

## On Death and Mourning

### A Guide

*Each of us has a name  
Given us by God  
And by our father and mother.*

*Each of us has a name  
Given us by our stature and smile  
And the clothes we wear.*

*Each of us has a name  
Given us by the mountains  
And walls within which we live...*

*Each of us has a name  
Given us by the seasons  
And by our blindness.*

*Each of us has a name  
Given to us by the sea  
And by the way  
We die*

*(Verses taken from "L'chol ish yesh shem" by the Hebrew poet, Zelda)*

“And Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”  
(Genesis 23:2)

## **Introduction**

Judaism teaches that humanity is created in the image of God and that all human life is sacred. Life is regarded as a blessing, and although we may sometimes be hurt by pain or defeat, the journey from birth to death, calls us to live as fully as we can, with care for ourselves and the highest regard for others. At the same time, Judaism acknowledges the transience of human life, the limitations of our mortality and helps us to face death and grieve for those we love.

All societies possess their own mourning rituals, ways in which the living can pour out their grief, mark the name and recall the memory of those who have lived. Judaism, too, has developed a structure of *mitzvot* – observances and traditions – which help those in the last stages of their life to acknowledge their mortality, and the living to begin to grieve and come to terms with their loss.

When someone dies, our first reaction is often a sense of shock and numbness and the last thing we feel like doing is making decisions about burial or cremation, how many nights of *shiva* (the seven day mourning period) to observe, or responding to similar questions. Many people help their families or those closest to them by writing their final wishes in their will or in a letter. Occasionally these matters are discussed while the dying person is still able to communicate. But for others, those decisions are too hard to make while they are alive and it is left to the living to face these questions. We hope this booklet will help to ease some of those choices and offer explanation and encouragement to use Jewish observance as something that can be practical, helpful and comforting.

## **The dying person (*Go-ses*)**

An individual who is close to death is treated as a living person in all respects. Jewish tradition makes it clear that we should not make any attempt to hasten the end of a person’s life. The sanctity of human life is a cardinal value in Judaism and the last weeks or days of a person’s life should be made as comfortable as possible, free from pain, peaceful, and without loss of dignity. The best of palliative care perhaps in a hospice or at home attended by special nursing staff or by family and friends may allow an individual to die in this way.

However, not everyone is able to find comfort and peace. Physical and spiritual pain often attend the last days of an individual’s life, and there are those who suffer from debilitating and tragic diseases, who no longer wish to be a burden on others, or who find life simply too difficult to bear any longer. Such individuals may express the wish to end their lives themselves. Physician assisted dying remains illegal in Great Britain, but hospital staff and families can be encouraged to support a dying person by easing physical and spiritual pain.

Prayer and the companionship and closeness of others can often address spiritual agitation or feelings of guilt, loss and fear. It is sometimes comforting for a dying person to recite or to hear the words of the *Shema*, the *Viddui* (confessional prayer) or Psalms, a simple prayer of reassurance and love, or a favourite song or piece of music. The practice of reciting a confessional prayer at the end of one’s life goes back a long way in Judaism and reflects the rabbinic view that death is a threshold into the world to come and that we need to repent and

seek atonement before we move on. Whatever our own beliefs, some individuals do find the ritual of a confessional prayer helpful in allowing them to acknowledge the limitations of human deeds. Draw on the resources of your community, your Rabbi or the Liberal Judaism Chaplain at this sensitive time. Prayers for the critically ill can be found in Liberal Judaism's prayer book *Siddur Lev Chadash* on pages 610-611.

### **What happens immediately after a death?**

Jewish observance is based on the rabbinic principle of *kibbud ha-met* (showing respect or honouring the dead). How we speak in the presence of the dead, how we handle the body, the swiftness of burial or cremation, the lifting of certain religious obligations for the living – all these things are considered important in Jewish practice because they reveal our respect for the dead lying before us.

Following the death of someone close, it is often difficult to know and decide what to do. The following are gentle guidelines, but each individual is different and you should be guided by your own sense of intuition and need. Liberal Judaism is not prescriptive, but it does commend rituals and observances that may be helpful and comforting at certain times in a person's life.

- 1) **Should you remain with someone who has just died?** Be guided by your needs and those closest to you. In traditional Jewish communities, a *wacher* or *shomer* (Yiddish, literally 'watcher' or 'guard') is appointed to sit with the deceased and recite Psalms throughout the night and until the time of burial. Liberal Jews are content to follow general practice, spending some time sitting with the deceased and then returning home from the hospital and engaging in the practical work of getting a doctor's certificate and registering the death. Generally, nursing staff are sensitive to the needs of the family and will leave you some time alone simply to remain with the deceased. It is sometimes helpful to recite Psalms or prayers at this time or just to sit quietly with other members of the family. Those who are just bereaved are often comforted by the companionship of the living, even if it is difficult to find words of conversation.
- 2) **Can nursing staff touch a Jewish patient after s/he has died?** In traditional communities, only the *Chevra Kaddisha* (Aramaic, 'Holy Society' appointed by communities to look after the needs of the dead) is permitted to move and care for the deceased after death. However, Liberal Judaism encourages nursing staff to care for the dead as they have cared for them while alive, by removing any medical equipment and treating them as they would any other individual. The arms of the deceased should remain by the side of the body. Families sometimes call a Rabbi to visit and to recite prayers.
- 3) **What happens if someone dies at home?** If you wish the funeral director to come and collect the body immediately, then you should contact the synagogue or funeral director straight away. There is always an emergency number to ring for out of hours contact. Your synagogue will provide you with the contact number of the funeral director.
- 4) **What happens if someone dies suddenly?** This can be a frightening experience, but the funeral director will guide you through the legal requirements of securing a doctor's certificate and registering the death. For further details about sudden death, an autopsy and a coroner's inquest, please contact the funeral director. In addition, local authorities post details about the Office of the Coroner and the legal requirements of an autopsy on their websites.

- 5) **What happens if someone dies abroad?** Funeral directors are used to dealing with deaths that occur abroad. Arrangements can take time and are occasionally complex. Contact your synagogue or funeral director who will guide you through what needs to be done.
- 6) **What happens if the deceased was not a member of the synagogue?** It is not uncommon for synagogues to arrange burials or cremations for non-members. There is space in Liberal Jewish cemeteries and a Rabbi from a local synagogue is usually available to officiate, but you must expect a reasonable charge. Members of synagogues pay fees for many years and these contribute in some measure towards their funeral costs and the right of burial in a Jewish cemetery. Contact details can be found at the end of this booklet.

### **Contacting the synagogue or funeral director**

It is helpful to have the telephone numbers of the synagogue and the funeral director to hand so that arrangements for collection of the deceased can be made, as well as arrangements for a funeral and *shiva*, if required. A member of staff is there to guide you through the practical arrangements of obtaining a doctor's certificate and registering the death. Advice from the funeral director should be sought when a death occurs abroad or unexpectedly.

### **Burial or Cremation**

Most individuals express their final wishes in their will or to their family. Liberal Judaism allows cremation and leaves the choice of burial or cremation to the individual. It is important to try and respect the final wishes of the deceased. A funeral is arranged either through the funeral director directly or through the synagogue or Burial Society. The traditional practice of holding the funeral as soon as possible after death ensures the dignity of the deceased, and for the mourners, a short period of being in limbo during the period of *aninut* (the period of mourning between death and a funeral).

Liberal Judaism recommends a funeral taking place sooner rather than later, but would also take into consideration the needs of family or friends who may have to travel some distance. The funeral director will also ask whether a widow or widower or other family members wish to reserve an adjacent plot as some cemeteries offer side-by-side graves as well as in-depth burials. Increasingly, individuals are enquiring about woodland burials and Liberal Rabbis are more than willing to officiate at funerals which have regard for the well-being of the environment. In-depth and woodland burials are certainly in keeping with the Liberal Jewish ethos of concern for the environment.

### **Meeting the Rabbi**

Whether the Rabbi has known the deceased or not, it is always helpful to arrange a meeting with the Rabbi taking the service. If it is not possible to meet in person, then please make time to speak to the Rabbi on the telephone. If you know the Hebrew name of the person who has died, then this should also be passed on to the Rabbi for inclusion in the Memorial Prayer. A meeting is also an opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the rituals and services.

## The funeral (*L'vayah*)

The Hebrew term for funeral is *l'vayah* which means 'accompanying'. Attending a funeral implies 'accompanying' the dead on their last journey together with the mourners and members of the community in which the deceased lived. Judaism pays regard to the dignity of saying farewell to those we love (*kibbud ha-met*). All individuals are buried or cremated in a simple wooden coffin with no adornment. Preparation of the body is usually undertaken by the funeral director. Jewish tradition commends the practice of *tabarah* – the ritual washing of a body. This can be undertaken by a Burial Society or members of a *Chevra Kaddisha* (Aramaic, 'Holy Society' – a group of individuals who attend to the needs of the dead) in one's own congregation. A woman is prepared by other women and a man by other men. The deceased is then wrapped in simple white shrouds (*tachrichin*). In general, Liberal Judaism does not provide *tabarah*, because it does not regard the body as being in a state of ritual impurity and therefore requiring purification. However, if requested, it can be arranged. It is traditional to be wrapped in one's *tallit*. The custom of providing flowers in memory of the person who has died is not generally one that is followed among Anglo-Jews, although if individuals particularly wish to send flowers then it is permitted. A charitable donation in memory of the individual is particularly appropriate.

Funerals do not take place on *Shabbat*, nor on the major festivals of *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah*, *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. It is permitted to bury or cremate the dead during the intermediate days of *Sukkot* and *Pesach*. Liberal Judaism differs from Orthodox practice in its observance of one day and seven day festivals and would technically allow burial or cremation to take place on the second or eighth day of certain festivals. However, it would invoke the rabbinic principle of promoting harmonious relations with others (*mi'p'nei darchei shalom*) by avoiding funerals on days which are observed as festivals for the Orthodox community. Where cemeteries are shared with the Orthodox community, burials on the second and eighth day of festivals would not be permitted. Liberal Judaism recognises the value of the mourning rituals and particularly the recitation of *Kaddish* and delivering a eulogy at all times.

The funeral liturgy used for burials and cremations is composed of Psalms and prayers with an emphasis on the life of the soul which returns to God. The *hesped* (eulogy) is often given by the Rabbi, but occasionally by a member of the family or a friend.

A funeral in a cemetery is usually conducted in the prayer hall. The congregation moves to the graveside for the burial and then returns to the prayer hall for the closing prayers and *Kaddish*. Once the coffin has been lowered into the grave, the congregation is invited to cover the coffin with earth. Both men and women are invited to undertake this *mitzvah*. The practice of rinsing one's hands in running water when leaving the graveside is a symbol of the return to life for the mourner and provision for this is made in some cemeteries. This is often one of the hardest steps for the mourner to take.

A cremation service takes place at a crematorium and essentially follows the same form as the burial, except for the committal. The committal is that point in the cremation service when the coffin is removed or screened from the congregation. Like the first thud of earth on the coffin, it represents the finality of death. The ashes will be stored temporarily at the crematorium and should then be buried or scattered. Precisely when to bury the ashes of someone who has died, is often a very difficult decision for mourners. Please consider discussing the matter with your Rabbi who will help you reach a decision.

At the conclusion of a burial service, the person officiating will ask the mourners to remain seated while inviting the congregation to greet them and to wish them strength and comfort. At

a cremation, it is usual for the family to make their way outside and then the congregation will file past them and offer them words of comfort.

### **Mourner's *Kaddish***

Our familiarity with the prayer known as *Kaddish* ('Sanctification') stems mostly from our daily, Sabbath and festival services. It is the prayer which concludes our worship at every service. But it is mostly closely associated with mourners. It is a prayer affirming the holiness and greatness of God, verses which say implicitly: "My life is changed by the loss of someone close to me, yet still I affirm my faith in a just and loving God." In orthodox communities, it is traditional for the male mourners only to recite the *Kaddish*. Liberal Judaism encourages men and women to participate as equals in all its services. It is not unusual at a Liberal Jewish funeral, for the whole congregation to support the mourners by joining in with the *Kaddish*. A transliteration can be found in the funeral booklet.

### **Can children attend a funeral?**

In the past few years, it has become more common for parents to bring their quite young children to the cemetery or crematorium to mourn a grandparent or another relative. There is no fixed view on children attending funerals. For parents who are unsure whether or not their children should attend, the best approach might be to ask them. A child who wants to attend will usually say so, a child who does not, likewise. It is always advisable to let the Rabbi know the ages of children who are going to be present and for relatives to be aware of the appropriateness of bringing very young children who might not understand why they are there to a cemetery or crematorium. A funeral service need not be a harsh experience, although it is of course sad. Take time to explain to children what is going to happen and acknowledge their sadness and tears. If you are a parent or carer of a young child at a service, please do be considerate of the mourners and take the child out if they cry or make an excessive noise.

### **After a funeral**

After a funeral, the emphasis in Jewish tradition shifts from *kibbud ha-met* (respect for the dead) to the needs of mourners (*avelim*). It is a comforting tradition to light a memorial candle on one's return home following the funeral. This can be obtained from synagogue Judaica shops or elsewhere. It is also traditional for mourners to partake of a special 'mourner's meal'. In Hebrew this is called *se'udat havra'ab*, literally 'the meal of recuperation' and should be provided by friends or members of the congregation. The custom is to include food that is round, such as a hard-boiled egg, to symbolise that the soul is eternal.

### ***Shiva* (Seven day period of mourning)**

The seven day period of mourning, known as *Shiva*, begins on the day of the funeral and ends on the morning of the seventh day. Although there is some variance in Progressive Jewish practice from the traditional mourning process, this process and those which follow, reflect the psychological journey a bereaved person makes during mourning. The intensity of the initial mourning period before the funeral (*aninut*) moves to a different stage of mourning (*avelut*) which acknowledges the grief and loss experienced by the mourner.

The *Shiva* period gives the mourner permission to stay at home, to be surrounded by friends, family and congregation, to be supported during a time of disorientation and grief. Prayers are recited in the home and members of the congregation are encouraged to attend. Some mourners sit on low chairs or stools as a sign of the “lowness” of their spirits and refrain from bathing, shaving, cutting hair and wearing leather, that is, the usual acts of daily life, as a way of expressing the reality that the mourners’ usual routine has been interrupted by the death of their loved one. Chairs can be borrowed from the synagogue if required.

Liberal Judaism certainly encourages the practice of *Shiva*, but leaves this decision and the number of days to the mourner. Many Liberal Jews choose to observe between one and three nights of prayers. It is important to add that Liberal Judaism does not apply any pressure to a family to undertake any *mitzvah* with which they might feel uncomfortable. The purpose of *Shiva* is to allow the mourner time to receive support, comfort and consolation, to help them with practical tasks such as shopping and cooking and to give them time to grieve and mourn. Some households cover the mirrors and abstain from watching television during the *Shiva* period. Some people might find it meaningful not to look at their reflection during the *Shiva* period. Although this has little basis in law and arises more from superstitious beliefs, the decision is left up to the individual in accordance with their own family traditions.

*Shiva* prayers in the home take the form of a daily evening service followed by the reading of Psalms and special memorial prayers. It is customary for a tribute to the deceased to be made either by the person leading the prayers or a member of the family. Because these prayers take place in the home, the atmosphere is often a little more informal and it becomes possible for mourners and friends to hold a conversation and to share memories about the person who has died. The service is read from a special prayerbook: *Seder Tefillot b’Veyt Evel* - “Prayers at a House of Mourning.”

Liberal Judaism acknowledges that these traditions may be hard to observe for the solitary mourner, the widow or widower without any children or any other mourners present. Then the congregation is expected to take the place of family by being aware of the mourner’s intense loneliness and by reaching out to offer companionship and comfort.

### ***Sh’loshim* (Thirty-day period of mourning)**

The next stage of mourning is known as *Sh’loshim* – ‘thirty’ and refers to the thirty day period which is counted from the day of the funeral. It is during this time following the *Shiva* that a mourner begins to return to work, to household chores and to rejoin society. There is an acknowledgement during this period, and indeed during the eleven months that follow, as mourners mark anniversaries and birthdays without their loved one, that the mourner is still vulnerable and that emotions remain unpredictable. Jewish tradition forbids the mourner from taking part in any festivity or attending a place of entertainment. For Liberal Jews, however, the important thing is not necessarily the sense of obligation on account of prescribed tradition, but what individuals will find meaningful and supportive in these circumstances.

It is often appropriate to bury the ashes of a person who has been cremated at the end of the thirty day period. A rabbi is always available to lead a short service as the earthly remains return to the earth. In some cemeteries, the ashes are buried beneath a rose bush or another plant, and a plaque can be erected at the place of burial.

## **Matzeivah (Tombstone Consecration)**

A tombstone is usually erected within the first year of a death – around eleven months after the funeral. However, if mourners wish to consecrate a stone earlier, six or seven months after the funeral, that is equally acceptable. Finding the right words with which to remember a loved one is often difficult. Please consult your Rabbi for suggestions and find out whether there are certain rules regarding the shape of a stone or the wording on a stone in the cemetery where a relative is buried. For those whose ashes have been buried in the cemetery, it is possible to erect a small stone or plant a rose bush in memory of the person who has died. Your synagogue or Burial Society will give you more details. It is usual for the Rabbi to lead a short service at the cemetery with the reading of Psalms and prayers and the dedication and reading of the stone. The tombstone consecration also acts as an important marker, bringing to an end the first year of mourning. It is not that grief or mourning is over, but it is a way of acknowledging that life continues even after those closest to us have gone.

## **Anniversaries**

The first year of mourning is often the hardest. Birthdays, anniversaries, festivals – the first *Pesach* or *Yom Kippur* without the presence of someone who always played a central part at these occasions, reawakens the sadness and sense of loss. The synagogue's bereavement group and friends need to be aware that our loneliness is often more acute at these times. A telephone call or a letter, an invitation to services, to a synagogue supper or similar event may be welcome.

## **Who are the mourners?**

Jewish tradition designates seven mourners: husband, wife, mother, father, child, brother or sister. Jewish law is most concerned with these specific mourners and what they may or may not have to do following a death. However, Liberal Judaism allows for a greater degree of openness and flexibility in its practice. It treats same-sex civil partners in the same way as heterosexual married partners. It takes note of the grief and sadness of in-laws, grandchildren and partners who may not have entered a marriage or civil partnership and who may have lived with the deceased for many years – their feelings need to be considered with sensitivity and understanding.

## **Non-Jewish partners mourning practices**

It is a fact of life that many who were not born Jewish and who have not chosen to convert to Judaism, have become part of a Jewish family. Although we may imagine that mixed-faith partnerships are a phenomenon of the twentieth and twenty-first century, it is likely that mixed faith marriages have always taken place throughout our history. That may be why you come across a statement such as this one in the sixteenth code of Jewish practice, the *Shulchan Aruch*: “We may provide for the poor of non-Jews, visit their sick, bury their dead, speak funeral eulogies and comfort their mourners in order to promote peace” (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 151:12). Jewish sources much earlier than Caro's work, speak of the obligation to care for non-Jews especially at times of bereavement.



Liberal Judaism takes a very clear view on how to help Jewish members of a family to mourn for non-Jewish relatives, and will always offer support to non-Jews whose Jewish family members or partners have died. Rabbis are certainly willing to officiate at funerals for non-Jewish members of a Jewish family, to lead prayers at a Shiva and to support the needs of non-Jewish partners and children following a bereavement.

In certain cemeteries it is possible for a husband and wife, same sex partners in a mixed faith relationship, to be buried together. Ask your Rabbi whether this is permitted in the cemetery used by their congregation. Where a non-Jewish partner has no particular religious affiliation, but has had an association with a Jewish congregation, perhaps as a 'Friend' of the synagogue, then it is not unusual to ask the Rabbi to officiate at a burial or cremation. Relatives should be consulted and feelings taken into consideration.

### **How do I mourn my parents or family who are not Jewish?**

Converts to Judaism or individuals born of a mixed marriage often ask how to mourn a parent or relative who is not Jewish. As always, one should try to respect the wishes of the deceased. It is important for people who declared their final wishes in a will or to relatives, to feel that the rituals and liturgy of their funeral are respectful of their own consciences even after they have died. Jewish mourners should attend other religious services where possible and show respect even though the theology expressed in the service is not necessarily that of their own faith. It is also perfectly possible to ask a Rabbi to officiate at a funeral service or *Shiva* prayers for a non-Jewish member of a family if it is appropriate. If it is helpful for the mourner, s/he should sit *shiva* and follow the rituals associated with mourning a Jewish relative.

### **Frequently asked questions:**

- 1) Do I need to tear my garment?** The practice of tearing a garment (*k'riah*) as a symbol of grief goes back to the Bible. The rending of one's outer garment symbolises the physical rending of the relationship following the death of a close relative. Traditionally, a garment is torn for the closest relatives whom one mourns: parents, children, siblings and spouse. Liberal Judaism does not prescribe *k'riah* but allows individuals to choose for themselves the rituals that have greatest meaning and significance.
- 2) Should I wear black?** The wearing of black or another sombre colour symbolises how we are feeling following a death. Customs differ even in the Jewish community, possibly influenced by the surrounding culture. Liberal Judaism does not prescribe what should be worn at a funeral or afterwards.
- 3) Are Jews permitted to donate their organs following their death?** Liberal Judaism regards organ donation as a *mitzvah* – a noble deed and worthy of merit. Through this act of generosity, the *mitzvah* of saving a human life (*pikkuach nefesh*) is upheld.
- 4) Can a suicide be buried in accordance with Jewish tradition?** While little was understood about the motivation of suicide in the past, today we accept that those who tragically take their own life, are often suffering from mental anguish. The burial or cremation of a suicide should be in accordance with Jewish tradition and everything possible should be done to offer comfort to grieving families and partners. Those who are left behind are in extra-special need of comfort and support.

- 5) **What happens when a loved one dies just before a festival?** In traditional forms of Judaism, the *Shiva* (seven day period of mourning) is cut off by the festival. However, if mourners request evening prayers in the home following a festival or during the intermediate days of *Pesach* or *Sukkot*, Liberal Rabbis are usually willing to officiate. Prayers do not take place on a festival itself.
- 6) **How does Liberal Judaism deal with the death of the very young or with a stillbirth?** The death of a child, a stillbirth, or a miscarriage can cause immense grief and pain. While the statutory funeral service may not be appropriate in these cases, Liberal Judaism recognises the need for parents to mourn this special kind of loss. Please ask your Rabbi or speak to the Liberal Judaism Chaplain to ask for special liturgies and prayers and to find out about particular rituals which address the death of the very young. Special support is required at this time, and your Rabbi will help you through the arrangements and rituals.
- 7) **How does one greet mourners?** The funeral service ends with words of comfort to the mourners: *Ha-makom y'nachem et'chem b'toch sh'ar ha-avelim* – “May God comfort you and all who mourn.” A more traditional form of these words is: *Ha-makom y'nachem et'chem b'toch sh'ar av'lei tziyon virushalayim* – “May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” In Great Britain, a traditional greeting is “I wish you a long life.” But sometimes a simple expression such as “I wish you strength” or “I’m thinking of you” can speak volumes. Sometimes it is not even necessary to say anything. The physical presence of friends and associates, a hug, or the simple touch of another person, can be of great comfort. Bringing food to prayers is another form of expressing care, love and concern for the bereaved person.

### Do Jews believe in an ‘afterlife’?

Judaism emphasises the blessings of this life (“Choose life”) and even in the immediate aftermath of a death affirms the majesty and sovereignty of God in the *Kaddish*. The focus of Jewish tradition after a death is constantly on the living and helping to support them. The Hebrew Bible scarcely mentions the ‘world to come’ and refers to those who have died as ‘sleeping with their ancestors’ or having gone down to Sheol – a kind of dark underworld.

Nevertheless, many of the Rabbis of the Talmud and the writers of our liturgy affirmed a belief in an afterlife in sayings such as: “This world is a corridor to the world beyond; we prepare ourselves in the corridor to enter the world to come.” How to conceive of the afterlife, is a great unknown. If we yearn for it, it is often because we find it difficult to conceive of a total negation of our own existence or the total absence of the person we love.

Whatever we believe about the afterlife – and beliefs will vary from person to person - one thing is sure: the memories and love we cherish of the person who has died, will endure, and that is why we pray that the memory of those who have died will abide as a blessing and remain a continual influence for good.

## **Conclusion**

For a number of Jews, the traditional rituals associated with mourning are a great comfort and support. There is often a familiarity when it comes to taking up the traditions practised by one's parents and grandparents and these often bring consolation and reassurance. For Liberal Jews, tradition has its place and importance, but its observances and rituals are not necessarily obligatory. We assume such rituals because they have meaning and purpose for us, because they are comforting and supportive, and ultimately, because they help us to come to terms with our loss. What is of immense importance at these times in our lives is the support of a Jewish community, who is able to take on the role of helping individuals practically, as well as emotionally and spiritually. Many synagogues offer bereavement visitors and other support, gently helping individuals adjust to major changes in their lives.

### **Useful contacts (if adapted for use in individual synagogues)**

- Local Synagogue
- Burial Society/Cemetery Co-ordinator/Funeral Director
- Liberal Judaism
- Bereavement Group
- Community Care Group

### **Useful contacts (if for Liberal Judaism)**

- Liberal Judaism
- Funeral Director/Burial Society
- Liberal Judaism Chaplain
- Website and reference to individual communities