

► WHEN A JEW DIES

Death is considered a passageway between this temporal world and **Olam Ha-Ba**, the **World to Come**. At the time of death, the soul that brought the body to life at birth is returned to God, Who gave it. The body is returned to the earth, but in the World to Come, the soul never dies. The Torah speaks to all when it says:

...Dust you are and to dust you shall return.
-Parshat Bereshit, Genesis 3:19

...And the spirit returns to God Who gave it.
-Ecclesiastes 12:7

Everything the Jew does in the world is in preparation for **Olam Ha-Ba**. Every *mitzvah* has its own reward, and sometimes the *mitzvah* that seems the least important, in fact, merits the greatest reward. Everybody will die - the most saintly and the most evil - and judgment will be rendered at the time of death.

Jews believe in the intrinsic goodness and mercy of God, and, therefore, they should face death without fear of eternal punishment. According to the Talmud, *Masechet Berachot 17a*, the righteous will dwell in **Olam Ha-Ba**, where they will sit with crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence. In **Olam Ha-Ba**, neither food, nor drink, nor procreation will be necessary. There will be no need to conduct business, and jealousy, hatred and competition will be unknown. The World to Come is also referred to as **Gan Eden**, the Garden of Eden.

► DEALING WITH ILLNESS

Judaism offers many approaches for dealing with illness. As we will discuss, they are all interwoven in the fabric of religious life. All of them provide emotional and spiritual relief, not only to the ill person, but to the family and community as well.

Every day, except on the Shabbath and festivals, we recite the nineteen blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. Blessing (8) asks God to mercifully restore the sick to health.

Heal us, Lord, and we will be healed; save us and we will be saved, for You are our praise. Grant complete recovery from all our ailments, for You are the faithful and compassionate God, King and Healer.

Blessed are You, Lord, Who heals the sick among His people Israel.

It is customary to insert the names of sick family members and friends that we wish to pray for in this *berachah*.

We also remember the sick during *Kriat Ha-Torah*. Immediately after an aliyah, a *Mi She'Berach* is offered for the well-being of the honoree. It is customary at that time to also recite a special *Mi She'Berach* for the sick in his family, if he so requests. Recited by the *ba'al korei* on behalf of the petitioner, it is a variation of the blessing for the honouree himself.

A Mi She'Berach for the sick

May He Who blessed our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Salomon, may He heal the sick person (Hebrew name of patient) son/daughter of (Hebrew name of patient's mother).
May the Holy One, blessed be He, mercifully and speedily restore him/her to perfect health of the body and the spirit

A Jew is given a Hebrew name at birth (or upon adoption or conversion) and is always known thereafter as the son/daughter of the father. This is the only name that is used in all religious documents or in conversion or adoption records. However, at the time of illness, a Jew is referred to as the son/daughter of the mother.

There are other traditions associated with serious illness. An additional Hebrew or Yiddish name, usually one connoting long life or blessing, may be given to the sick person. For example, the following names may be added, to avert the severe decree.

• For Males

NAME	MEANING
Chayim→	life
Alter→	old (Yiddish)
Raphael→	God heals
Azriel→	God is my help

• For Females

NAME	MEANING
Chavah→	life
Chayah→	life
Berachah→	blessing

Often, a call will go out in the community when someone is critically ill, and, in response, people undertake to recite the entire book of Psalms over and over, until the crisis passes. The text usually divided up so that someone is always saying Psalms throughout the day.

Psalms 20, 27, 30, 41, and 102, among others, are specifically for healing and may be recited when someone is undergoing surgery or other serious treatments. They may be recited by others in behalf of the patient or personally by the individual who is ill. Sometimes particular Psalms are chosen because together the first letters spell out the patient's Hebrew name.

It is also customary to recite prayers of repentance and to donate to charity in the hope of a recovery, for repentance, prayer, and charity can cancel the decree of heaven. Some people even commission the writing of a *Sefer Torah*, an exceptional *mitzvah* that few have the opportunity to fulfil.

People often ask travellers to carry prayers written on small pieces of paper to Israel and insert them in the cracks of the *Kotel*. This tradition of offering prayers at the Western Wall dates back to antiquity, but modern technology - via the Internet - has made possible to have prayers recited there without leaving home.

God is called the Healer of the Sick, and His miracles can bring about the recovery that is out of reach to mere humans. It is, therefore, always appropriate to wish a sick person ***refuan sh'leimah bi'm'heirah, a complete and speedy recovery***, no matter how dire the circumstances appear.

Sometimes ordinary human beings, including doctors and nurses, serve as agents of God in the healing process. The *mitzvah* of visiting the sick provides us with the opportunity to bring a brief respite from pain or to lift the patient's spirits, all of which can contribute to healing.

Even using the expression "God bless you" when someone sneezes has biblical origins. According to the midrashic teaching of *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 52*, in the days of the patriarchs, there was no such thing as illness before death. Instead, a person would sneeze and the soul would depart.

Jacob prayed and asked God to grant people a short period of illness before death. Accordingly, it became customary to say "*God bless you*", and to wish others "*good health*" or "*long life*" when they sneeze.

► THE RITUAL OF DYING

There are many *halachot* and rituals associated with dying and death. These end-of-life traditions resonate with the same intent to perform acts of kindness and charity that mark the entire Jewish life cycle, and their purpose is to protect the dignity of the deceased and console the grieving.

According to the Talmud, *Masechet Shabbat 32a*, when death is thought to be near, it is proper to encourage the patient to recite the **Confession on the Death Bed** and to assist in making this final declaration of faith. For fear that this may frighten the patient and hasten death, which is prohibited; it is permissible to remind the Jew that the recitation of the Confession does not mean death will occur immediately thereafter. Rather, the Confession is an opportunity to acknowledge God's divine judgment, perhaps, for the last time. If a patient is too ill to speak, the Confession should be said with one's mind and

heart, but if even this would be too emotionally taxing, a person should not be forced to confess, for in the *Mishnah*, we find the promise:

All Israel is guaranteed a portion in the World to Come. -*Sanhedrin 90:1*

The *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law (*Yoreh De'ah 338:2*), provides the minimum text for the Confession.

Confession on the Death Bed

I acknowledge before You, Lord, my God and God of my forefathers, that my recovery and my death are in Your hands.
May it be Your will to send me a complete recovery; but if I die, may my death be an atonement for all the sins, iniquities, and transgressions that I have [committed] before You.
May You grant my share in the Garden of Eden and find me worthy for the World to Come that is concealed for the righteous.

If possible, the **Viduy**, full confessional of *Yom Kippur*, may be recited as well. At the very end, those in the room should recite Psalms.

When a Jew dies, it becomes the duty of the community to assist in preparing the body of the deceased for burial. The **chesed shel emet**, *act of true loving-kindness*, is unlike other good deeds or favours, because it is a kindness that the recipient can never repay.

Upon hearing of a death, all Jews pronounce the blessing

Blessed is the true judge

referring, of course, to God. Among family members, seven close relatives are considered mourners: the mother and father; the spouse; sisters and brothers; and sons and daughters. Between the time of notification of death and burial, each of these individuals is called an **onen**, and specific restrictions apply to them in regard to the performance of certain *mitzvot*. A qualified rabbi should be consulted. After the funeral, each mourner is called an **avel**. Each of them is obligated to rend his or her garment upon stand and recite the following blessing at the time:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of Universe, the true judge.

Upon hearing of the death of a parent, a child rends the garment on the left side, over the heart. All other mourners rend the garment on the right side. The popular custom of wearing a black ribbon, which is cut by the undertaker, does not fulfil the requirements of **k'riah**, tearing one's clothes, as sign of mourning. Rather, this practice makes a mockery of the rite which has been practiced by

the Jewish people since biblical times (*Parshat Vayeshev*, Genesis 37:34). Rending the garment is an emphatic and authentic expression of Jewish grief, and it should not be diminished by insignificant gestures. When a death occurs, the family of the deceased should call their rabbi, who will assist them in making the necessary arrangements. After the rabbi has been notified, the Jewish burial society and the Jewish funeral home should be contacted.

► REVERENCE FOR THE DEAD

The underlying theme of all the rituals of death is that God's judgment is righteous. Even in the bleakest of hours of grief, a Jew believes in His infinite wisdom and benevolence, recognizing the limitations of human beings to fathom the mysteries of God. Faith, *bitachon*, in the immortality of the soul, and the belief everything God does is for good, provide the support to accept His judgment and contribute to the consolation of the mourners. Everything is not given to humankind to understand, and the inability to always understand does not negate the commitment of faith.

In all aspects of ritual, the body of the deceased must be treated with reverence and honour. This is referred to as *kavod hamet*, honouring the dead. Except under unique circumstance, an autopsy is forbidden. This prohibition is based on the tradition of according the deepest respect to the deceased, a human being created in the image of God. A qualified rabbi should be consulted if an autopsy is requested by medical or legal agencies.

Many Jewish communities have a *Chevrah Kadisha*, a *Holy Society*, whose members are responsible for the sacred duties of preparing the body before the funeral and for assisting the family in making preparations for burial. The Torah specifically requires interment.

And you shall surely bury him the same day.
-Parshat Ki Tetzei, Deuteronomy 21:23

According to *halachah*, this means directly in the ground. Where local law and custom require the use of a coffin, it is permitted.

Often the *Chevrah Kadisha* owns land set aside for use as a cemetery.

Synagogues and benevolent organizations often maintain their own cemeteries for the benefit of their members. Families may purchase burial plots from the synagogue or organization, the *Chevra Kadisha*, or the cemetery itself.

Cremation is forbidden, even if it was the wish of the deceased, and embalming of the body is likewise prohibited.

The *Chevrah Kadisha* brings the body from the place of death to the funeral home where it will be ritually prepared for burial. A special room is equipped and set aside for this purpose in the funeral home and for this reason alone, a Jewish funeral should be used. There are two groups: the men's group prepares the body of a man; the women's group, that of a woman. This preparation is called *taharah*, ritual purification.

Those performing the *taharah* begin with the ritual washing of their own hands

three times. They then recite the following prayer.

God of kindness and mercy, Whose ways are merciful and truthful, You have commanded us to practice righteousness and truth with the dead and engage in properly burying them, as it is written, "And you shall surely bury him". May it, therefore, be Your will, Lord, our God, to properly perform our undertaking of this holy task of cleansing and washing the body, and putting on the shroud and burying the deceased.

Keep us from any harm or fault that we not fail in the work of our hands and grant the fulfilment of the verse regarding us: "He who observes the commandments shall never know any evil".

May our merit, in the performance of this work of loving-kindness, prolong our lives in happiness, and may the mercy of God rest on us forever.

In accordance with ritual law, the body is washed, cleansed, and dressed in simple with **tachrichin**, *burial shrouds made of linen*. The procedures for purification must be carried out with meticulous care and consideration, always remembering the nobility of the life just past. The shrouds consist of several garments, which are sewn by hand without hems, seams, pockets, or knots.

For a deceased man, the *tzitzit* of one corner of his *talit* is tied in a knot, and the *talit* is spread in the bottom of the coffin. Jewish tradition discourages the use of ornate coffins, and indication that in death all are equal. The **aron**, *casket*, should be made of wood, and wooden pegs are preferable to build and close the coffin. No fancy linings or pillows are permitted in the interior, and the practice of sending floral arrangements or covering the casket with flowers is inappropriate. It is preferable to make a donation to a charity in memory of the deceased instead. (In Israel, the body is placed in the ground without a casket, returning the body directly to the earth from which it came).

Once the *taharah* has been completed, the funeral can begin. From the time of death until the *taharah*, and from the *taharah* until the funeral, a **shomer**, or *guardian*, stays with the deceased as a sign of respect. It is customary for the shomer to recite **Tehilim**, *Psalms*, continuously until the funeral.

► THE FUNERAL

The Jewish funeral service is called **halvayat hamet**, accompanying the dead, or simply, **levayah**. A funeral should take place as soon as possible, even on the day of death if time permits; it should not, however, be held at night, when certain prayers are omitted.

In any case, it should not be unnecessarily delayed, unless a Sabbath or festival intervenes, or to wait for mourners to arrive from a distance. If delaying the funeral will permit the arrival of the deceased's son, who must recite the Mourner's **Kaddish**, then waiting is permitted. The funeral should never be held in the sanctuary of the synagogue, unless the deceased was revered Torah scholar.

In accordance with the traditions that require **kavod hamet**, the coffin should not be opened at any time after the **taharah** has been completed. It is not a Jewish practice to view the body-in fact, it is considered a sign of disrespect- nor is it appropriate for the mourners or those in attendance at the funeral to wear black clothing.

The service begins with the recitation of several Psalms. Most families ask their rabbi to then deliver a eulogy, usually a tribute to the memory of the deceased. It is certainly appropriate for a mourner, other members of the family, or friends of the deceased to speak as well.

When the funeral service in the chapel has ended, the mourners and others in attendance proceed to the cemetery for the burial. It is a **mitzvah** to accompany the funeral procession- this is the actual **mitzvah** of **halvayat hamet**- a distance of at least seven and a half feet. At the cemetery, those carrying the casket are required to make seven stops as they approach the grave. During each stop, Psalm 91 is recited by the officiant until the verse.

He will charge His angels for you, to protect you in all your ways.

In Hebrew, this verse contains seven words, and at each of the seven stops, an additional word is recited, until the last stop when the entire verse is said. The casket is then lowered into the grave, and the grave is filled and covered with a mound of earth. **Tziduk HaDin**, a prayer which marks the acceptance of God's judgment, is recited by mourners.

The **E-I Malei Rachamim**, a request that God grant complete and perfect rest to the soul, is recited and is followed by the **Burial Kaddish**, if a quorum of ten men is present. It is not traditional Jewish practice to merely cover the grave with a grass-like cloth and allow the gravediggers to fill in the grave with a bulldozer after every one has left. A Jew should be buried by other Jews. Those filling in the grave should not pass the shovel directly from one the other, but should put it down and let the next person pick it up.

On the days when **Tachanum**, Prayers of Supplication, are not recited, **Tziduk HaDin** is not recited either, since it is considered similar to a eulogy. Both **Tziduk HaDin** and the **Burial Kaddish** are omitted if the burial, of necessity, takes place at night.

The first section of the **Burial Kaddish** is unique. It speaks of the **Resurrection of the Dead** and the restoration of worship of the One God.

Recite the Burial Kaddish

Mourners:

Magnified and sanctified be His great Name...

All: Amen,

Mourners Continue:

...in the world which will be created anew, where
He will revive the dead and raise them up to

eternal life, rebuild the city of Jerusalem and establish His Temple... and where the Holy One, blessed is He, will reign in His sovereignty and glory, speedily, and let us say, "Amen".
All: Amen

The remaining verses are the same as those found in the other **Kaddish** prayers. After the **Burial Kaddish**, those in attendance then form two parallel lines and recite the following verse of consolation as the mourners, now called **avelim**, pass between them.

May the Omnipresent One comfort you among all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem.

It is customary for those in attendance to stop as they prepare to exit the cemetery and tear some grass from the earth and throw it behind them, saying:

He remembers that we are dust.

This is symbolic of the resurrection of the dead, who will rise from the earth, as it is written:

May they blossom forth from the city like the grass of the earth. -Psalms 72:16

Then, using a utensil to pour water (this is usually available at the cemetery or it may be prepared in advance at one's home and left outside the door), everyone is obligated to wash their hands (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 376, Paragraph 4*), saying:

The utensil should not be handed from one person to the next, but should be put down and picked up again, in turn. The prevailing custom is to not dry one's hands after washing.

After the funeral, the mourners are once again obligated to observe all **mitzvot**. They return home and partake of the **se'udat havra'ah**, the meal of condolence, which is customarily prepared by friends and neighbours and brought to the mourners' home. It is traditional to serve hard-boiled eggs, lentils, and other round foods, their shape representing the cycle of life. The meal should not be a social event where neighbours and friends gather to chatter idly and eat. It is a solemn occasion, and it should be conducted with dignity.

Special note: A **Kohen** is not permitted to come in contact with the dead, with the exception of those relatives of his immediate family for whom he would be obligated to mourn. For example, he should not

- ◆ enter the premises where a Jewish patient lies dying
 - ◆ enter the premises where the deceased lies before or during the funeral
 - ◆ approach within eight feet of any grave on the cemetery, even in a vehicle
- There are many other restrictions that apply to the Kohen, and a qualified rabbi

should be consulted.

► THE PERIOD OF MOURNING

There are many rituals associated with the mourning period. In the **Torah**, we find:

And Isaac was comforted [by Rebecca] for [the loss] of his mother. -Parshat Chayei Sarah, Genesis 24:67

and God Himself consoled Isaac after the death of his father Abraham, according to the **Talmud**, *Masechet Sotah 14a*.

When Jacob thought his son Joseph was dead, he

... rent his garments and put on sackcloth... and mourned... and his sons and daughters all arose to comfort him. - Parshat Vayeshev, Genesis 37:34-35

Years later, when Jacob died,

... Joseph fell upon his father's face and wept... and he mourned for his father seven days. -Parshat Vaychi, Genesis 50:1,10

We also find:

And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died;... and Children of Israel wept for Moses... thirty days; ... -Parshat V'zot HaBerachah, Deuteronomy 34:7,8

Thus, we see that the various customs of mourning and consolation date back thousands of years.

According to the **Talmud**, *Masechet Mo'ed Katan 27b*, there are three stages to the period of mourning, each observed with somewhat less intensity. As a practical matter, we consider them to be five distinct phases:

1. the period of the **onen**, between notification of the death and the funeral, when the **onen** is both exempted from the performance of certain **mitzvot** and restricted from participating in certain activities;
2. the first three days after the funeral, considered to be a period of most intense grief for an **avel**;
3. the seven-day period of **shivah** (from the Hebrew for *seven*), which includes the first three days;
4. **sh'loshim**, the first thirty days after burial; and
5. **yahrtzeit**, the observance of the first-year anniversary after the death, according to the Hebrew calendar.

The seven-day period immediately following burial is called **shivah**. For seven days, including the day of burial, if it is concluded before sundown, the mourners are obligated to sit **shivah**. A memorial candle that will burn for the

entire week is lit when **shivah** begins, a symbol of the departed soul.

Mourners are permitted to sit only on the floor or on low stools or benches during **shivah**, which is customarily observed in the home of the deceased. If that is not possible, mourners may sit separately in their own homes, designate one mourner's home as the **shivah house**, or return to their own homes at night and come back to the **shivah house** each morning.

The outer garment, which was torn upon notification of the death, is worn throughout the entire week. If it should be necessary to change the torn garment, the fresh garment must also be torn. Leather shoes are not worn during the period as an additional sign of mourning. Shaving, cutting the hair, and bathing for pleasure are prohibited, but one may wash parts of the body separately in cold water. Mourners refrain from marital relations during **shivah** as well. In the home, wherever mourners are present, all the mirrors are covered, so that the mourners will not see their own images.

During the **shivah**, relatives, who are not mourners and friends, come to offer consolation to the mourners on their loss. This **mitzvah** is called **nichum avelim**. Visitors should not come before the funeral, and according to one custom, not until after the third day of **shivah**, giving the mourners an opportunity to deal with their most profound sorrow in privacy. Visitors should not greet the mourners when they enter the **shivah house**, nor are they greeted by them.

It is appropriate to talk about the deceased during a condolence visit. Visitors must really let the mourners lead the way in terms of conversation, and should not prolong their visit in order to give others the opportunity to offer words of consolation as well.

Many friends bring prepared food for the mourners so that they do not have to bother with such preparations themselves during the **shivah**. The first meal, in particular, should be prepared by others and brought to the **shivah house** for the mourners.

Throughout the **shivah** period mourners may not go to work and should refrain from business matters by telephone or otherwise. They may not attend social events, communities, daily worship services are held in the **shivah house**. Mourners do not sit **shivah** on the Sabbath, but **shivah** resumes after the Sabbath. They may not study **Torah**, even on Sabbath, except for the **halachot** of mourning or the books of Job or Lamentations. There are special laws regarding the observance of **shivah** when a festival intervenes. A qualified rabbi should be consulted.

Visitors should not eat in the **shivah house**, nor take anything, including food, from the house of mourning, even if it is offered. At the conclusion of a condolence call, while the mourner is seated, the visitor expresses words of consolation, the same words offered at the cemetery after burial.

May the Omnipresent One comfort you among all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem

The fourth stage of mourning is the thirty-day period called **sh'loshim**, from the Hebrew for **thirty**. When the **shivah** period is over, mourners may return to work, but they continue to refrain from cutting their hair (and shaving) and attending festive occasions during the **sh'loshim**.

All mourners observe a minimal period of the **sh'loshim**, which includes the seven days of **shivah**, during which the **Mourner's Kaddish**, called **Kaddish Yatom**, is recited daily during services. The **Mourner's Kaddish** makes no reference at all to death or the sadness associated with the loss of a loved one.

Recite the Mourner's Kaddish

Mourners: Magnified and sanctified be His great Name...

All: Amen.

Mourners Continue: ...in the world which He has created according to His will; may He establish His kingdom, during your life and during your days, and during the life of ask the House of Israel, swiftly and soon, and say "Amen".

All: Amen.

All Continue: Let His great Name be blessed forever and ever and to all eternity-blessed...

Mourners Continue: Blessed and glorified, exalted, extolled, and honoured, magnified and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He,...

All: Blessed is He,...

The Mourner's Kaddish continues.

Mourners Continue:

...beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say: "Amen".

All: Amen.

Mourners Continue: May they have abundant peace, loving-kindness, mercy, long life, ample sustenance, and salvation from their Father Who is in heaven, and say "Amen".

All: Amen

The mourner then concludes the *Kaddish Yatom*.

Conclude the Recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish

Mourners Continue: May there be great peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel and say "Amen".

All: Amen.

Mourners Continue: He who makes peace to His celestial heights, may He make peace for us and for all Israel; and say "Amen".

All: Amen.

The **sh'loshim** marks the end of mourning period for all relatives except one's parents. A man may remarry after passage of the **Shalosh Regalim**, in any sequence, but if he has young children who need to be cared for, he may remarry after the **sh'loshim**. A woman does not have to wait for the passage of **three Pilgrimage Festivals** to remarry, but must wait at least three months. Only thirty days of mourning are required on the loss of a child or a sibling.

The fifth stage of mourning is the period of one year following death, when the soul of the deceased undergoes divine judgment. Mourners in the first eleven months after the death of a parent must recite the *Mourner's Kaddish* during services.

According to the **Mishnah**, *Masechet Eduyot 2:10*, a sinner is punished for twelve months. However, in the **Shulchan Aruch**, *Yoreh De'ah 376, Paragraph 4*, the Rema states that a righteous person is judged for only eleven. By reciting the *Mourner's Kaddish* for eleven months, the mourner sanctifies the memory of his parent whose upright soul was not required to be judged for a full year.

Throughout the twelve-month period, mourners continue to refrain from attending weddings, *Bar Mitzvah* celebrations, and other festive events. They should not listen to music, attend the theatre, or go to the movies. In all cases, a qualified rabbi should be consulted.

If there are no surviving children who are obligated to recite the **Mourner's Kaddish**, it is customary for other relatives to recite it or to engage the services of an observant Jew who will recite it in their place. Some **yeshivot** often arrange for the daily recitation of the **Mourner's Kaddish** in consideration of **tzedakah**, **charity**, donated to the school, inasmuch as they also conduct daily prayer services with a quorum.

Of course, each person's grief is measured not by the number of days required by Jewish law to mourn. It is simply that the **halachah** provides a framework so that the Jew does not mourn excessively and goes on with life.

Once the full year has passed, all restrictions are suspended for those mourning a parent. At the end of the first year and every year thereafter, all mourners observe the **yahrtzeit** (year's time) by reciting the **Mourner's Kaddish** on the anniversary of the Hebrew date of death.

A **yarhrzeit** may be observed for any relative, even someone other than one of the seven close relatives for whom mourning is required. Therefore, it is appropriate for grandchildren to observe the **yahrtzeit** of grandparents, for example, if no original mourners are still alive.

Some Jews observe the custom of fasting on the day of a **yahrzeit**, especially of a parent. On the eve of the **yahrzeit**, it is a custom for most Jews to light a **yahrzeit candle**, which will burn for at least twenty-four hours, symbolizing the light of the soul which was extinguished. This custom finds expression in

The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord. –*Proverbs 20:27*

Organizations which have made arrangements to recite the **Mourner's Kaddish** during the first year customarily send the mourners a yearly notice shortly before the **yahrzeit** will occur so that they can recite the **Mourner's Kaddish** themselves on that day.

► MARKING THE GRAVESITE

It is a religious obligation to erect a monument, an upright stone **matzevah**, at the gravesite by the time of the first **yahrzeit**. We find the earliest reference to this in the **Torah**.

And Jacob set up a pillar on her grave- the same pillar which as on Rachel's grave to this day. –*Parshat Vayishlach, Genesis 35:20*

In the **Talmud**, *Masechet Horayot 13b*, we find a reference to “inscriptions on the graves”, an indication that the practice of erecting monuments was well established by Talmudic times.

Placing the monument at the head of the grave is a religious obligation and an act of respect for the dead. It marks the grave as a sacred resting place, one that must not be desecrated. Standing as a testament to the life of the deceased, it symbolizes that the dead will not be forgotten. Marking the grave with a brass plate that lies flush with the ground is not an equivalent observance.

The inscription on the monument should include the full Hebrew name of the deceased and the Hebrew date of the dead, so that prayers on behalf of the deceased may be recited at the gravesite in the future and the **yahrzeit** can be observed on the correct date. It is also appropriate to include the name and date in English (or other familiar language) and expressions of praise and love.

The monument of a **Kohen** is often engraved with the symbol of two hands, fingers spread apart, as is customary for **Birkat Kohanim**. Other symbolic engravings include a flame or a candelabra, signifying the eternal spark of the soul; the **Torah**, especially for a revered sage; a sheaf of grain, symbolizing resurrection; a **shofar**, symbolizing the **Messiah**; and a broken branch, for someone who died young. In the Middle Ages, one's professional calling was often indicated on the tombstone: a pair of scissors for a tailor; a violin or harp for a musician; and a lion carrying a sword for a physician.

It is also customary to inscribe a Hebrew abbreviation at the bottom of the matzevah: "ת"נ"צ"ב"ה", which stand for five Hebrew words meaning *May his/her soul be bound up into the bonds of eternal life*.

The prevailing custom is to not erect the monument until twelve months have passed. By then, the soul's period of judgment has passed; the intense grief has diminished; there is no obligation to say the **Mourner's Kaddish** on a daily basis; and there is a greater likelihood that the memory of the deceased will begin to fade. However, it is permissible and even laudatory to erect the **matzevah** as soon as possible, even during **shivah**.

Once the monument has been erected, it is a tradition, but not a requirement, to unveil the **matzevah** in the presence of family and friends. A special service of unveiling is then conducted, usually by a rabbi. It begins with the recitation of Psalm 1, and may be followed by **Aishet Chayil**, Proverbs 31:10-31, for a wife and mother, another appropriate Psalms, such as 15 and 23. The rabbi usually offers a eulogy, recalling the highlights of the deceased's life. The memorial prayer for the soul of the departed, which was also offered at the funeral, is recited at the unveiling. It again requests that God grant complete perfect rest to the soul. The unveiling service concludes with the recitation of the **Mourner's Kaddish**, if a **minyan** is present.

Before leaving the unveiling, it is customary for each person to place a small pebble on the top the **matzevah**. One explanation for this suggest that this is done to assure **shalom bayit**, harmony in the family, as visitors see that the deceased is being remembered by others as well. It is also obligatory to wash one's hands before leaving the cemetery.

► VISITING THE CEMETERY

According to Talmudic sources, including **Masechet Sotah 34b** and **Masechet Ta'anit 16a**, it is an ancient custom to visit the graves of the departed to ask them to intercede on behalf of the living. It is appropriate to recite prayers at the gravesite, but it is not permissible to pray to the deceased. It is appropriate to leave a small stone on the **matzevah** after these visits as well.

Most often, visits to the cemetery are made on the **yahrzeit**, on **Tishah b'Av**, during the month of **Elul**, and during the **Aseret Y'mei T'shuvah**, especially on the eve of **Rosh HaShanah** and **Yom Kippur**. Special prayers are recited at the gravesite on a **yahrzeit**, before the **Yamim Nora'im**, and other specific occasions. All of these tefillot are poignant expressions of sorrow. They ask for God's mercy on the souls of the departed, so that their eternal rest will be in **Gan Eden**, where, according to the **Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 13:2**, God Himself will fete them, and fragrant breezes will perfume their heavenly abode.

While the wicked often seem to prosper in this world and righteous seem to suffer, in the World to Come, the righteous souls will achieve their ultimate reward- attainment of the concept of God, which is impossible on earth. Before leaving the cemetery, it is obligatory to wash one's hands.

► THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Resurrection of the Dead, **Techi'at HaMetim**, is a fundamental belief of Judaism. In the words of the **Prophets**, in the **Talmud**, and in the daily prayers,

Jews reaffirm their belief in the immortality of the soul and the restoration of the body. For example,

Behold! I will open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. -*Ezekiel 37:12*

May Your dead live, My corpses shall rise; awaken and sing, you who dwell in the dust. -*Isaiah 26:19*

In ***Birchot HaShachar***, every morning, Jews recite the following Talmudic passage as an expression of thanksgiving for the restoration of the soul after sleep. Ultimately, it refers to the Resurrection of the Dead. In the ***Talmud***, we find:

My god, the soul You placed within me is pure. You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me, You preserve it within me; You will take it from me, and restore it to me in Time to Come. As long as the soul is within me, I offer thanks before You, Lord my God and God of my forefathers, Master of all beings, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, Lord, Who restores the souls to the dead. -*Berachot 60b*

Techi'at HaMetim is associated with the coming of the ***Messiah***, the ***Mashiach***, who will herald the restoration of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The ***Mashiach*** will descend from the House of King David, according to the promise of the prophet.

[And God said] He [that is, Solomon, son of David] shall build a house for My Name, and I will establish a throne of his kingdom forever. -II Samuel 7:13

Originally the title ***Mashiach*** was bestowed on the anointed of Israel –the priests and kings. When David received this promise, the title of ***Masiach*** attained a special significance: the lineage of the House of David. The prophecy linked the anointed of Israel- that is, the one called ***Mashiach***- with the establishment of God's divine kingdom on earth.

According to the ***Rambam, Mishneh Torah***, Book of Judges, Laws of Kings 12:2, the Coming of the Messiah will be foreshadowed by the arrival of the prophet Elijah, who will proclaim world peace. The messianic age will be a time of universal peace and prosperity, and the very essence of nature's forces will be altered.

... a wolf shall lie down with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie down with a kid...
-*Isaiah 11:6-9*

Every generation has believed that the arrival of the ***Messiah*** was imminent. Some have been led to believe in false messiahs, the most notable, ***Shabbtai Tzvi***, in the seventeenth century, who was arrested and exiled.

To this day, Jews continue to proclaim the words of the ***Rambam***, in the ***Thirteen Articles of Faith***:

I believe with perfect faith in the Coming of the Messiah; and though he may tarry, in spite of this, I will await him until the day he comes.

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