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The staff of Kraft-Sussman Funeral Services is available to address your questions or concerns. Please contact us if we can assist you with an immediate need for services, locally or in another city; if you would like to discuss advance planning options or if we can assist you in any other way.



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Guide to Jewish Funeral & Mourning Practices in Southern Nevada

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This booklet is meant to help Jews and non-Jews alike gain a better understanding of Jewish funeral and mourning practices in Southern Nevada. It is not designed to be a comprehensive manual. Instead, it is intended to be a basic guide, providing information on the most common traditions and customs. We encourage you to seek additional and more comprehensive information from your rabbi or other religious sources. In addition, the staff of Kraft-Sussman Funeral Services are always available to assist you or direct you to additional resources for answers to questions you may have.

When a Death Occurs

Choice of Funeral Home

When a death occurs in Clark County, the family is asked by the healthcare facility or the coroner to choose a funeral home to handle the arrangements. If a funeral home is not immediately selected, the coroner or health care facility may ask the mortuary-on-call to pick up the

deceased. Even after the deceased is picked up by the mortuary-on-call, the family continues to have the option to select whichever funeral home they wish to coordinate the arrangements for their loved ones. Choosing a Jewish owned and operated funeral home who is a member of KAVOD, the Association of Independent Jewish Funeral Chapels, ensures that your arrangements are coordinated by members of the Jewish community who fully understand Jewish tradition.

Role of a Funeral Home

Representatives from your chosen funeral home pick up the deceased from the place of death or the mortuary-on-call, provide appropriate shelter of the deceased, provide a place where the deceased is prepared, prepare the deceased as directed by the family, secure all necessary permits, file for the death certificate, help write and submit an obituary, transport the deceased to the synagogue and/or cemetery for services and coordinate with the family, clergy, synagogue

In the event of my death, please notify:

Name	Address	Phone Number
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_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I wish to use _____ funeral home, located in _____.

My funeral should consist of the following:

Specify which casket: _____

I would like to have a tahara: yes no

If not, I would like to be buried in a shroud or _____

I have a prepaid funeral contract with _____
_____. A copy of my contract is located _____

I wish to be buried at _____ Cemetery,
located in _____

The deed to the cemetery is in the name of _____
_____ and the deed is located _____

I wish the following in regard to memorial donations: _____

Other wishes: _____

Planning Ahead

The time of death is a time of great stress. Decisions regarding funeral arrangements should be discussed when you are healthy and have ample time to make well-informed decisions. It is generally wise to involve your immediate family, your rabbi and a funeral director in your decision.

You may find it useful to complete the information below and have it available for your family in the time of need.

List first, middle and last name where applicable.

English Name: _____

Maiden Name: _____

Hebrew Name: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

City/State/Country of Birth: _____

Father's English Name: _____

Father's Hebrew Name: _____

Mother's English Name (Maiden): _____

Mother's Hebrew Name: _____

of Years of Education: _____

Degrees Earned: _____

Usual Occupation: _____

Industry: _____

If a Veteran

Branch of Service: _____

Dates of Service: _____

Location of DD214 discharge paper: _____

I would like the Honor Guard and Taps at my service?

Yes No

Location of other important papers: _____

staff and cemetery. If the deceased is to be transported to another city for burial, the funeral home will coordinate transportation to the other city as well as implement arrangements with the receiving funeral home and cemetery.

While a funeral director provides great guidance and support to the family, it always is recommended that the family contact their rabbi for additional guidance and support. If the family is not affiliated with a congregation, the funeral home provides information about rabbis who assist unaffiliated families with a funeral.

Cemetery Arrangements

There are seven options for consecrated Jewish cemetery space in southern Nevada. In addition, many Jews are buried in the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Boulder City. An independent Jewish funeral home is able to discuss options with you, enabling you to make the best choice for your family's needs.

Onen or Mourner

From the moment of death until the burial, an immediate relative is considered to be an onen. In Judaism, immediate relatives are traditionally those who have lost a parent, spouse, significant other, sibling, or child. We often grieve for others we have loved and need

to express our grief and caring for them. Some people wish to follow the traditional customs for other losses as well, such as a grandparent, an in-law or a close friend. The onen attends to the practical necessities of arranging for the funeral and has no other religious obligation. Once burial has occurred, the seven immediate relatives are considered mourners.

For friends of the onen, the period until the funeral is a particularly delicate time. Friends can help in many ways. A hug or helping gesture is usually appreciated, as is driving or accompanying your friend during the funeral arrangement session, taking care of children, picking up incoming family at the airport, or canceling appointments for the survivors or deceased. This is also a good time to begin arranging for food to be brought to the home, from now through the end of shiva, the initial 7 day mourning period.

Preparations for Burial

Shmira – As an act of respect, tradition encourages that we do not leave the deceased alone from the time of death until the burial. The practice of sitting with the deceased, *shmira*, may be performed by family, friends, or a paid shomer, which the funeral home can arrange. Usually the shomer sits with the deceased while reading from the Book of Job, Psalms or contemporary writings on spirituality or the subject of death.

Tabara – The tahara, performed by members of a Chevra Kadisha, Jewish Burial Society, is a gentle and respectful ritual honoring the body as the miraculous vessel that housed the soul in life. Care is taken to preserve the dignity and modesty of the met (body of the deceased). In addition to washing the body, the tahara involves reciting prayers while pouring water in a continuous flow, an act suggestive of the living waters of the mikveh (ritual bath) used by traditional Jews to honor occasions of transition.

After the body is cleansed and tahara is performed, the body is dressed in shrouds, tachrichim, made of white cotton or linen. Men are also buried with a tallit with the fringes cut, to show that it will no longer be used. Earth from Israel is sprinkled in the coffin as a way of connecting the deceased to the holy soil of Israel. Broken shards, symbolizing the fragility of life, are laid over the deceased's mouth and eyes.

The Casket – The *aron*, traditional Jewish casket, like the shrouds, are simple and unadorned, reflecting the Jewish belief that we are all equal in the face of death. The *aron* is made entirely of wood, without ornate carving, nails, or metal decoration.

Civil Issues

Autopsies – Tradition frowns on autopsies unless required by civil

law or for immediate medical benefit. Questions about autopsies should be referred to the rabbi.

Organ Donations – In keeping with the mitzvah of saving a life, organ donations for immediate use are encouraged. Specific questions about organ donations should be referred to the rabbi.

Embalming and Cremating – Traditionally, Jews return the body to the earth and allowed the body to decompose in a natural way.

Embalming is not required by civil law, except in rare circumstances. Both embalming and cremating are discouraged by Jewish law. Some of the reasons include:

- Jews show “kavod” (honor) for the body that housed the spirit and the breath of God and such practices could be considered desecration of the body.
- The practices originated as pagan ceremonies and are contrary to the belief of one God.
- Many Jews believe that the body is resurrected at the time of the Messiah
- Many Jews were burned to death over the centuries, during the Inquisition, in the pogroms and ghettos of Europe, and in Nazi ovens during the Holocaust therefore we should not willingly add to the number.

person is added. Many end with five Hebrew letters, which are an abbreviation for the phrase t’hee nishmato/nishmata tzrura b’tzor hechaim, “may his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life.” It is customary to put a pebble on the headstone when you visit to mark that you have been there and that you respect the one who has died.

- Dedication – The ceremony, not required by Jewish law, includes the recitation of a few psalms, the chanting of Eyl Malei Rachamim, the mourner’s kaddish, and a few words spoken about the deceased. It may be held any time after the thirty days from the day of the funeral. Family members themselves often conduct the simple dedication services. A funeral director or rabbi could help with this service, but it is not required.
- Synagogue Plaques – Many local synagogues have memorial areas in which you may purchase

a plaque with the name of your loved one. Each year, a light is lit next to the plaque during the month in which the *yahrzeit* falls.

- Tzedakah - There is a close connection between tzedakah (giving to charity) and the various mourning customs. You may give tzedakah at any point in the year of mourning as a tribute to the memory of the deceased. It is also customary at a *yahrzeit* to honor the memory of the deceased by giving tzedakah.
- Flowers - Traditionally, flowers are symbolic of rejoicing and, therefore, are discouraged at a funeral or house of mourning. If someone who does not know of this custom sends or brings flowers, it is important to be appreciative of the kind intention. You may keep them or you may wish to ask someone not in mourning to take them.



the spiritual and emotional aspects of loss. Mourners often sit on low stools, pillows or on the ground during shiva, as a sign of their physical and emotional state.

Many people worry about what they should say to a mourner. A visitor's job is to help make the mourner feel better. Often, a person in pain needs to talk, and needs someone to listen. Always let the mourner take the lead in the conversation.

Before leaving, it is customary for visitors to extend the traditional words of consolation to the mourners: Hamakom yenachem etchem b'toch she'ar aveilei tzion v'yerushalayim ("May God comfort you, together with all mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.")

Kaddish

An ancient prose poem, the kaddish praises God for life and anticipates peace on earth. It has five variations; one is the mourner's kaddish intended as a statement of faith at a time when we feel most threatened and fragmented. Mourners recite the kaddish throughout the mourning period.

Shloshim

The first thirty-day period of mourning after burial is called shloshim. Mourners recite the kaddish and refrain from public acts of joy. Children who have lost a parent continue to mourn for a year and

say kaddish for 11 months and one day. For all other mourners, the official mourning period ends at the conclusion of shloshim. During shloshim, a mourner refrains from getting married or attending festive events. In addition, men do not shave or get haircuts during Shloshim.

Yahrzeit

The anniversary of a death, *yahrzeit*, is observed each year by reciting kaddish at the synagogue, lighting a memorial lamp at home, and giving tzedakah (gifts of charity) in memory of the deceased.

Memorials

Jewish tradition provides several ways for memorializing the dead.

- ***Yizkor*** – Memorial prayers, *yizkor*, are recited as a congregation four times a year; on Yom Kippur and on the three major festivals, Shemini Atzeret, which comes at the end of Sukkot, the last day of Pesach, and the second day of Shavuot.
- ***Gravestones*** – Jewish law requires that a grave be marked, but neither the type of marker nor the inscription itself is specified. Cemeteries have varying requirements about size and placement of such markers. Inscriptions usually include the name of the deceased in Hebrew and in English as well as the date of birth and date of death. Sometimes other information is noted or a quotation about the

Some Jews, for a variety of reasons select cremation or embalming. These are very personal decisions and need to be treated with consideration and respect.

Funeral Service and Burial

When The Funeral Takes Place

The funeral, the act of burial, and the first recitation of the mourner's Kaddish, takes place by the grave (and on occasion at the funeral service before the burial). The mourner's Kaddish is of great value in beginning the mourning process. Long delays between death and burial put strain on the mourners, leaving them in emotional limbo. Every effort is made to expedite the burial. Delays, however, are permitted in order to honor the dead. For example, if we must wait for close relatives to come from out of town or for legal reasons. Funerals are not performed on Shabbat or some Jewish holidays.

Where The Funeral Service Takes Place

Jewish funeral services, which are characterized by simplicity and brevity, may be conducted at a funeral chapel or at the gravesite. In addition, members of many congregations have the privilege of a funeral service at the synagogue.

The Funeral Service

The mourners are seated at the front of the chapel, or in seats closest to the grave, at a graveside service.

Before the service begins, the mourners gather together with the rabbi to perform kriah, tearing a garment. Kriah is one of the most ancient traditions, tracing back to biblical times. Some mourners actually tear a garment; others tear a black ribbon that is attached to the mourner's garment. The tradition is to tear on the left (close to the heart) for parents and children and on the right for spouse and siblings. The torn ribbon or garment is worn through the shiva period, and some people wear it for a full 30 days (shloshim). During Kriah, mourners stand, signifying strength at the time of grief, and recite a prayer acknowledging the inevitability of death.

The service includes psalms and inspirational readings as well as a eulogy, *hesped*. "Eulogy" means "a good word." The eulogy need not be an entire biography of the person, but a way to convey some of the personality, accomplishments and character of the deceased. There is an emphasis on a person's virtues and the sense of loss experienced by the survivors. The service ends with the El Malei Rachamim prayer, "God Full of Compassion," which expresses the hope that the deceased will be granted

eternal peace. Specific readings or poems of meaning to the family may be added if desired. Traditionally the mourner's Kaddish is said during the service at the cemetery.

At the end of a chapel or synagogue service, the casket is moved to the funeral coach by pallbearers designated by the family. As a sign of respect, the casket precedes the mourners. Generally, mourners do not serve as pallbearers.

Viewing

Jewish tradition discourages viewing the deceased. It considers opening a casket prior to burial an intrusion of the deceased's privacy and, therefore, disrespectful. However, prior to closing the casket, some family members may want to see the deceased to help in facing the reality of death. In some cases this may be essential to a healthy grieving process, especially for relatives from far away who have not seen the deceased in a long time

Traditions Observed At Burial

After the casket is removed from the funeral coach, the pallbearers and rabbi, followed by the mourners, then others, walk to the grave. Traditionally, we stop the procession seven times to show how reluctant we are to make our final goodbye. At each stop, the Rabbi recites Psalm 91.

The burial service is simple, consisting of a psalm, the chanting of the Eyl Malei Rachamim prayer and the recitation of the kaddish. Traditionally, the casket is lowered and covered with earth before the mourners leave the cemetery. It is considered a mitzvah, obligation, for family and friends to place dirt into the grave, the last act we are able to perform on behalf of the deceased. The back of a shovel is used for this purpose, signifying that this use of the shovel is different from every other use. Normally, the rabbi begins, followed by the mourners, their family members and friends.

Traditionally, at the end of the service, mourners leave the cemetery walking between two lines formed by family and friends who offer comfort and support and recite the traditional condolence: "Hamakom y'nachem etchem b'toch sh'ar avilai tziyon ee yerushalayim." "May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." With the shift from honoring the dead to consoling the bereaved, the official mourning period begins.

Memorial Service

A memorial service is performed without the deceased present. A memorial service often takes place after a private burial ceremony, in cases of cremation, or if the person died or was buried in another location. A memorial service may be held in the synagogue, at a private home,

at the funeral home or in virtually any location where people gather. A funeral director may help with the coordination of a memorial service, but it is not required.

Mourning

Hand Washing

It is traditional to place a pitcher of water, a bowl and towels outside the door of the house. Before entering the home, mourners and those who have been to the cemetery customarily pour water on their hands as a symbolic act of purification.

Meal of Consolation

Immediately on returning from the cemetery, mourners are greeted with a "meal of consolation" prepared by their extended family and/or community. Mourners do not need to host or entertain people after the funeral. In fact, they should be served and supported during this time. Since eggs are one of the few substances that become harder when subjected to heat, hard boiled eggs are included as a symbol of strength.

Shiva

(Literally, seven) is a period of up to a week during which the mourners remain at home. During the shiva, a service is held daily (often in the evening) at the home, so that the mourners may recite the Kaddish. Mourners are encouraged to join the congregation on Shabbat to say Kaddish. The tradition is that the

mourner's Kaddish is said in the presence of a minyan, to insure that mourners do not grieve in isolation but are surrounded by members of their community.

Friends, relatives, and community members visit and bring food for the household. It is traditional to include round foods (hard-boiled eggs, lentils, bagels, etc.) that are symbolic of the wholeness of life. In some instances, especially in Las Vegas, where there may be very few or no family members, the role of the community becomes central. People are needed to attend minyanim, bring meals, help with dishes and other housework and help with childcare and/or pet care.

A special candle is lit in the shiva home that burns for the full seven days. This candle is provided by the Jewish funeral home. The wick of the candle represents the body, while the flame represents the soul. The flame, like the soul, is always reaching higher and higher.

The shiva period gives the mourners time to withdraw from the busyness of the world and begin to integrate and accept their loss. Our tradition emphasizes focusing on memory and items of emotional significance, and relieves the mourner from focusing on the external world. Therefore there are traditions that the mourner cover mirrors and does not need to bathe, shave, change clothes, or use makeup. The practices aim to de-emphasize externals, and to keep the focus on