

Chevrah Kadisha Policy Manual Comparison

In today’s world, there are many factors that play into the formation of *Chevrah Kadisha* policy. To help you get a feel for some of the variations that abound from community to community, here is a comparison of the contents of the policy manuals from two fully operational *chevrot*, both community-based, and serving multiple shuls. Note that the text in the table below is taken from these manuals and hence the spelling of transliterated Hebrew words differs from our normal spellings.

Sample 1	Sample 2
Membership	
	<p>All members of the Jewish Burial Society must be Jewish. We define this to mean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Born of a Jewish mother and/or Jewish father, or converted by a <i>bet din</i> (legal court) of Jewish rabbis, <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. b. Self-identified as Jewish, that is, having no other religion and being able to affirm the phrase, “No Messiah has yet entered (or been revealed in) the world.”
Training	
	<p>All members of the Jewish Burial Society must have completed the JBS Training before they will be permitted to participate in any of its ritual or educational functions. Training will include traditional Jewish burial customs; the policies of the JBS; and gender identity and inclusivity practices.</p>
Vaccination	
	<p>All members of the Jewish Burial Society must either obtain a documented Hepatitis B vaccination, or sign a release stating that they understand the risks involved in not being vaccinated and knowingly choose this nonetheless.</p>

Notification	
<p>When a Jewish person dies, the hospital, funeral home or rabbi contacts the central contact number for CK informing us of the death. Our Director of Services then coordinates between the family and the funeral home to schedule <i>Shmira</i> and <i>Tahara</i> for the deceased.</p> <p>The CK Director of Services then contacts CK members to schedule specific personnel for both rituals as appropriate.</p>	<p>At the time the <i>rosh</i> (team leader) notifies team members of an upcoming tahara, all available relevant information about the case will be shared, including unusual characteristics of the <i>meit</i> (decedent), cause and circumstances surrounding the death, and family plans and requests for the tahara and funeral. Any team member may decline to participate in any particular tahara; no explanations are required.</p>
Shomrim	
<p>If CK has enough volunteers they will provide <i>shomrim</i> for the entire time between death and burial. If not able to provide coverage for the entire time, the presence of a lit candle may be used to represent the presence of <i>shomrim</i> with the deceased. This candle does not need to reside with the deceased.</p>	
Supplies	
<p>It is expected that the funeral homes provide most of the supplies required for <i>Tahara</i>, while CK provides buckets, hand washers, <i>Tahara</i> Manuals, boards, and some other supplies stored in our own cabinet at each funeral home. CK expects the funeral home to provide <i>tachrichim</i> (burial shrouds for the deceased) and personal protective clothing.</p>	
Scheduling	
<p>The <i>Tahara</i> procedure is usually scheduled 3 hours prior to burial, the night before burial, or under unusual circumstances, as soon after death as possible if there will be a prolonged delay before burial. The body of the deceased should be refrigerated until just before the <i>Tahara</i> begins.</p>	

Taharah	
<p>CK will perform <i>Tahara</i> for any Jew who requests it. We provide volunteers to perform this ritual for all Jewish denominations as well as the unaffiliated and provide training to the CK members as well as to the personnel of both local funeral homes.</p>	<p>We will provide <i>tahara</i> to any <i>meit</i>, to the best of our ability, no matter the circumstances of their life or death, so long as they fell under our definition of Jewish.</p>
<p>CK's standard <i>Tahara</i> policy is the following: men perform <i>Tahara</i> for deceased men, and women perform <i>Tahara</i> for deceased women. Under unusual circumstances, a mixed team may perform <i>Tahara</i>, as long as the modesty and dignity of the deceased is preserved. This may mean guidance from someone outside of the <i>Tahara</i> room, or possibly a reader standing at the back of the <i>Tahara</i> room with their back to the <i>Tahara</i> table, or other such arrangements.</p>	
Liturgy	
<p>CK uses a <i>Tahara</i> manual to guide <i>chevra</i> members in performing this ritual. The same manual should be used by both men and women, even though there might be slight variations in how they do their work. The choice of which manual to use could change over time, so CK does not specify in these policies that a specific manual must be used. It is felt important, however, that whatever manual is being used for <i>Tahara</i> also be used as the basis for training, and that it be available to all <i>chevra</i> members to study at home.</p>	<p>JBS <i>roshim</i> (team leaders) will agree to follow an approved JBS liturgy.</p>
Observing	
<p>CK policy emphasizes respect for the deceased. Hence, we do not allow observers of <i>Tahara</i>. If someone wishes to observe, they must participate as a part of the team. That's often how new members in the <i>chevra</i> learn the basics – through “on the job training”.</p>	

Clothing	
<p>The normal practice of CK is to dress the deceased in traditional Jewish <i>tachrichim</i> – burial shrouds that are simple cotton or linen clothes designed to represent the clothes of the <i>Kohen HaGadol</i> (the High Priest in the days of the Temple). On occasion there have been requests to dress a deceased person in specific clothes of importance to that person, such as a robe bestowed upon them for an honorary degree, or possibly a jacket that was “always worn” by a deceased teenager.</p> <p>Our policy is to dress the deceased in <i>tachrichim</i>, then if the family is particularly insistent about such clothing, we will cut the clothing up the back and drape it over the deceased once they are in the casket (after removing any metal on the garment). If CK team members do not wish to handle such clothes, they may ask the funeral home to perform this part of the procedure.</p>	<p>It is our default policy to prepare, ritually wash and dress the deceased in <i>tachrichim</i> (burial garments) according to traditional practices, and then place the meit in a plain casket. As a liberal burial society, however, our tahara is free of judgment. It is not our place to judge or alter the choices made by or for the meit.</p> <p>We are open to considering family requests to dress the meit in specific personal garments, or to alter the traditional arrangement of <i>tachrichim</i> garments. Toe tags, hospital bracelets and personal property that can be removed from the meit will be given to the mortuary. We decline to place personal items in the casket; this will be left to the discretion the family.</p>

Family Member Participation	
<p>Our experience has led to a policy of no participation in <i>Tahara</i> ritual procedures by family members or relatives close to the deceased. This policy is based on 2 primary concerns:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The possibility of emotional trauma to the family member, and possible subsequent disruption of the ritual, and 2. Respect for <i>chevra</i> team members who might feel scrutinized by the presence of family members while they do their work. <p>If a child of a deceased parent or a parent of a deceased child insists on participating, we offer them the opportunity to tie the last knot – they tie the <i>shin, daled, yud</i> knot representing the name of God into the belt around the waist that finishes the clothing of the deceased. For all other relatives of the deceased, they are invited to participate in sitting <i>Shmira</i> with the deceased, but are not offered participation in the <i>Tahara</i>.</p>	<p>If someone who had a relationship with the meit asks to attend a tahara as a guest, we will first explain that we permit but do not encourage this. If they still wish to proceed, they may do so if they agree to the following requirements, at the discretion of the rosh:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The guest must bring a support person to accompany them. b. The support person must contact the rosh ahead of time for an orientation to their task, to explain their relationship to the meit and to affirm that the meit's Advance Health Care Directive agent or person of next degree of kinship has approved the attendance. c. Both of the visitors must be of the same self-identified gender as the meit. d. Both visitors must observe the etiquette of the tahara room by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. remaining silent, ii. not interrupting the ceremony or becoming a distraction, iii. participating in the ritual in some way so as not to disrespect the dead and the tahara team, iv. leaving at any time if asked to do so by the rosh.

Cremation

Jewish tradition does not support cremation. In today's world, however, many Jewish families do choose cremation for their loved ones. If the family insists on cremation, it is the policy of the CK that we will indeed still perform *Tahara* and *Shmira* for the deceased, with the caveat that CK team members will be informed of this circumstance and may choose not to participate. If there are enough team members to perform the *Tahara*, then CK shall do so. If there are not enough personnel to perform the ritual, then the family shall be told that CK is unable to perform the requested *Tahara*.

CK will sit *Shmira* until the *Tahara* starts, or until the body is taken for cremation, but only if there are enough personnel to do so.

Transgender

CK will perform *Tahara* for Jews who change their sex or live as a different sex from that of their birth. The careful decision as to which team from CK (men's or women's) should perform the *Tahara* procedure must take into account the lived identity of the deceased. This decision should be made with input from family members and close friends of the deceased and will vary from case to case. The goal is to promote and maintain the dignity and modesty of the deceased to the greatest extent possible. CK members may choose not to participate in such a *Tahara*.

Tahara teams will be made up of members of the same self-identified gender as the meit. If a mixed team would be most appropriate (such as if the meit identified in life as transgender or otherwise-gendered, or if the tahara will be performed on remains of mixed or indeterminate gender) this may be provided, at the discretion of the rosh, following the principle of *kavod hameit* (honoring the dead).

Non-Jewish Spouse	
<p>CK will not perform <i>Tahara</i> for non-Jews. However, the CK policy is to support the needs of the community by honoring deceased non-Jewish spouses of Jews who have been involved in the Jewish community, have raised their children as Jews, and who are considered “<i>K’rov Yisrael</i>” – those close to the Jews. It is our policy that CK not perform preparation rituals for <i>K’rov Yisrael</i> as a <i>chevra</i>, however, it is deemed appropriate for the CK mailing list to be used to notify members of such a death, so members can choose to participate as individuals in the preparation for burial of non-Jewish spouses of Jews. A manual to guide such a preparation is being published at this time.</p>	<p>We will provide tahara to any meit, to the best of our ability, no matter the circumstances of their life or death, so long as they fell under our definition of Jewish. We are open to providing a ritual washing ceremony for non-Jews from within the extended Jewish community, following a JBS approved procedure developed for that distinct need.</p>
Anonymity	
	<p>The work of the Jewish Burial Society is anonymous. The names of team members involved in a particular tahara are not to be shared with anyone outside of the team.</p>
Fees	
	<p>The Jewish Burial Society may charge fees for the services we provide.</p>