



known as a shomer (guard), remains with the body from the moment it reaches the funeral home until the funeral (including through Shabbat or holidays), reading from Psalms. Family members sometimes take on this responsibility.

## The Time of the Funeral

Traditionally, burial takes place within 24 hours of death. Rabbis and Jewish funeral homes are prepared for this. However, in setting the time of the funeral, consider:

- Availability of the clergy.
- Available times at the funeral home and cemetery.
- How soon the family can gather.
- Transfer of the deceased from local authorities.
- Transporting the body to another location.
- Personal preference: Remember that the family will likely return to the *shiva* home for the meal of condolence. If the funeral is on a weekday, friends will more likely attend at the lunch hour or in the late afternoon.

## The Funeral Service

The funeral service is an opportunity for the family and friends to draw comfort from prayer and reflections on the life of the deceased. It usually includes: greetings, readings, a eulogy or eulogies, and chanting the memorial prayer. In addition to clergy, family and friends increasingly participate by offering eulogies.

## The Burial

The Hebrew word for funeral is *levayah*, "accompanying." The presence of family and friends at the funeral is the most important way to honor the dead and comfort the mourner. A visible symbol of mourning is the *k'riah*, literally the tearing of an article of clothing or a symbolic black ribbon worn by mourners as a sign that the mourner's

heart is torn by the loss.

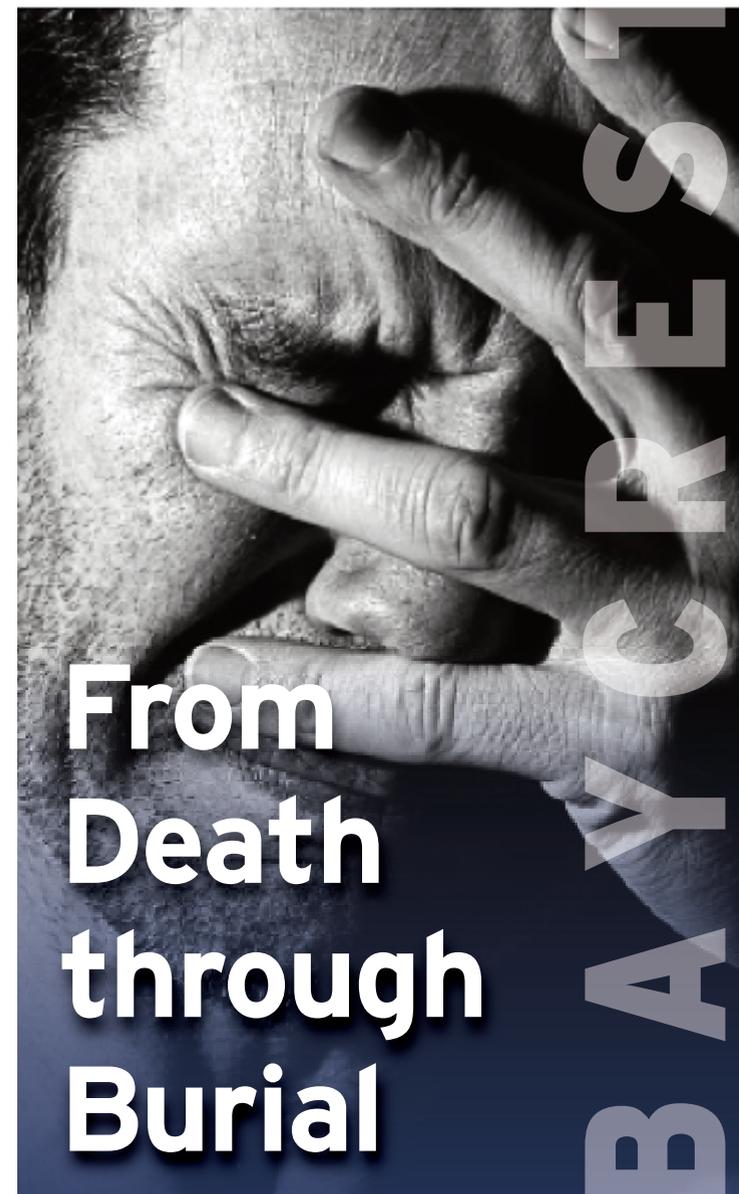
## The Qaddish

At graveside, the mourners recite the Mourner's *Qaddish*. Traditionally, there is a special *Qaddish* recited at the graveside, but the more familiar Mourner's *Qaddish* is commonly used instead. There is no mention of death in the prayer. Rather, it praises God. At the moment of this supreme test of our beliefs, the tradition asks us to stand and proclaim our faith in God.

## Concluding the Burial Service

In a traditional burial, the casket is lowered by hand or mechanical device. Mourners and all in attendance fill the grave with earth. Often this is observed symbolically by those who shovel some earth onto the casket. When the mourners leave the cemetery, the participants form two parallel rows, creating an aisle for the bereaved to pass through. As the mourners walk through this corridor of consolation, the community offers the traditional prayer of condolence: *Ha-Maqom y'naḥem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar aveilei Tzion v'Y'rushalayim*, "May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." It is customary to wash our hands upon arriving home from the cemetery.

May God grant consolation, strength and courage to those who mourn and restore them to a sense of life's goodness. Amen.



[www.baycrest.org](http://www.baycrest.org)



Adapted from "From Death through Shiva" by Dr. Ron Wolfson and used with permission from Jewish Lights Publishing.

Baycrest Health Sciences  
is fully affiliated with  
the University of Toronto



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

Baycrest





## We All Mourn

Sooner or later, we all mourn. The ancient Rabbis understood grief and how to heal it. Every law and custom has the core imperative to surround those who grieve with a supportive community.

## The Mourners According to Jewish Tradition

Judaism *obligates* us to mourn for seven relatives: mother, father, spouse, sister, brother, and son and daughter. There is no halakhic (legal) prohibition if someone wants to show respect for the deceased by joining in some of the bereavement practices. According to Jewish law, the seven relatives *must* observe the mourning rites, but others *may*.

## Grieving

Grieving is the way we mend broken hearts. Long ago the Talmud established six phases of mourning:

- *Aninut*: From the moment of death until the conclusion of the funeral.
- *Aveilut*: Seven days of *shiva*, beginning at the conclusion of the funeral (Day One) through the next six days, unless terminated early by a festival.
- *Shloshim* - Thirty days (for seven relatives): From the end of *shiva* (Day Seven) through thirty days from the day of burial.

- *Shanah*: From the day of burial through the eleventh month for parents.
- *Yahrtzeit*: Anniversary of the day of death.
- *Yizkor*: Memorial services annually in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur*, *Shemini Atzeret*, last day of *Passover*, *Shavuot*.

## Making Funeral Arrangements

Immediately after a death, if we belong to a congregation, we should call the synagogue. The clergy will explain the rituals and ask about the deceased in order to prepare the eulogy. Let clergy know if family members and/or friends want to participate in the service.

## The Funeral Home

After contacting the clergy, the mourning family should meet with funeral home staff to arrange for the funeral, if it was not preplanned. If it was, then notify the funeral home that the death occurred so they can put the arrangements into place.

## The Casket

Death is the great equalizer for all are equal in birth and death. Judaism teaches that the body returns to the earth as soon as possible, "for you are dust, and unto dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). The halakhic preference for a simple wooden casket (*aron*) reflects this value.

Traditionally, nothing is buried with the body in the casket except for some earth from Israel and the person's *tallit* (prayer shawl). However, some families add small mementos, such as photos or letters. Jewish tradition frowns upon cremation of the body, especially after the Holocaust.

## Preparing the Body: *Taharah* (Purification)

The notion of *kavod ha-meit* (honoring the dead) extends to preparation of the body for burial. This involves ritual cleansing of the body (*taharah*, purification) by the funeral home staff or by members of a synagogue's or Jewish community's *hevrah qadishah* - literally, the "holy friends" - who are trained in this ritual and perform it with love and devotion.

## Preparing the Body: *Takhrikhin* (Shrouds)

Jewish tradition stipulates dressing the deceased in plain linen shrouds for burial to demonstrate equality in death. The shrouds have no pockets. No matter how much or how little we have acquired, no one leaves this world with material possessions. However, some families prefer to have the body dressed in a suit or dress appropriate to the deceased.



## Embalming

Embalming replaces bodily fluids with chemicals in order to "preserve" the body. Embalming is anathema to traditional Jewish burial, which considers the return of the body to the "dust" a high priority.

## The Shomer

The body is the abode of the soul, and thus respected and guarded, even after the soul has departed. The person who guards the body,