speak gently with those who are in grief about whatever the mourners wish. Since there are no exact right words to say, it is worth remembering that Judaism sees our presence as the greatest comfort we can offer to a fellow member of the community.

Shiva Candle

The funeral home will provide a seven-day candle to be lit upon returning from the cemetery, officially marking the beginning of the seven days of mourning. It remains lit through *shiva* as an ongoing memorial. The Bible teaches that “the light of God is the soul of humankind” (Proverbs 20:27). The *shiva* candle is therefore symbolic of the soul of the deceased.

Other Home rituals

Unlocked door: Doors are traditionally left unlocked so that visitors can enter without knocking or ringing the doorbell, which would otherwise distract the mourners from their grief and cause them to act as hosts.

Covering mirrors: The practice of covering the mirrors began centuries ago, based on a belief that spirits were attracted to mirrors. Some people thought that the soul could be trapped in the reflection or that the dead person’s spirit lingered on earth for a time and might reach out from “the other side.” Since during *shiva*, mourners often abstain from daily personal practices such as shaving or the use of cosmetics, the folk custom was further interpreted to discourage vanity and encourage inner reflection.

Regardless of its symbolism, covering mirrors is a striking visual cue, a token of the disruption and grief felt by everyone who enters the house. It reminds us that the time is not about ourselves but rather a time to concentrate on our inner life rather than outward appearances.

Low stools: Mourners can choose to be seated on the floor, on pillows, low boxes, stools or smaller chairs. If you are unable to do this for any reason, of course you may sit more traditionally. The purpose of this ritual is as an outward symbol showing your humility, grief and pain as a mourner, being brought ‘low’ by the passing of your loved one.

Sheloshim: The First Thirty Days

Sheloshim means thirty, and it is customary for this period (inclusive of *shiva*) to honor the continued needs of the mourner. Although the traditions of *shiva* are more intense, during this period many families continue to receive condolence calls and to notify extended friends who may not know a death has occurred. You may slowly return to work, but you are excused from public entertainment or from celebratory gatherings if you choose. Weddings planned before a death occurred may be held during this period, but with opportunities taken during the celebration to honor those who have died. Visits from family and friends can be especially appreciated during the period of *Sheloshim* as mourners often feel more isolated during this time as everyone else returns to their regular routines.

During *sheloshim*, your loved one's name will be recited aloud during our Shabbat services as the entire community reads the Mourner's *Kaddish*.

Following both the *shiva* and the *sheloshim* period, it can be a healing gesture to observe the Jewish custom of walking publicly around one's neighborhood, in front of fellow neighbor's homes, as a signal that one is returning to life and beginning to resume normal patterns of activity.

During the First Year Following Burial

The next period of mourning in Jewish tradition is observed for a symbolic year after a death occurs, for eleven months. During this time, you can recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* at least once a week during synagogue services, or on a daily basis, if you prefer. You will be notified of *yahrzeit* observances (the anniversary of your loved one's passing) as well as upcoming *Yizkor* (memorial) services held at NVHC on Yom Kippur afternoon, and around the observances of *Sukkot*, *Pesach* and *Shavuot*.

It is customary in Judaism to set a stone-marker or headstone on the grave within the year following burial. A service of "unveiling" the stone is a relatively modern ritual in Jewish tradition and can be held at a convenient time in the first year after a death, although many prefer to wait for several months or even through the first year after a death. An unveiling service can be held at the discretion of a mourning family. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) has published a [short guide](#) on how to lead a consecration of a burial marker ceremony (aka unveiling). A hard copy of the guide is available from our temple office.

Memorial Headstones

Jewish traditions around headstones are rich with meaning and symbolism. In Jewish practice, headstones (Hebrew: *matzevot*) are typically erected after a period of mourning, traditionally within the first year. The headstone serves as a permanent memorial that "speaks" for the deceased, affirming that their memory endures.

Headstones themselves are often inscribed in both Hebrew and English, beginning with the Hebrew acronym פ"נ (*po nikbar/po nitman* — "here lies") and the name of the deceased in Hebrew. Sometimes the Hebrew acronym ת.נ.צ.ב.ה is also added for the phrase from Samuel meaning "may his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life", a functional equivalent to the anglicized expression R.I.P. for "rest in peace". Progressive Jews will often use the Hebrew name that includes both the deceased father and mother. As an example, Issac Son of Abraham and Sarah would appear in Hebrew as יצחק בן אברהם ושרה. Thus, the Hebrew on a memorial headstone might appear as פ"נ יצחק בן אברהם ושרה meaning "Here lies Issac son of Abraham and Sarah". Headstones inscriptions should include birth and death dates and may include other significant information about the deceased's life.

Jewish headstone iconography also varies by community and tradition. Headstones often feature carved symbols such as a Star of David, a menorah, candlesticks (women's role in maintaining a Jewish home), lions symbolizing strength, hands in the priestly blessing gesture (indicating a *Kohen*), or a pitcher and basin (indicating a *Levi*). Sephardic and Mizrahi traditions may differ in style, favoring horizontal slabs or more ornate carvings. More traditional customs generally favor simple, modest stones, reflecting the egalitarian

principle that all people are equal in death. In many Jewish cemeteries, stones are oriented so the deceased “faces” Jerusalem, connecting the burial to the hope of resurrection and return to the holy land.

Visiting the Cemetery

A very important part of the Jewish tradition is visiting the gravesite, after someone has passed away, which expresses that you have not forgotten your loved one. The visits are not generally frequent as remembering someone’s life and values through the ways that we live is more important than dwelling on their passing by spending more time in the cemetery. Try to spend more time, sharing memories and honoring family rather than frequent visits to the cemetery, in order to help your spirit heal from loss.

There are certain special times when going to the cemetery is most appropriate. The first time that you might go back to the cemetery after burial would be at the end of *shiva*. Marking the end of the *sh’loshim* period with a visit to the cemetery is considered very appropriate. The next common time to visit the gravesite for your loved one would be at the *Yahrzeit*.

In addition, there are certain holy days on the Jewish calendar that are appropriate times to make a visit to the cemetery. These days include the last day of a month and before *Rosh Hashanah*. Conversely, there are certain days each year we traditionally do not visit Jewish cemeteries, most notably on Shabbat. We also encourage trying to separate our grief from our joy, thereby honoring each of those experiences. It is also not customary to visit during Chanukah, during the intermediary days of *Sukkot* and Passover, or on *Rosh Chodesh* (the first day of any new month) for these are days of celebration. Of course, there are exceptions to these rules. For example, if relatives have travelled a far distance and want to visit the gravesite, they are welcome to do so on any day of the year.

When you visit the grave of your loved one, it is customary to leave a stone by the grave or on the marker, an indication that you have been there, that they are remembered. Flowers, though beautiful, will eventually die. A stone will not dry out and die; thus can symbolize the permanence of memory and legacy. There is no commandment to fulfill here; placing a stone on a headstone is an opportunity for you to create your own ritual and do things in the way that feels most meaningful to you.

Yahrzeit Observance

The annual observance of the *Yahrzeit* of a loved one takes place on the anniversary of the date of death on the Hebrew calendar. At the time of *Yahrzeit*, during the week of its observance, the deceased's name is read as part of memorial prayers at a Shabbat evening and morning service. NVHC notifies its members of which Shabbat their loved one's name will be read, so that families can plan ahead to attend. If you wish to be reminded instead on the secular date, please let us know.

Yahrzeit Candle: You may light a *Yahrzeit* candle in your home on the evening preceding the day of the *Yahrzeit*, which will burn for twenty-four hours. There is no special prayer recited for the lighting of a *Yahrzeit* candle, although you may say a prayer or share a remembrance of your loved one at that time, if you wish.

Tzedakah: Many families find it a meaningful way to perpetuate the memory of their loved one by giving *tzedakah* (a charitable donation) at the time of *yahrzeit*.

Memorial Plaque: You may additionally fulfill this *mitzvah* through memorializing your loved one's name permanently at our synagogue on a memorial plaque or by making a donation to one of our synagogue's special funds which help us continue to fulfill our synagogue mission. Please contact our office at 703-437-7733 to arrange for the purchase of a plaque on our memorial board.

Yizkor

Yizkor ('remembrance') is a set of prayers and psalms designed to remember all congregational family members and friends who have died. We include such prayers as part of festival observances on the morning services of *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and on the afternoon of *Yom Kippur*. We provide notice of our *Yizkor* services to all of our members during the first year after a death has occurred.

Appendix A: TO-DO LISTS

While You Are Healthy

- **Write an Advanced Directive and designate a health care proxy.**
 - The greatest gift you can give to your loved ones is to have your final wishes clear, in writing, and known to your family. Deciding what kind of medical care and intervention you want at the end of life, as well as taking care of planning for your end-of-life rituals, relieves the burden and conflict from your family members and loved ones when they are already confused and bereft.
 - NVHC has developed guidance for a [Jewish Advanced Directive and Health Care proxy](#). This document gives you an opportunity to describe your values and desires in grave illness and at end-of-life. It tells clinicians who you are, what is important to you, and what is not important to you.
 - Advanced Health Care Directives and Health Care Proxies are often prepared with professional legal assistance.
- **Share your wishes regarding funeral and memorial plans**
 - Talk with your family members and/or close friends so that they know your wishes and what plans you have made.
 - It can be helpful to speak with one of the NVHC Clergy to get their opinions about places and situations they have encountered to give you guidance.
 - Share any legacy giving plans that you have made or would like to make.
 - Discuss charitable causes that family and friends of the mourners might be directed to make *tzedakah* contributions in your memory.
- **Select a Cemetery**
 - If you are planning a cremation, it is possible to bury ashes or place them in a columbarium, if you choose.
 - See listing of [Local Jewish Cemeteries](#) and some [Local Non-Denominational Cemeteries](#) contained in [Appendix B](#).
- **Select and meet with a Funeral Home**
 - This is who will take care of all the details in moving and preparing a body, selecting a casket and transport for burial. They will also have information about cremation.
 - For a listing of NVHC recommended funeral homes and other Jewish funeral homes in the area see [Appendix B](#).
 - Give the Funeral Home the contact number of our synagogue/clergy if you wish one of them to officiate at a service or memorial, to ensure that there will be no scheduling conflicts.
 - There are several options regarding business arrangements.
 - **Prepay:** You have the opportunity to prepay the cost, which will freeze the current price.

- **Preplan:** All information is given so that survivors will not have to deal with the details at the difficult time right after death but no money is exchanged.
- The funeral home can also provide:
 - Printed directions for guests from service to cemetery
 - Shiva candle
 - Sign-in book for guests, so you can know who attended

After a Death Has Occurred

- **Contact NVHC Clergy**
 - Call the Temple Office 703-437-7733. During office hours someone will be able to immediately help you contact clergy.
 - After hours, you can follow prompts to get to clergy voice mails.
 - Temple members can also find clergy cell phone numbers in the Temple directory (<https://nvhc.shulcloud.com/member/directory>).
 - Alternatively, you can send an email to: Clergy@nvhcreston.org.
- **If you have already made funeral arrangements:**
 - Call the Funeral Home. They will arrange to pick up the body, prepare it for burial and transport it to the Temple and/or cemetery. Please inform the mortuary if the deceased is an organ donor, so that proper arrangements can be made.
 - Call the Cemetery. A family member or friend may need to go out to the cemetery to identify the gravesite to ensure that it is the correct one.
- **If you have not already made funeral arrangements,** use the resources in [Appendix B](#) to select a Funeral Home and Cemetery.

Appendix B – Useful Contacts

To Reach NVHC at a Time of Loss

703.437.7733

As soon as you learn of the death of a loved one, please call the temple office. During office hours someone will be able to immediately help you contact clergy. After hours, you can follow prompts to get to clergy voice mails.

Temple members can also find clergy cell phone numbers in the Temple directory (<https://nvhc.shulcloud.com/member/directory>).

Alternatively, you can send an email to: Clergy@nvhcreston.org.

Local Funeral Home – NVHC Recommended

Northern Virginia Jewish Funerals 8453 D Tyco Road Vienna, Virginia 22182 571-586-2017 https://www.northernvirginiajewishfunerals.com/ Prices see: https://www.jewishfuneralsdc.org/northern-virginia-jewish-funerals	Ellen MacDonald, Community Liaison EMacDonald@jewishfuneralsusa.com 571-586-2017 Lee Cohen, Community Liaison LCohen@jewishfuneralsusa.com 201-264-5633 (Cell)
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Jewish Funeral Practices Board (JFPB) of Greater Washington has negotiated a set-fee for funeral home services for members of the Jewish community in the Greater Washington, D.C. area. You may contact the JFPB at (410) 733-3700 or see its website (<https://www.jewishfuneralsdc.org/>) for listings of funeral contracts. To receive this pre-negotiated fee arrangement, you may contact the **Northern Virginia Jewish Funerals Home** in Tysons, **Cunningham Turch** in Alexandria or the **Hines-Rinaldi Funeral home** in Maryland to speak with a funeral director about arrangements, according to the JFPB Contract.

Other Funeral Homes in the Area

Adams-Green Funeral Home

Herndon, Virginia

(703) 437-1764

Kathryn Parr Adams, Owner

kathryn@adamsgreen.com

<https://www.adamsgreen.com/>

Jefferson Funeral Chapel

5755 Castlewellan Drive

Alexandria, VA 22315

(703) 971-7400

<https://www.jeffersonfuneralchapel.com>

Torchinsky Funeral Home

Washington, D.C.

(202) 541-1001

<https://www.torchinsky.com/>

Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Home

Rockville, Maryland

(301) 340-1400

<https://www.sagelbloomfield.com>

Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home*

11800 New Hampshire Ave

Silver Spring, MD 20904

(301) 622-2290

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/funeral-homes/maryland/silver-spring/hines-rinaldi-funeral-home/9738>

Cunningham Turch*

811 Cameron St

Alexandria, VA 22314

703-549-1800

cunninghamfh@gmail.com

<https://www.cunninghamfuneralhome.net/>

Hebrew Free Burial Society

5300 Southern Avenue

Capital Heights, MD 20783

Phil Goldman – 301-762-2825 or 240-481-9242

<https://www.chesedshelemesaid.org/hebrew-free-burial.html>

The Hebrew Free Burial Society provides free funeral service and burial at the Chesed Shel Emes Cemetery for indigent Jews. Applicants require a reference by any one of the Orthodox Rabbinical leaders in the Greater Washington area. Contact NVHC Clergy for assistance.

*Jewish Funeral Practices Board of Greater Washington has negotiated a set-fee for funeral home services for members of the Jewish community in the Greater Washington, D.C. area

Local Jewish Cemeteries

King David Memorial Gardens

Falls Church, Virginia

(703) 560-4400

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/funeral-homes/virginia/falls-church/national-funeral-home/4927>

Note: Only Jews can be buried at King David. There may be some near-by or adjacent plots for non-Jews to be buried near-by to a Jewish family member interred at King David.

Garden of Remembrance

Clarksburg, MD

(301) 428-3000

<https://gardenofremembrance.org/>

Note: Burial at Garden of Remembrance is available for Jews, as well as their non-Jewish parents, siblings and spouses.

Judean Memorial Gardens

Olney, Maryland

(301) 384-1000

<https://www.judeangardens.com/>

Local Non-Denomination Cemeteries

Chestnut Grove (municipal)

831 Dranesville Road, Herndon, Va

(703) 435-3480

chestnutgrove@herndon-va.gov

<https://www.herndon-va.gov/departments/chestnut-grove-cemetery>

Note: Not a Jewish Cemetery but they do intern Jews. There is no separate section for Jews.

Fairfax Memorial Park

9900 Braddock Road, Fairfax, VA 22032

(703) 323-5202

<https://www.fmpark.com/fairfax/memorial-park>

Note: Not a Jewish Cemetery but they do intern Jews. There is no separate section for Jews.

Appendix C: For Further Reading

Books:

- **Jewish Book of Living and Dying*, Lewis D. Solomon
- **Grief in Our Seasons: A Mourner's Kaddish Companion*, Kerry Olitzky
- **Mishkan T'filah – For The House of Mourning*, CCAR Press
- **What Happens After I Die? Jewish Views of Life After Death*, Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme
- *Being Mortal*, Atul Gawunde
- **How to Say it When You Don't Know What to Say: Right Words for Difficult Times*, Robbie Kaplan
- **Jewish Mourner's Book of Why*, Alfred J. Kolatch
- **When Mourning Comes: A Book of Comfort for the Grieving*, William B. Silverman, Kenneth Cinnamon
- **Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing*, Anne Brener
- *A Jewish Mourner's Handbook*, Ronald Isaacs and Kerry M. Olitzky
- *The Bereaved Parents' Survival Guide*, Juliet Cassuto Rothman
- *On Death and Dying*, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
- *The Kaddish Minyan*, Herbert A. Yoskowitz
- *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, Maurice Lamm
- *Making Loss Matter: Creating Meaning in Difficult Times*, David Wolpe and Mitch Albom
- *Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss*, Nina Beth Cardin

Additional Resources for the Children:

- **A Candle For Grandpa: a Guide to the Jewish Funeral for Children and Parents*, David Techner
- **Daddy's Chair*, Sandy Lanton
- **The Remembering Box*, Eth Clifford
- **Lifetimes: Beautiful Ways to Explain Life and Death to Children*, Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen
- **Where Do People Go When They Die?*, Mindy Avra Portnoy
- *When A Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Remembering Workbook*, Nechama Liss-Levinson [Clergy have copies of this book]
- **What Does Being Jewish Mean? Read-Aloud Responses to Questions Jewish Children Ask*, E. B. Freedman

*These resources can be found in the NVHC library. For a complete catalog of the NVHC lending library see: <https://www.libib.com/u/nvhc-reston>

Web Resources:

- Center for Jewish End of Life Care - <http://www.centerforjewishendoflifecare.org>
- Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington - <https://www.jewishfuneralsdc.org/resources>