



Temple Emanuel Funeral Guide by Rabbi Robert Goldstein

BASIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What do I do when someone in my family dies?

If your loved one dies at home, the doctor, nurse or medical examiner must "pronounce" the patient. In the hospital the attending physician takes care of this. The first call should be to immediate family. These calls are always difficult, but particularly so if the death is unexpected. The very next call should be to the Funeral Director. Hopefully you have given this some thought so you know whom to call.

The next call should be to the Rabbi. (S)He is available to help you, to offer support and counsel during these first, most traumatic moments after a death occurs. (S)He is experienced in this area and can often give you advice and answer any questions you may have. If you have not made any pre-arrangements, (s)he can guide you along the way. Additionally, the Rabbi must be consulted in order to schedule the service. Since Jewish funerals traditionally occur within two to three days after the death, it is important to determine the time of the funeral as quickly as possible so that newspapers, family and friends can be made aware of where and when the service will take place.

What if family members are far away? Can we hold the funeral until their return?

It is important that a family be together for the funeral. While Jewish tradition encourages a swift burial, we will make every effort to await the arrival of relatives who are traveling or who live far away.

Where does the funeral take place?

Members of Temple Emanuel of Andover and their families are encouraged to hold the funeral at the Temple. Smaller funerals generally take place in the chapel (seats about 75) and larger funerals take place in the sanctuary. The decision is made entirely based upon the number of people the family expects to attend. Non-members may use the Temple as well, although there is a modest charge. The Funeral Director will include the charge in his bill.

What about a graveside funeral?

Some families prefer a "graveside" funeral, where everything takes place at the cemetery. The funeral director can arrange for chairs and a tent if inclement weather. Graveside funerals tend to be quicker, with less time spent traveling between the temple and the cemetery.

What is the role of the Funeral Director?

From the moment you call the Funeral Director (s)he will take care of all details relating to the funeral. (S)He will arrange for the removal of the deceased from the place of death and the body will be brought to the funeral home for preparation. The Funeral Director will meet with the family that day (or in the case of

a night time death, the next day) to discuss information for the obituary. (S)He will also help you determine into which newspapers the obituary should go.

The Funeral Director will provide limousines to the service for the immediate family. (S)He will provide personnel to guide people who come to the service, the hearse that carries the casket and will make all the arrangements to have the grave opened at the cemetery. (S)He will also provide copies of the death certificate for legal purposes, as well as a mourning candle, mourning ribbons, a guest book and acknowledgement cards.

How do I know what to do when I meet with the Funeral Director?

The Funeral Director is required by law to clearly identify every cost. Most of what (s)he provides is pre-determined, although there may some variables.

Casket: Jewish law requires that the casket not be made with any metal parts. Metal is a symbol of war, which is inappropriate at the time of death. Also, since the Bible says "dust you are and to dust you will return" nothing should inhibit the natural decomposition of the casket. Jewish caskets are made of many different kinds of wood and are generally held together with pegs and glue. Jewish law also requires modesty in death; the simpler the casket the more in keeping with tradition. The Funeral Director will show you a range of caskets.

Shrouds: It is written that in ancient days, the wealthy were buried in their fine clothes, leaving the poor to be buried in rags. So as not to humiliate the poor, rabbis determined everyone should be buried in the same shrouds. Shrouds, known as "tachrichim", are made of linen and purposely contain no pockets, alluding to the fact that we come into life with nothing and we take nothing with us. Many people choose tachrichim, others prefer to have their deceased loved ones dressed in their own clothes. The decision is completely up to the family.

Embalming: Embalming, make-up, etc., are considered an insult to the deceased in Jewish Law. In rare instances where the death has taken place far from where the funeral will be, state law requires embalming in order to transport the body. Clearly, the laws of the state need to be respected in such circumstances.

Limousines: Immediate mourners, including the spouse, children and siblings of the deceased ride in the limousine. However, the final decision is entirely up to the family.

Are there additional costs?

Members of the temple are entitled to the use of the temple as well as the services of the rabbi and cantor at no cost. It is part of your privileges as dues paying members. Many times families wish to make a contribution to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund or the Cantor's Music Fund in appreciation of the clergies' support during their bereavement.

What about cemetery plots?

Many temple members choose to make use of the Temple Emanuel Cemetery on Mt. Vernon St. in South Lawrence. It is a beautiful, secure and well-maintained cemetery. The cost of plots is modest compared to other cemeteries and it is very convenient to Andover (in fact, while the entrance is in Lawrence, the cemetery itself is technically in Andover). Members of the congregation as well as non-members (at a higher price) can purchase plots in the cemetery. The cemetery's by-laws allow for the burial of non-Jewish spouses/partners, so long as there are no displays of the symbols of other faiths.

What about pallbearers?

Some families wish to ask close friends, grandchildren or other relatives to serve as pallbearers as a way of honoring the deceased. They can be men or women, Jew or non-Jew; however, they should not be direct mourners (spouse, child, sibling, parent). Sometimes the pallbearers actually carry the coffin from the hearse to the grave site. In other cases, pallbearers merely walk alongside the casket as it is wheeled

from the temple or funeral home. It is not necessary to have them. When you meet with the Funeral Director, let him or her know you have designated individuals to serve as pallbearers (usually 6-8 people). (S)He will ask them to identify themselves at the funeral, and they will sit in a designated place.

The Funeral

Depending on the location of the funeral (graveside, temple or funeral chapel) you will be picked up (or drive yourself) to the service. It is best if the family gathers at the location of the shiva and travels together from there, since they will all be returning to the shiva house immediately following the service. The family should arrive at least 45 minutes prior to the service. At the temple and at most funeral chapels, there is a room where people can come and express their sympathy to the mourners prior to the service. If a family does not wish to greet people, the Funeral Director will ask guests to go directly into the chapel.

The Black Ribbon (K'ria)

Prior to the service, the rabbi will perform k'ria. He or she will place a mourning ribbon on the lapel or blouse of the mourners. Jewish law describes "mourners" as immediate family: parent, child, spouse or sibling. Though many relatives and friends may experience profound grief, it is inappropriate for anyone else to wear a ribbon. The rabbi will say the dayan ha'emet prayer with you - it is a prayer that acknowledges death as a sad but very real part of our existence - and will then tear the ribbon.

The ribbon is traditionally worn during the period of shiva. Among very orthodox Jews, the cut is made to the clothing (a man's jacket lapel or tie, or a woman's blouse) and they wear the torn clothing for eleven months. Among liberal Jews, (Reform and most Conservative) the ribbon is worn only during the shiva at home or by some for the first thirty days of mourning (shloshim). When the ribbon is taken off (or lost), it should be discarded. It is not a sacred object. The mitzvah (religious commandment) is the cutting, not the wearing. Since it represents a moment of most profound sadness, it is not kept as a keepsake.

After the "rending" (tearing) of the ribbon the family will be escorted into the chapel/sanctuary by the funeral director. The Rabbi will then conduct the service which will include Psalms and other readings, primarily in English, with some Hebrew.

The Eulogy

Jewish tradition prescribes a eulogy (hesped in Hebrew), a tribute to the deceased, which the Rabbi generally delivers. Prior to the funeral, the Rabbi will speak to the family, gathering information for the eulogy.

Occasionally a family member or close friend will ask to say a few words. It is imperative that the remarks are prepared (written) so that if the speaker becomes overwhelmed with emotion, someone else can deliver them. Also, while Jewish tradition considers it an honor for the deceased to be eulogized, it is considered disrespectful for the eulogies to be too lengthy. The speaker must always remember, it is not about him/her it is about the deceased.

At the cemetery the casket will be carried (or rolled) from the hearse to the grave site.

The family and other mourners will be led to the grave. The Rabbi will say some brief prayers and then kaddish will be said. The Funeral Director will provide little cards or a booklet with the kaddish written in Hebrew and transliteration.

Following kaddish (in some cases before), the mourners will be asked to perform kevarah, placing dirt on the casket. The Jewish tradition teaches that this is the final acknowledgement that death has occurred. It is dramatic and painful, but psychologically sound. This is when the mourning process truly begins.

Kevarah is the last mitzvah, or commandment one can perform on behalf of the deceased. The deceased cannot rise up and thank us. We do it because it is the right thing to do.

It is a folk custom (surely not Jewish law) to use an upside down shovel (the convex side) showing our willingness to perform the mitzvah, and our reluctance at the same time.

No one will ever force you to perform kevurah if you do not wish to do it. Some people find the ritual very difficult; others find it cathartic and therapeutic.

Following the family's completion of kevurah, the Rabbi will ask the congregation to form two parallel lines through which the mourners will walk. These "lines of comfort" represent the community's desire to embrace and support the mourners at the time of their bereavement.

What about Shiva

The word shiva technically means seven. It was the tradition (and still is among orthodox Jews) to "sit" for a full seven days. Generally, more liberal Jews will remain at home for three days, including the day of the funeral. One does not sit on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays. The Rabbi will help you determine the length of shiva as well as the appropriateness of sitting on certain days.