
ON DEATH AND MOURNING

A Guide


liberal judaism

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LIBERAL JUDAISM

*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)

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*"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 and 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, recall the name of those who have lived and mark their names. 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 *shivah* (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 (*Goses*)

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 may 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 *Sh'ma*, the *Vidui* (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 prayerbook *Siddur Lev Chadash* on pages 610-611.

What happens immediately after a death?

Jewish observance is based on the rabbinic principle of *kibbud ha-meit* (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 as well as the feelings of the mourners.

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.

- **Should you remain with someone who has just died?**

Be guided by your needs and those closest to you. Liberal Jews follow

general practice, spending some time sitting with the deceased and then returning home from the hospital and engaging in the practical work of obtaining a doctor's certificate and registering the death. In very traditional Jewish communities, a *wacher* or *shomeir* (Yiddish, literally 'watcher' or 'guard') is appointed to sit with the deceased and recite Psalms throughout the night and until the time of burial. 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 for as long as you wish. Those who are just bereaved are often comforted by the companionship of the living, even if it is difficult to find words of conversation.

- **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.

- **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.

- **What happens if someone dies suddenly?**

This can be a frightening experience, but initially the hospital or GP, and then 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.

- **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.

- **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 *shivah*, 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 or partners wish to reserve an additional plot. 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-meit*). 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 *taharah* - the ritual washing of a body. This can be undertaken by a Burial Society or members of a *Chevera 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 *taharah*, because it does not regard the body as being in a state of ritual impurity and therefore requiring purification. However, if requested, it may be arranged. It is traditional to be wrapped in one's *tallit*. Tradition deems that one of the *tzitzit* (fringes of the *tallit*) should be cut. All ornaments are removed. Behind these customs is the recognition of the democracy of death. Wealthy or poor, all are equal before God. The dead should be dressed simply. Just as we come into the world without possessions, so in the same manner do we go out of this world.

The custom of providing flowers in memory of the person who has died is not generally one that is followed among British 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, Sh'mini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, Pesach and Shavu'ot. 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 orthodox congregations, burials on the second and eighth day of festivals are not 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. It is often a difficult decision for mourners to decide precisely when to bury or scatter the ashes. Please consider discussing the matter with your Rabbi who will help you reach a decision.

The funeral service ends with words of comfort to the mourners: *Ha-makom y'nacheim et'chem b'toch sh'ar ha-aveilim* - "May God comfort you and all who

mourn." A more traditional form of these words is: *Ha-makom y'nacheim et'chem b'toch sh'ar av'lei tziyon virushalayim* - "May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." In 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.

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, the family may 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* (Aramaic: 'Sanctification') stems mostly from the 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. 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 be considerate of other 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-meit* (respect for the dead) to the needs of mourners (*aveilim*). 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 *s'udat havra'ah*, literally 'the meal of recuperation' and is usually 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.

Shivah (Seven day period of mourning)

The seven day period of mourning, known as *shivah*, 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 (*aveilut*) which acknowledges the grief and loss experienced by the mourner.

The *shivah* 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 *shivah*, 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 *shivah* 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.

Shivah 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'Vet Evel* - "Prayers at a House of Mourning." The Rabbi or service leader will bring the prayerbooks to the house.

Liberal Judaism acknowledges that these traditions may be hard for the solitary mourner to observe, 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. Bringing food to prayers is another form of expressing care, love and concern for the bereaved person.

***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 *shivah* 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.

Traditional Judaism is particularly prescriptive with regard to the use of cosmetics, haircutting and shaving during the *sh'loshim* period. Forsaking attention to our appearance is seen as an indication of the mourner's

withdrawal from society. Refraining from shaving makes it very clear that someone is a mourner and to appear clean-shaven indicates the end of the thirty day period of mourning. Liberal Jews must be dictated by their own personal choice and conscience. Whether our personal practice is public or more private, it is important for mourners to feel that whatever customs they choose to practise, have integrity and meaning for them.

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 or Stone Setting)**

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, that may be possible. Please check with your synagogue and the cemetery. 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 lay 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.

The first anniversary is an important and often very difficult threshold to cross. If you are a member of a congregation, ask the synagogue to send you a reminder letter of the date on which a loved one's name can be read out each year on the *Shabbat* nearest to the anniversary of their death. The name is usually read out just before the recitation of the *Kaddish* towards the end of the service. It is also customary for mourners to light a *Yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary itself.

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

Many Jewish families include those who were not born as Jews and who have not chosen to convert to Judaism. 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 one reason for this statement in the sixteenth century 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 Deiah* 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. When requested rabbis will officiate at funerals for non-Jewish members of a Jewish family, lead prayers at a *shivah* and are always there to support the needs of non-Jewish partners and children following a bereavement. It is certainly permitted and the family is encouraged to say *Kaddish* for non-Jewish members.

Liberal Judaism's Rabbinic Conference supports the burial of mixed faith partners in the same cemetery and some cemeteries permit couples to be buried together either in depth or next to each other. However, not all cemeteries used by Liberal Jewish congregations permit mixed faith burials. Ask your Rabbi whether this is allowed in the cemetery used by your 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 have stated what their final wishes are in a will or to relatives to feel that the rituals and liturgy of their funeral are respectful of their own conscience and faith 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 *shivah* prayers for a non-Jewish member of a family if it is appropriate. If it is helpful for the mourner, s/he should sit *shivah* and follow the rituals associated with mourning a Jewish relative including reciting *Kaddish*.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Is there a 'funeral fund' for people who cannot afford the costs of a burial or cremation?**

No one is ever turned away on account of financial constraints.

Please speak to your local synagogue or to Liberal Judaism to find out how we can help you.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Do I need to cover the mirrors in my home following the death of a member of my family?**

Some households cover the mirrors and abstain from watching television during the *shivah* period. Some people might find it meaningful not to look at their reflection during the *shivah* 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 and what is meaningful to them personally.

- **Does there need to be minyan for the funeral or shivah?**

A *minyan* is the traditionally required minimum number of ten Jewish men or boys over the age of thirteen whose presence constitutes a congregation for certain statutory prayers to be recited. The principle of equality in Liberal Judaism would include women in a *minyan*, but at a funeral or any other mourning ritual or gathering for prayer, Liberal Judaism would not require a *minyan*. It is considered more important to honour the dead and to offer comfort to mourners by reciting the full funeral service which would include *Kaddish*.

- **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.

- **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 unbearable mental anguish. There should be no distinction made in the burial or cremation service for a suicide. In other words, everything should be done for a suicide that one would do for another individual who has died. 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.

- **What happens when a loved one dies just before a festival?**

In traditional forms of Judaism, the *shivah* (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.

- **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.

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

- **Liberal Judaism** is located at
The Montagu Centre
21 Maple Street, London W1T 4BE
Telephone: 020 7580 1663
Fax: 020 7631 9838
Email: montagu@liberaljudaism.org
Liberal Judaism's Internal Services Administrator will help you to organise a funeral. Telephone 020 7631 9822
- **Local Synagogues** can be found listed on the website of Liberal Judaism, www.liberaljudaism.org There are approximately 35 Liberal Synagogues throughout Great Britain and Ireland.
- **Funeral Director in the London Area:**
M.M. Broad and Sons
12 Woodside Lane, London N12 8RG
Tel. 020 8441 6047
If you ring this number out of hours, you will be referred to an emergency number.
- **Liberal Judaism Chaplain:** To contact the Liberal Judaism chaplain or your nearest Rabbi, please telephone 020 8580 1663. The funeral director can also refer you to your nearest Rabbi in the London area.
- **To arrange an out of London funeral:** Contact your nearest synagogue.

Glossary of Terms

Aninut (Onein)

Period of mourning between death and a funeral. A mourner is known as an *onen*.

Aveilim (singular, Aveil)

Mourners

Aveilut

Period of mourning following the funeral

Chevra Kaddish

Aramaic term meaning 'Holy Society'

Goses

Hebrew term referring to a person near to death

Ha-Makom y'nacheim etchem

b'toch sh'ar ha-aveilim

"May God comfort you and all who mourn" - traditional greeting extended to mourners

Hesped

Eulogy

K'riah

Tearing of a garment as a symbol of grief

Kaddish

Aramaic term meaning

'Sanctification'. A prayer recited at the end of services and most closely associated with the dead

Kibbud ha-meit

Respect for the dead

L'vayah

Funeral

Matzeivah

Stone

Mi'p'nei darchei shalom

Literally, 'on account of the ways of peace', to promote harmonious relations

Mitzvot (singular, mitzvah)

Commandments, good deeds

Pesach

Passover

Pikkuach nefesh

The saving of human life

Rosh Hashanah

New Year

S'udat havra'ah

Meal of recuperation, consolation

Seder Tefillot b'Vet Evel

Order of Prayers in a House of Mourning, booklet used for *shivah* prayers

Sh'loshim

Thirty day period of mourning

Shabbat

Sabbath

Glossary of Terms - Continued

Shavuot

Sh'ma

Sh'mini Atzeret

Shivah

Shomeir

Shulchan Aruch

Siddur Lev Chadash

Sukkot

Taharah

Tallit

Tzitzit

Viddui

Wacher

Yahrzeit

Yom Kippur

Yoreh Deiah

Festival of Weeks

'Hear' - Affirmation of faith

Eighth Day of Assembly,

Seven day period of mourning

Guard

'The Prepared Table' - c16th code of Jewish law by Joseph Caro

Liberal Jewish prayerbook

The Festival of Tabernacles

Literally, 'purification', the ritual act of washing a body after death

Prayer shawl

Fringes attached to the prayer shawl

Confession

Yiddish, Guard

Anniversary of someone's death

Day of Atonement

Second part of the *Shulchan Aruch*

LIBERAL JUDAISM

ON DEATH AND MOURNING

A Guide



Publications on Liberal Judaism published by Liberal Judaism

Affirmations of Liberal Judaism

Aspects of Liberal Jewish Thought by Rabbi David J Goldberg

Compelling Commitments by Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah

Fundamentalism by Rabbi John D Rayner

Principles of Jewish Ethics by Rabbi John D Rayner

Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century by Rabbi Pete Tobias

Liberal Judaism The First Hundred Years by Rabbi Lawrence Rigal and Rosita Rosenberg

Liberal Jewish Values Ageing

Liberal Jewish Values Animal Welfare

Liberal Jewish Values Biblical Criticism

Liberal Jewish Values The Environment

Liberal Jewish Values Genetic Research

Liberal Jewish Values Miracles

Liberal Jewish Values Zionism and Israel

Liberal Judaism in Practice Death and Mourning

Liberal Judaism in Practice Lesbian & Gay Jews and Same Sex Relationships

Liberal Judaism in Practice Jewish Marriage

Liberal Judaism in Practice Ethical Eating

Liberal Judaism in Practice Liberal Judaism and Jewish Identity

Liberal Judaism in Practice The Role of Women

Liberal Judaism

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