

Links and References

Jewish-funerals.org

This website is a wealth of information regarding the subject of death and dying. It also has more links on it to help you gain more understanding regarding the Jewish practices of Chevrah Kadisha

Deathcafe.com

This is a website that has much information about local meetings for people to get together in a safe environment to talk about the issues surrounding the topic of death and dying.

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Final Acts of Kindness

The Work of the Chevrah Kadisha



Final Acts of Kindness

Chevrah Kadisha

Chevrah Kadisha is the Hebrew translation of Holy Society. It is an organization of people who help others in making end of life decisions and taking care of people when they die. It is a group of people who are trained to help build support within their community to help people work through the challenges of the dying process, and preparing of the physical body for burial, and supporting those who are mourning the loss of their loved one.

One of the fundamental reasons for helping people who are sick, dying, and preparing them for burial is to offer a service to them out of simple kindness. Helping someone in a challenging situation without expecting anything in return is the truest act of kindness.

The Chevrah Kadisha can help you have a safe place to talk about all the issues that surround death and the dying process. We don't provide legal help, but can help you find people who are in your location that can better assist with legal issues.

We can help provide services to support those who are sick, dying, or have died. They include Shmira, Tahara, and Shiva.

Home Funeral? Green Burials?

There is a growing movement, where people are no longer wanting to have a traditional funeral service in a funeral home. The following are a few options.

A Home Funeral is an option that people have available to them. They can choose to have their loved one die at home, but also have all the taharah and funeral services done in the privacy of their home. The requirements and permits for transporting the meit/meitah (male/female) from the home to the cemetery vary from state to state. Check with the city or county authorities on what they require.

A Green Burial is a burial that can be done in a green burial cemetery. There is a growing number of green burial cemeteries throughout the United States. These cemeteries will allow people to be buried in simple caskets that are biodegradable and do not have any metal on them. The person being buried can be put in a simple pine box, or a special blanket that was made for this specific purpose.

What Is Shiva?

Shivah means seven in Hebrew. When someone is mourning the loss of a parent, child, spouse, or sibling, they generally stay at home for a period of seven days to mourn their loss.

Traditionally, when a family loses a loved one, after the funeral, the family is encouraged to stay home and mourn for a period of seven days. There are others within the community that stop in, and help prepare meals for the mourners so they don't have to worry about cooking or cleaning.

When we go to a house of mourning, we are encouraged to arrive with a humble heart. We sit quietly and wait for them to talk first. It may seem uncomfortable to sit in silence, but that would be a good time to silently pray for the family, and to just be with them. Many times, the mourner is comforted with the knowledge that someone is just there. We don't have to talk to show we care. It is the act of showing up and just being there that may be important for mourners.

Why Choose These Services?

Over the years, things in our society have changed. We no longer care for our loved ones in the privacy of our homes. We now let the funeral homes care for those who have died. But things are starting to change.

Are there other options to bury our loved ones? Are there systems in place that we can learn from to KNOW that our loved one was treated with honor, respect, and dignity? Do you know where to look or who to ask or talk with about the topic of death and dying?

Some of the answers you are searching for are found in the traditions of the practices of the Chevrah Kadisha.

When we learn to accept that the subject of death is a part of life, and not something to be feared, we can learn to be supportive to those actively working through sickness and death. By helping our community learn to work through the issues surrounding sickness and death, we build a community of stability and trust in each other.

It helps calm many fears around sickness, death, and dying by providing practical ways to help those in our communities.

What is Shmira?

Shmira is a Hebrew word that means to guard. In this context, it represents guarding the body.

Helping with Shmira is a simple way to keep watch over the deceased so they are not sitting alone by themselves. It was instituted so no one has to be alone while they are waiting between the time when they died until the time in which they are buried.

Most of the time, when people are sitting Shmira, the Shomrim (the person who is guarding) reads from the book of Psalms or read a book that may be available at the funeral home. Sometimes, it is a time of quiet reflection that may be used to pray over the family of the deceased.

This is most often the easiest aspect of caring for the deceased and their family. There is no physical contact with the deceased, and is the least intimidating area.

What is Tahara?

Tahara is the process of washing, and cleansing the physical body of the deceased. This process has a few different elements within the whole Tahara portion. First, the meit/maitah (male/female) is gently washed and bathed. Then, the next step is the purification process, which would represent a ritual washing, which is similar to a mikvah. This portion represents the person being cleansed from the physical things of this world and being clean as they prepare to go to the world to come. The meit/meitah (male/female) is then dressed in a special garment that is called tachrichim (burial shroud). It is a special garment that the deceased is dressed in that symbolizes a priestly garment. Then they are carefully placed in an aron (casket) and moved to where the person performing shmira is waiting. The beauty of this process is the gentle care the deceased is given. He/she is cleansed with the utmost honor, dignity, respect and care that one can give. The men take care of the men. The women take care of the women so respect can be given to each gender. If men are not available, then the women can take care of the men. The men do not take care of the women. The entire time this process is done there is liturgy that is recited. The liturgy is generally readings from the Song of Songs with some readings from appropriate Psalms.

