

## ***Adat Shalom***

### ***Reconstructionist Congregation***

### **Guide to Jewish Funeral and Mourning Practices**

*"Even as I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." (Psalm 23)*

Shevat 5763 / January 2003

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### **Important Phone Numbers**

Adat Shalom.....(301) 767-3333

Administrative office..... ext. 106

Rabbi..... ext. 113

Cantor .....

In case of emergency .....

Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home....(301)622-2290\*

Jefferson Funeral Chapel.....(703)971-7400\*

\*Remember to inform the funeral home if you want to use the community funeral contract, which is explained on page 5.

## ***Advance Preparation***

### **Introduction**

Jewish tradition provides a rich variety of rituals and practices that honor the dead and allow mourners to adjust to the loss of a loved one. An important role of the Adat Shalom community is to assist members during these difficult life transitions, providing spiritual and emotional support. This pamphlet provides a brief description of traditional and contemporary Jewish ritual practices and explains the type of support provided by the clergy, Life Cycle Committee, and Congregation. It also includes information about services provided by the broader Jewish community, and specific information useful to someone who is faced with the death of a loved one.

The immediate burden of dealing with the death of a loved one can be greatly eased if basic decisions are made in advance and communicated to those who will need to carry them out. In Jewish tradition, burial occurs very shortly after death, allowing little time for deliberation. When death occurs, it comforts family members to know they are carrying out their loved one's desires.

It is helpful to make decisions about these subjects, and extremely important to communicate this information to family members before it seems necessary. Steps each individual should consider include the following:

### **List vital personal information**

It is useful to create a list that sets out information that family members would need in the event of sudden death. The list should describe any specific requests concerning funeral and burial arrangements, as well as the location of important documents, such as wills, ethical wills, and financial documents. There is a detailed listing of recommended information at the end of this pamphlet.

### **Decisions relating to death**

Many individuals describe their wishes concerning terminal illness through living wills and medical powers of attorney given to loved ones. It is extremely important that these desires be captured in legally binding documents and discussed with those who are expected to carry them out, to be certain they accept, are

comfortable with, and understand the role assigned to them.

## **Organ Donation**

One uniquely important decision relating to death is whether to offer to be an organ donor. As the slogan of the Washington Organ Transplant Consortium says, "Donate Your Organs -- Heaven Knows We Need Them Here On Earth!" Organ donation is among the truest ways in which we can live on after our own passing. Reconstructionists encourage organ donation as an ultimate example of saving a life – *pikuach nefesh*.

## **Burial Arrangements**

Individuals who have specific desires with respect to their funerals or traditional burial practices should communicate their wishes in advance. Similarly, decisions about where and by whom to be buried should be considered well in advance. For those members who desire burial plots, Adat Shalom has purchased a section in *Gan Zikaron* - Garden of Remembrance, a non-profit Jewish cemetery in Northern Montgomery County, on whose advisory council our members sit. Plots are available through the Synagogue office at a cost of \$1500 a plot, including perpetual care.

## **Funeral Arrangements**

Though there is no need to contact funeral homes before the death of a loved one, it is advisable to consider options ahead of time. Basic Jewish services can be obtained at reasonable rates through the community-wide contract negotiated by the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington. The Maryland funeral contract is with the Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home, located at 11800 New Hampshire

Avenue in Silver Spring, MD (301) 622-2290. The Virginia contract is with Jefferson Funeral Chapel located at 5755 Castlewellan Drive, Alexandria, VA (703) 971-7400. These contracts are subject to renegotiation periodically and the Adat Shalom office will have the details if there are changes in contract providers.

For approximately \$1500, this contract provides traditional Jewish funeral services including picking up the body in the metropolitan area, transporting it to the funeral home, preparing it for burial, providing a simple pine coffin, transportation to the funeral service and to the burial site. The contract also provides miscellaneous services, such as a death certificate. To use this contract, no action is necessary until death occurs. At this time, the mourner notifies one of the funeral homes mentioned above to request funeral services using the community wide contract. **The mourner must be sure to specify the community wide contract in order to benefit from contract rates and services.** Hines-Rinaldi also offers a burial plot as part of the contract funeral. If this plot is chosen, please be advised that with this option there is no choice regarding either the cemetery or the location, and no way to reserve adjacent future burial plots for other family members.

## ***From Death to the Funeral***

In Jewish tradition, the mourners are the parents, siblings, children, and spouse of the deceased. At Adat Shalom, the mourners often include other relatives. From the death until the burial - the period known as *aninut* -- their only obligation is to make arrangements for the funeral. Tradition recognizes the harried, confusing, shocking nature of this initial stage of grief by relieving mourners of all other regular responsibilities.

In some families, the question arises whether Jewish customs should be followed by non-Jews mourning Jews, or by Jews mourning non-Jews. This decision is an individual one. Individuals are encouraged to observe Jewish rituals for anyone for whom it seems appropriate, whenever the rituals are comforting.

Traditionally, a Jewish funeral service takes place within 24 hours of death. Reconstructionists and others believe the service can be delayed for several days, to allow for the attendance of close relatives and friends who may live far away. In order for the planning to be completed in a short period of time, the Life Cycle Committee has provided an outline of the steps that need to be taken.

**\*Immediately contact the Rabbi or Cantor** at the Synagogue office (301)767-3333 to let them know of the death and to discuss the funeral. The clergy will contact the Life Cycle Committee, or the mourner may call a Committee chairperson directly (see the committees list in the Membership Directory). The Committee will be in touch with the mourner shortly upon learning of the death.

**\*Contact the funeral home** (see above). Again, the Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home in Silver Spring is at (301) 622-2290; the Jefferson Funeral Chapel in Alexandria is at (703) 971-7400. Telephone numbers for other funeral homes can be found in the Yellow pages; information on the area's historically Jewish funeral homes (Danzansky-Goldberg, Ed Sagel, and Torchinsky) may also be found in the "Guide to Jewish Life in Washington", published by the Washington Jewish Week. Other funeral homes will not necessarily provide services for the same price as that negotiated by the Funeral Practices Committee.

**\*Notify family members** that the death has occurred. According to the tradition, all family members should be notified of the death regardless of any previous feelings

of anger or conflict between them and the mourner or the deceased. Though it is always a stressful time, the death of a loved one may also be the occasion for healing within the larger family or circle of friends.

**\*Meet with the Rabbi or Cantor** to make plans for the funeral, to agree on the time and place of funeral and burial, and to decide on the number, time and location of *shiva minyanim*. When these decisions have been made the Life Cycle Committee will communicate them to the Congregation using the list-serve. The mourner also might want to discuss the mourning rituals described below. If an autopsy has been requested, the mourner can discuss this with the clergy as well.

**\*Discuss traditional rituals** that the deceased requested or that you may wish to practice with a member of the Life Cycle Committee or the funeral home.

**Tahara:** A respectful washing of the body, accompanied by prayers, to honor the body as the vessel that held the spirit in life. As of Fall 2002, Adat Shalom provides this service only for women. In the future, we hope to create a men's *tahara* group. Men or women may have *tahara* performed by the community wide *tahara* group, which the funeral home can arrange. After the ritual of *tahara* is performed, the body is dressed in *tachrichim* (shrouds), and placed in the coffin, also called the *aron*. (see below):

**Shmira:** According to the tradition, the body is not left alone from death until burial. Adat Shalom provides *shomrim* (guards/watchers/accompaniers), to the extent possible. *Shomrim* watch over the body at the funeral home until burial; including during the night after staff leaves.

**Aron:** The traditional *aron* (coffin) should be simple, made of wood without nails or decoration. Such simplicity reflects the Jewish value that all are equal before death; it re-enforces Judaism's this-worldly emphasis, by not lavishing great resources on those who are deceased. Also, the human boy (adam) is closely related to the earth (adamah), and according to Genesis 2 we were taken from it -- so this tradition ensures the completion of the natural cycle, "from dust to dust".

**Note:** Jewish tradition does not permit embalming, the public display of the body, or cremation. Some individuals prefer cremation for ecological or philosophical reasons. Exceptions to these traditions - particularly when the express wishes of the deceased are contrary to them or when extenuating circumstances are involved - should be discussed with the clergy.

A full discussion of Jewish mourning customs, "Guide to Mourning Practice", by Rabbi Richard Hirsch, can be found in the book used for our shiva minyanim, "Prayers for a House of Mourning."

## ***Funeral Service and Burial***

The Service may be held in the synagogue, at the chapel of the funeral home, or at the graveside. In keeping with the idea that all are equal in death, the various elements of this ritual are usually quite simple. Graveside services are recommended for smaller groups, in predictably good weather. Usually, the funeral service is held at the synagogue or funeral home, followed by a funeral procession from there to the cemetery.

## **The Service**

Before the Service, mourners participate in the custom of *k'riah*, the Rending of Garments. In this ancient ritual, the officiant tears a black ribbon, symbolizing death rending the fabric of life. The mourners stand together signifying strength, and recite a prayer acknowledging the inevitability of death. With the exception of Shabbat, the ribbon may be worn for the next 30 days.

During the funeral service, the immediate family usually sits in the front row of the chapel, sanctuary or graveside. The traditional service includes the chanting of psalms, a eulogy honoring the deceased, and *El Malei Rachamim* (the traditional memorial prayer) asking for eternal peace for the deceased. Additional readings or musical offerings may also be appropriate. A family member, the clergy, or a friend of the deceased may give a eulogy, alone or in combination. Mourners are not expected to give the eulogy, but may do so if they desire.

At the funeral, the closed coffin remains in view, often covered with a special cloth called a *pall*. At the end of the service it is borne from the funeral to the hearse, and taken from the hearse to the gravesite by family or friends (pallbearers) selected by the mourners. Six pallbearers are usual; women and men, Jews and gentiles may all serve in this capacity, though immediate mourners generally do not. Honorary pallbearers may also be selected. Staff of the funeral home will assist with moving the coffin.

## **Burial**

The burial service - often an hour or so after the end of the funeral service, allowing for time to get to the cemetery - includes the repetition of the *El Malei Rachamim* prayer and the Mourner's *Kaddish*. The coffin

is lowered and mourners and others are encouraged to cover the coffin with earth, after it has been lowered into the grave. This is considered in our tradition to be a great act of *chesed*, of loving-kindness, as well as an important cathartic moment for the mourners. Mourners may leave the cemetery walking between two lines formed by family and friends offering support and comfort.

## Mourning

On returning from the cemetery, family and friends traditionally wash their hands before entering the house of mourning. This custom is an affirmation of life after the close contact with death. Also, a special *yahrzeit* candle, given by the funeral home, is lit, which burns for the next seven days. Usually relatives and friends will serve a meal of consolation to all who return from the cemetery with the mourners. Adat Shalom will contribute a fruit basket as a sign of the Congregation's participation in the mourning process. If further help is needed in coordinating this or other elements of the mourning process, let the clergy or the Life Cycle Committee know.

**Shiva:** The seven-day period of intense mourning observed by the immediate family of the deceased, beginning on the day of burial, is called *shiva*. During the time of *shiva*, mourners are encouraged to remain home and refrain from routine activities, so that friends and relatives can visit and offer support. Mourners can use this time to adjust to the death, and to think about what life now will be like. Many families do not observe *shiva* for the full week, or observe it to varying degrees. Depending on the mourners' preferences, *kaddish* is said daily in the home in the presence of a *minyán*. This provides an opportunity for members of the congregation to join the mourners in prayers, reminiscences, and in offering emotional support. The Adat Shalom Life Cycle

Committee will arrange evening *shiva minyanim* for the mourners for as many days as they would like.

There are numerous traditional customs associated with mourning, such as covering the mirrors in a house of mourning, having mourners sit on lower seats, not shaving or grooming oneself, and giving *tzedakah* (charity/righteousness) in honor of the deceased instead of flowers. In Reconstructionist practice, mourners make their own decisions about these and other customs.

While light food is usually provided for visitors during the *shiva*, families involved in mourning should not be concerned about hosting. Those who come will always bring sufficient food. The Life Cycle Committee will help with these arrangements also, and will publicize any particular *kashrut*, dietary, or other requirements. (Usually dairy/vegetarian food is brought)

*Shiva* is suspended for *Shabbat*, when mourners are encouraged to go to the synagogue to say *kaddish*. Because the death is considered a loss for the entire community, the deceased's name will be read by the rabbi or service leader shortly before the Mourner's *kaddish* on *Shabbat* morning. Major festivals traditionally interrupt *shiva*, often ending it early. Please consult with the clergy on this situation, as necessary.

At the end of the *shiva* it is customary for a friend or relative to walk those who are in mourning around the block to signify the end of this period.

If the death and burial occur out of town, congregants often hold *shiva* or "*post-shiva*" *minyanim* when they return home, to receive the emotional support provided by the Congregation. Please contact the Synagogue office or the Life Cycle Committee to arrange these *minyanim*.

**Shloshim:** The thirty days after the burial are called the *shloshim* period, when mourners return to work and normal activities, but refrain from public entertainment or socializing. The *kriah* ribbon is worn during this time. At the end of *shloshim*, there is an opportunity for another gathering of friends and family to commemorate this passage of time. At the gathering, the deceased is honored, often through sharing something that has been learned, especially for the occasion, from the *Mishnah* (A book of Rabbinic commentaries).

**Shnat ha-evel** (year of mourning): Traditionally, mourners who have lost a parent say *kaddish* daily for 11 months, whereas mourning for all other relatives ends with the *sholshim*. In modern practice, mourners may recite *kaddish* for 11 months for other immediate relatives as well. Of course, *kaddish* is just one way of remembering the deceased during this year. Consult with clergy to consider other appropriate ways. Many area synagogues offer daily *minyanim* at which you may recite *kaddish*. A convenient daily *minyan* may be found by consulting the Washington Jewish Week.

**Yahrzeit:** The anniversary of the death, rather than of the burial, is commemorated by saying *kaddish* in the synagogue and by lighting a *yahrzeit* candle at home. *Yahrzeit* candles burn for 24 hours and can be purchased in area supermarkets. On the *Shabbat* preceding the *yahrzeit*, the rabbi or service leader will read the name of the deceased from the *bimah*. It is common to "unveil" the grave marker, concurrent with the first *yahrzeit* (first anniversary of the death) a ceremony about which the clergy can provide more information.

## **Advance Preparation Checklist**

### **Important information**

Name

Full Hebrew name

Date of birth

Social Security Number (and location of the card)

Military Service, if any

Health and Accident Insurance Company

Life Insurance Co.

Insurance Agent's name  
phone no.:

Attorney's name  
Phone no.:

Organ donation desires

Location of Birth Certificate

Location of Marriage Certificate, other personal  
status documents

Bank Accounts: Location and Account Numbers

Location of safe deposit box

Location of Documents about Financial Assets

Location of Estate Planning Documents

Location of ethical will

Location of medical directive/s

Location of cemetery plot

Relatives and close friends who should be notified

## **Personal Preferences**

Funeral Service

Eulogies

Readings / Musical Offerings

Pallbearers

Casket (plain pine box preferred)

Tahara

Shomrim

Shiva minyan

Instructions for printing this document as a folded  
16-page pamphlet, using Word:

Click on File

Select Print

In the Page Range area, in the specific pages box,  
type – 8,9,6,11,4,13,2,15

Print

Take pages you just printed and place them back in  
the document feeder. You want to print the rest of  
the document on the other side of these pages.  
The proper “feed” may require some trial and error.  
On the printer used to originally print this document,  
the pages were placed “face up –bottom first” to  
achieve the correct printing on the reverse side.

Click on File

Select Print

In the Page Range area, in the specific pages box,  
type - 10,7,12,5,14,3,16,1

Print

Check to see if you have a pamphlet or four sheets of  
paper with text printed in the wrong direction and/or  
printed twice on one side.

You do not need to delete the instructions from the  
end of the document to print it as a pamphlet.