

THE
SINAI TEMPLE
GUIDE TO

Traditional Jewish FUNERAL PRACTICES



SINAI TEMPLE



MEMORIAL PARKS AND MORTUARIES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Dignity, respect and simplicity are the Jewish fundamental principles related to care of the deceased and are evident in every aspect of Mount Sinai's services. When a loved one dies, Jewish tradition suggests a course of action shaped by one fundamental insight: human beings are sacred and must be cared for accordingly. When a soul departs, the laws and customs of Jewish burial are dictated by "*K'vod hamet*" (respect for the deceased), with rituals related to the washing, dressing, caring for and guarding of the body. These rituals lead up to the funeral and are sacred rites that instill, with dignity, a profound respect for the deceased.

Traditional Jewish funerals are marked by simplicity. Out of respect to the departed, family and visitors express restraint in their dress and behavior. Traditional Jewish practice avoids both embalming and public viewing, and interment takes place as soon as possible after the death, while still providing time for distant relatives to arrive.

The ritual commandments for the preparation of the body and burial are highly valued *mitzvot* (good deeds). Mount Sinai employees or members of traditional burial societies (in Hebrew called a *chevra kadisha*), who are often members of synagogue-based groups, take responsibility for the ritual bathing and dressing of the deceased. Mount Sinai offers the facilities and personnel for preparing the body for burial as well as interment.

ANINUT

THE TIME BETWEEN DEATH AND BURIAL



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

Tahara Preparation

This ritual preparation, or purification, is a centuries-old detailed procedure which honors the deceased by carefully preparing the body for burial. Psalms and prayers are recited as the deceased is bathed in warm water and purified for its return to the Eternal.

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

Mount Sinai Chapel Prayer Book,
Mount Sinai Seven Day Shiva Candle



Sh'mirah Guardianship

The practice of Sh'mirah (guardianship) highlights the respect that Jewish tradition accords the deceased. A *Shomer* is a guardian who stays with the deceased at all times prior to burial, ensuring that the deceased is never left alone. While guarding the deceased, the *Shomer* recites from the Book of Psalms, readings from the Book of Lamentations, or engages in other study. A family member, friend, fellow congregant, or an individual designated by Mount Sinai may serve as the *Shomer*.



Tachrichim Burial Garments

Tachrichim Burial Garments

The rabbis of the Talmud objected to differences between burial rituals for rich and poor, and to preserve equality, evolved the tradition of using *Tachrichim*, simple white linen or cotton shrouds, as burial garments. The deceased's *Tallit* with the fringes cut may also be included in the casket.

Aron / The Casket

The biblical teaching, "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19), calls for caskets to be made entirely of wood. A traditional Jewish casket is constructed using dowels, pegs and glues instead of metal nails and hinges.

Wood is a product of the earth, and as a part of nature, promotes the quick and natural return of the body to the earth. To add warmth, beauty and a sense of timelessness to the service, caskets may be constructed from pine, mahogany, walnut, or cherry and often incorporate Jewish symbols, such as a Star of David.

Earth from Jerusalem is placed under the head to symbolize our shared longing to dwell in Israel.

LEVAYA - THE FUNERAL SERVICE



The traditional Jewish funeral service is brief and provides comfort by creating time and space for the mourners and community to recall memories of the deceased. The service



K'riah Ribbon

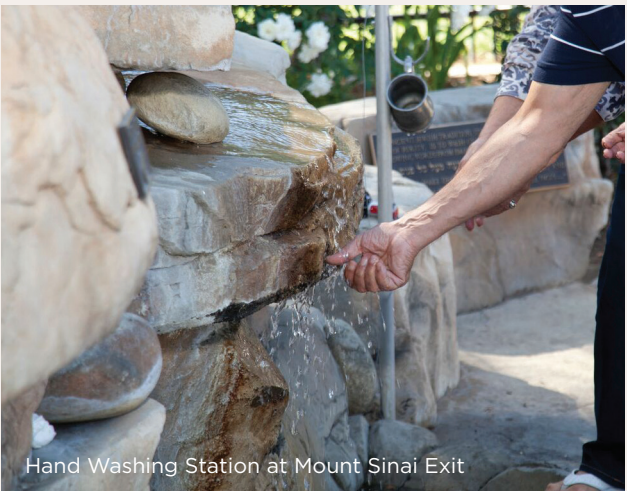
may be held in a chapel, in the synagogue or at graveside.

Before the funeral, those grieving for a parent, spouse, child, or sibling participate in the rite of *K'riah* (rending of the outer garments) to symbolize

the expression of grief and that a part of one's soul has been torn away. *K'riah* is expressed by tearing the outer clothes or tearing a ribbon which is affixed to the clothes. This torn garment or ribbon is worn at the funeral, burial, and throughout the seven-day (*Shiva*) mourning period.

The basic elements of a traditional Jewish funeral service include the chanting of Psalms and the recitation of a *hesped*, a eulogy honoring the deceased, followed by the *Eil Malei Rachamim* prayer.

At the end of the service, typically at the gravesite, mourners recite either the special *Kaddish* recited at graveside or the Mourner's



Hand Washing Station at Mount Sinai Exit

Kaddish. The casket is lowered and mourners and all attending take turns shoveling three quantities of earth onto the casket as a way of physically parting from the deceased.

The recessional from the gravesite focuses on comforting the mourners. Service attendees form two lines, leaving an aisle through which the mourners pass, while reciting “May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem” so that the mourners feel embraced by their community. It is a tradition for everyone to wash their hands when leaving the cemetery or prior to entering the house of mourning as a symbol of spiritual cleansing.

AVELUT MOURNING



After leaving the gravesite, the seven-day period of mourning (*Shiva*) begins. Mourners are served the *Se'udat Havra'ah* (traditional meal of condolence) in their home, and they each light a seven day candle. During *Shiva*, friends take on the responsibilities of preparing meals for the family and handling everyday tasks (e.g., carpools for the children) to allow mourners to focus on their loss. For seven days, morning and evening worship services are held in the home, and on the last morning of *Shiva*, the mourners are accompanied for a walk around the block as a symbol that they are returning to normal life.

Mourners continue to say *Kaddish* for a deceased spouse, sibling, or child each morning and evening for thirty days after the funeral (the *Shloshim* period) and for eleven months for a parent to fulfill the

commandment of honoring one's parents. Male mourners traditionally do not shave and mourners do not attend celebrations during *Shloshim*, however, other normal activities are resumed.

After the *Shloshim* period ends, a Mount Sinai representative will contact the family about designing a Memorial Tablet (a *Matzevah*) as a permanent symbol of remembrance.

The anniversary of the death (*Yahrzeit*) is observed each year on either the Hebrew or the English calendar date by lighting a 24 hour *Yahrzeit* candle. Mount Sinai can provide you with a list of future Hebrew *Yahrzeit* dates or you can visit www.digital-yahrzeit.com to receive annual reminders of the upcoming *Yahrzeit* via email.

Yizkor (the special memorial prayer for the departed) is recited in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, the seventh day of *Pesach*, and the second day of *Shavuot*. Many people light *Yahrzeit* candles in their homes on these days as well.

It is also customary to visit the graves of parents and loved ones during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – a tradition known as *Kever Avot*. Each year Mount Sinai hosts community *Kever Avot* services where thousands of people gather to pray together, support one another and honor the memory of those who have passed.

Placing stones on a grave is an ancient Jewish tradition which signifies that someone has recently visited the grave. Stones symbolize permanence of memory and enable visitors to partake in the *mitzvah* of commemorating the





deceased. Mount Sinai offers all visitors packets of pebbles, which are Imported from Jerusalem, to leave on the grave as a sign of their visit.

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



A GLOSSARY OF TRADITIONAL TERMS

Aninut: Time period from death to burial.

Avelut: Hebrew for mourning.

Aron: Casket carrying the physical remains.

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

Hesped: Eulogy of tribute to the deceased.

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

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

K'vod Hamet: Respect for the deceased.

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

Kever Avot: The tradition of visiting the graves of parents and loved ones between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Levayah: Hebrew for the funeral service.

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

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

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

Shloshim: The thirty days after the burial, including the intense mourning period of the first seven days (*Shiva*) and the less intense mourning practices of the remainder of the month.

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

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

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

Tallit: The fringed shawl traditionally worn during morning prayers on weekdays, Shabbat and during the Jewish holidays. Today many people wish to be wrapped in a Tallit for burial.

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

Tzedakah: Charitable acts in memory of the deceased.

Yahrzeit: The Hebrew anniversary of the death when families light a memorial candle which remains lit for 24 hours.

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

**For immediate assistance or
general information, please
contact Mount Sinai Memorial
Parks and Mortuaries at
(800) 600-0076.**

**For Rabbinic assistance or to
notify the Sinai Temple Chevra
Kadisha, please call the temple
at 310-474-1518.**



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A Jewish Family Tradition®

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as a service of Sinai Temple of Los Angeles*