



A GUIDE FOR BEREAVEMENT



A GUIDE FOR BEREAVEMENT

One of the most sensitive, distressing and traumatic experiences one ever faces in life is the loss of a loved one. As a result, at a time of bereavement it is difficult to think rationally and make clear decisions. It is precisely at a time like this that one is desperately searching for comfort, support and, above all, clear guidance on how to proceed.

Please be assured that you are not alone. Help and assistance is readily available from our Rabbis, our Shul Office and an excellent team of volunteers at the Shul. We are here to help ease the pain and to guide you through the various steps which will facilitate a smooth passage

The following information is intended to guide you through the initial arrangements.

When a death is imminent

It is very important to notify one of our Rabbis well in advance (where practically possible) when a loved one is ill. You can do this via the Shul Office. This will hopefully enable time to visit the patient and for advice on how to be prepared for that difficult moment when life draws to an end.

Once a death is confirmed

Jewish law is unequivocal that burial should take place as soon as possible. This is best for the deceased – and is also helpful for the family as a first step towards restoring healing and calm.

Timing is of the essence. The two critical elements are 1) Notification of death. 2) Paperwork, without which nothing can proceed.

Notification: If the burial is under the auspices of the United Synagogue, one should immediately contact the US Burial Society on 020 8950 7767. If the office is closed, leave your name and contact phone number, and the name of the deceased.

One should contact the Burial Society, even out of hours, as it will help in facilitating the next steps.

The next call should be to contact our Shul Office – see the numbers at the back.

Paperwork: The two vital documents you will need to obtain are 1) A Doctor's Medical Certificate of Death. 2) The Disposal Certificate (also referred to as the Green Slip).

1) Doctor's Medical Certificate of Death

When death takes place in hospital it is vital that this is requested immediately, as it may be difficult to contact the attending Doctor afterwards. Alternatively, the General Practitioner who was treating the deceased during his or her final illness will issue a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death

2) The Disposal Certificate

The Certificate of Death is taken to the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Death in the borough or county authority where the death took place. The Registrar will ask for the following information:

- The full name of the deceased (including, where appropriate, the maiden name or any other names the deceased may have used).
- The date and place of death.
- The date and place of the birth of the deceased (if born abroad, country of birth).
- Occupation of deceased (and full names and occupation of the spouse, if married).
- If you have the deceased's birth or marriage certificates it may be useful to take them with you for reference. The Registrar will also ask if the deceased was in receipt of a pension from public funds and for the National Health number. If the medical card is available, it should be brought to the Register Office. However, the registration should not be delayed if this information is not available.

The Registrar will also issue a formal Death Certificate (required for Probate, etc.) It is useful to order additional certificates, for which there is a charge. This Death Certificate is not vital for the funeral, and an appointment can be arranged for a later time.

As mentioned earlier, there is an urgency to bury the deceased. However, there are occasions when it is appropriate to delay a burial, like when close loved ones are coming from great distances. Every effort should be made - in advance - to minimise this possible disruption.

Please also keep in mind that delays in obtaining paperwork are not unusual - due to the nature of the medical and legal process. It can be deeply upsetting and frustrating. We are, as ever, here to offer support and guidance should the process drag out.

The Burial Society will generally only collect the deceased once the above documentation is obtained. If a loved one has passed away at home, or in a Care Home without mortuary facilities, there are independent companies they can recommend who are able to help. For further information on this, see: <https://theus.org.uk/what-we-do/burial/arrange-a-burial>.

The following instructions contained in this guide only apply when any one of the following close relatives passes away: a parent; a child; a spouse; or a sibling.

ANINUT

In Jewish law and practice, immediately following a death, one is considered to be in a state of '*Aninut*'. This status remains until after burial when '*Aveilut*' takes over.

The state of Aninut is best described as a form of numbness. The shock and grief can be immense. One's mind is also consumed by organisational necessities relating to the burial.

As such, normal religious practices are somewhat suspended. No prayers, no Tallit or Tefillin (for men) etc. Additionally, one should not consume meat or wine. One should ideally keep eating to a minimum, and one should not eat among a group of people. One should also not go to work unless severe loss would be sustained.

The status of Aninut is suspended when Shabbat or Jewish festival occurs between death and the funeral.

KERIAH

Keriah is the act of tearing an item of clothing as an expression of grief. It is a powerful moment. More than anything else, *Keriah* captures how one feels. The tear must be visible. It's a way of letting others know what you are going through.

An item of clothing can be a shirt, sweater, jacket, etc. A tie, scarf or shawl are considered accessories, rather than clothing, and do not qualify.

Keriah is required to be performed immediately following the death of a loved one. The tradition in our community is for *Keriah* to be handled at the cemetery, with guidance from the presiding Rabbi.

The Rabbi will make a small cut with scissors. The mourner then continues to tear. The precise cut should be around four inches. This torn clothing should be worn throughout the Shiva, with the exception of Shabbat when no visible mourning practices are permitted.

LEVAYA – FUNERAL

The Levaya commences at the cemetery. After prayers, a eulogy is delivered. Whilst the Rabbi is experienced at delivering it, there is no objection to a member of the family speaking.

A few points to consider when preparing a eulogy:

- 1) In a time of raw grief, it can often be difficult for the mourner to calmly articulate the message.
- 2) The best eulogies are brief - just a glimpse into a loved one's life. Those present appreciate it more.
- 3) One must be sensible. It is not fair to share embarrassing details about the deceased. Pointing out behaviour which is blatantly not in the spirit of Judaism (eating establishments, Shabbat etc) is also inappropriate.
- 4) A little light-heartedness is fine.

The funeral then moves towards the internment. It is an important Mitzvah to take part in helping to fill the grave. While professional staff are on hand to fill the grave, it remains our Mitzvah. One should view it in this way and, where practically possible, help. After helping, the shovel should be replaced in the earth and not handed to the next person.

As the grave is being filled, the period of *Aninut* ends. *Aveilut* (mourning) now begins. This period will continue for 12 months following the passing of a parent, and 30 days for other relatives.

The initial phase of *Aveilut* is the most intense. This is the week when *Shiva* is being observed. Following Shiva is a less intense, but still restrictive, period. It ends after 30 days (*Sheloshim*). More about these phases is explained separately below.

Once the grave is filled, all return to the hall. The mourners should remove leather footwear. It is useful to bring sneakers or slippers in which to change. If this is impractical, they should be ready for when one returns home. Leather footwear is not worn throughout the Shiva week.

Back in the hall, Kaddish will be recited twice. There is a special longer Kaddish only recited following the passing of a parent. Kaddish has many unfamiliar words. This special Kaddish has even more than usual. There's no rush - the officiating Rabbi will help prepare for it and can assist to say it at the funeral.

While Kaddish is usually recited by sons of the deceased, daughters can also take part in this emotional and powerful experience. Our Rabbis will help any women who want to recite the Kaddish - both at the cemetery and at the Shiva.

RETURNING HOME AFTER THE LEVAYA

The place where Shiva will be held should be prepared prior to the funeral. All mirrors should be covered. Low chairs, a 7-day candle, and prayer books will be supplied by the Shul. Please be in touch with the Shul Office to arrange pickup.

The priority following the return to the home after the funeral is to eat a special 'meal', called *Seudat Havra'ah* - meal of consolation and recovery. It is usually a hardboiled egg with bread rolls - or Bagels - or other food which is circular. The key to this meal is that it is NOT prepared by the mourner. Neither is the mourner to serve him or herself. It must be prepared by others and must be served to the mourner.

Once this food has been consumed, the mourner can then serve him or herself with regular food.

SHIVA AND MOURNING

Before discussing the practicalities and details of Shiva, a clear understanding of what Shiva is may be helpful.

Shiva is the Hebrew word for 7. It is a period lasting the better part of seven days. The first day is whatever time remains after the internment (even if there are only a few minutes till sunset, it counts as day one). The seventh day is just a few minutes.

These are days of Shiva - whether one chooses to have services or not. It is a time to catch one's breath, allowing the enormity of the pain and grief to calm and settle. It may be a religious requirement, but it is actually an incredibly therapeutic and comforting way in which to come to terms with one's loss.

Staying at home, and withdrawing from normal daily activities, is the essence of Shiva.

Spiritually, it is also a source of comfort to the soul of the departed, which is navigating its own journey 'back home to heaven'.

Hosting services helps to facilitate the reciting of Kaddish. It also provides structure for visiting times so as not to be overburdened. It is good to discuss any arrangements with one of our Rabbonim before making any final decisions.

Our Rabbonim and/or the Shul office will organise and facilitate the running of any Shiva services. They will, of course, organise this in close consultation with the family.

During the Shiva week, the mourner should not bathe, shave or trim the hair. Only hygienic washing is permitted. In addition, the mourner should not go to work, and may not launder or iron clothing. One may change undergarments, or any clothing which comes in direct contact with the body. Intimate relations with one's spouse is also prohibited during this week.

Whenever the mourner is seated, it is on low chairs (supplied by the Shul). The mourner may get up and walk around in the home. But, when visitors come and one is seated, it should be on the low chairs. Obviously, if one will struggle with a low chair (sore back, etc) a regular chair is fine.

Shabbat and Shiva

Shiva, as mentioned earlier, is seven days. Shabbat is part of this period. Except that the mourning aspects of the Shiva are paused. The low chairs should be put away during Shabbat, and the torn item of clothing is not worn.

This hiatus begins on Friday a couple of hours before the commencement of Shabbat, leaving adequate time to get ready. The Shiva resumes the moment Shabbat ends. There is not generally a service at a Shiva home after Shabbat.

When, a mourner attends Shul for the Shabbat Service on Friday Night during the Shiva period, our tradition is that they leave the service briefly for the opening songs of Kabbalat Shabbat – they will be accompanied by someone at this time - and, when it is time to return, they will be greeted with a blessing of comfort by the Rabbi and the Congregation.

Yom Tov and Shiva

Any of the **Biblical** festivals - like Pesach, etc will bring the Shiva to a premature end. As soon as the festival begins the Shiva is over and it will not resume after Yom Tov.

The key is that the Shiva must have begun prior to the festival in order for it to end. If the funeral is on *Chol Hamoed* (the intermediate days of Pesach and Succot), the Shiva does not begin until after the festival has concluded.

Comforting the Mourner

The Shiva period is for the mourner. Keeping to the guidelines just outlined will assist the healing process. Visitors also help by offering support and just interacting with the mourner.

Talking of visitors, it is the mourner who dictates the pace. Some people find it intrusive and only want few visitors, and only at specific times. Others love the constant flow and energy of many people coming to pay their respects. It really is all about the mourner.

With this in mind, visitors take their cue from the mourner. In Jewish law one should not communicate verbally with the mourner until the mourner has engaged in conversation. The mourner may, in fact, not be in the mood for conversation. They may find comfort and solace just knowing that the visitor is there. At times, even this may be too much. They are, after all, grieving. One must respect these feelings and not feel insulted. Again, it really is all about the mourner.

End of Shiva

The last day of Shiva is just a few minutes. For most people, they sit on the low stool then 'get up' and move on. If one wishes a Rabbi to come and get the mourner up formally, please indicate this to the Rabbi in advance.

There are no specific laws covering what to do at the moment when a Shiva ends. There are many traditions. The most well-known custom is for the mourners to take a stroll around the block. This is a really nice and useful practice. After being 'holed up' at home for a week, there is an element of healing by rejoining the world again.

The torn clothing should be disposed of.

Whenever a Shiva finishes early, such as for a festival, it ends shortly before the festival begins. All traditions (such as a formal get up or walking around the block) are NOT observed. Likewise, when the Shiva formally ends on Shabbat morning - even as mourning practices conclude before Shabbat - it ends without any of the traditions.

THE REMAINDER OF MOURNING

Once Shiva ends, most of the restrictions in place during the Shiva are relaxed. Haircuts and shaving are still prohibited for 30 days following the funeral. During this time music and other celebrations are not allowed.

For a parent, these restrictions - other than hair cutting - continue until 12 months have completed. For haircutting, one should wait until after receiving adverse comments on one's appearance (but not before the Shloshim 30-day period has ended).

NEXT STEPS

Losing a loved one is a terrible blow. It hurts. It is painful. The adjustment to this loss is often fraught with difficulty and can take a long time. There will be many feelings, some of them quite unexpected. It's a process and cannot be rushed.

At times like these, friends and family can be a source of comfort and support.

It can also help to speak to someone who is not directly affected. **Stanmore Synagogue Community Care** (SSCC) has a team of excellent trained counsellors who are available to help you. All handled confidentially. They have helped thousands of people over the years in adjusting to this new, sad, reality. SSCC can also advise on some of the necessary paperwork that inevitably follows a death. They will usually be in touch after a Shiva but can be contacted at any time on **020 8954 3300** or via Email on: **sscc@stanmoresynagogue.org**

Our Rabbis are also available to be a source of comfort and help.

Saying Kaddish

One of the best ways to find support and friendship is to recite Kaddish. While the discipline required is hard - requiring a daily commitment - those who stick with it are also often the ones who recover best from the trauma and pain of bereavement.

It might be because of the Kaddish itself - knowing that one is giving support and comfort to the soul itself. It might also be the new sense of purpose and camaraderie in joining other people who are attending the service.

One thing is clear: every single person in attendance will go out of their way to make the mourner feel welcome and to help in the initial phase when Kaddish is still a struggle. It is extraordinary how one often makes friends in the process. Even if one finds it difficult to commit daily, even coming a few times a week will pay huge dividends.

Women are absolutely invited to be a part of this experience, and to recite Kaddish.

Kaddish is most beneficial to the soul of the deceased. The **obligation**, however, is only on the deceased's children. Other relatives can certainly recite Kaddish, but the duty is on the children. Kaddish is recited for eleven months after the death.

For our guide to understanding Kaddish, its origins and purpose, please see our website: [Kaddish Guide](#)

The United Synagogue website (<https://theus.org.uk/>) Also contains a guide on Kaddish for female mourners together with a video on how to say Kaddish

Learning

In addition to Kaddish, there are other ways to bring honour and merit to the soul of the deceased. Learning Torah - especially Mishna - in the merit of a loved one, has been part of Jewish life for centuries. Many find creating a learning project deeply meaningful and comforting.

The learning can be structured to one's individual needs and knowledge, or one can join a range of ongoing classes at Shul or online. The Rabbinic team are here to provide guidance on this.

Charity

Yet another tradition is to contribute Tzedakah in honour of the deceased. There are also opportunities to dedicate something in the Shul in memory of a loved one.

The Synagogue Office can provide further information on dedications for the Synagogue.

Organising the Stone Setting

The prevailing custom in our community is for a stone setting to be around 9-11 months after death, although there are other traditions which do this earlier. However, please note, that as dates and availability are limited, and particularly for stone settings on Sundays, the United Synagogue recommends the date is arranged **as soon as possible after the Shiva**. It is important that you liaise with both the presiding Rabbi and the United Synagogue before finalising any date.

Yahrzeit

The anniversary of the Hebrew date of death is referred to as the *Yahrzeit* (lit. time in the year). This date will be marked each year - not just on the first anniversary. It is a day of reflection and nostalgia - a sombre time.

It is traditional to light a 24-hour Yahrzeit candle after sunset. It remains burning for the full 24 hours, or until it goes out. On Shabbat and Jewish festivals, it is lit before those days commence, and before lighting the special lights associated with Shabbat and festivals.

Our Synagogue sends out reminders in advance of the Hebrew date with further information.

Other traditions on a Yahrzeit include reciting Kaddish at all three of the daily services, making charitable donations in honour of the loved one, Torah study, and visiting the grave. The cemeteries have booklets containing appropriate Psalms and prayers in Hebrew and English to be recited at the graveside.

Yizkor

Yizkor ('remembrance') takes place four times a year - on the last day of the three biblical festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, as well as on Yom Kippur. It is a powerful moment. It is an emotional time. It is one of those occasions to which anyone who has lost a loved one relates and respects.

During the first year after the loss of a loved one, many remain inside the Shul for Yizkor but do not actually recite the prayer for the one who has recently passed away. The prayer is still recited for any other loved one whose passing is not recent.

A guide of this brevity cannot possibly cover every circumstance. If there is anything needing further clarification, please reach out to one of our Rabbonim. We are here to help!

Important Contacts

(we suggest always calling
unless advised to email)

US Burial Society: 020 8950 7767

<https://theus.org.uk/what-we-do/burial/resources/>

Synagogue Office: 020 8954 2210

mail@stanmoresynagogue.org

Stanmore Synagogue Community

Care: 020 8954 3300

sscc@stanmoresynagogue.org