



April 7, 2020 COVID-19 Protocols for Levayahs and Cemeteries

Among the many trying challenges we face in these dire times is the sorrow of isolation from one another, added to the deeper one of personal loss, as we accompany those beloved to us to their resting places.

Just as the current times demand that we now pray and study at home, the way to give honor to the dead during this pandemic is by staying at home. That is what the *niftar* (deceased) would have wanted and what Jewish law, which warns us to be extremely careful to guard our health, demands of us. We therefore must not congregate at funeral homes, shuls, residences, or on city streets to pay our respects to the *niftar* and their families.

While we honor the departed through proper Jewish burial despite the challenges entailed, we must maintain a balance. We must remain sensitive and committed to serving our bereaved families as fully as possible, while working to ensure their health and safety, along with the health and safety of the funeral home and cemetery staff.

We recognize that the burial may provide the only opportunity for family to say Kaddish and be offered proper *nichum aveilim* (comforting of the mourners). As such, the following suggested policies and procedures should be followed at the cemetery to minimize the risk of exposure and to ensure the safety of all.

B'virchas kol tuv v'chag kasher v'sameiach,
Rabbi Elchonon Zohn

1. PARTICIPANTS

- a. Crowd size should be limited to the greatest extent possible. A minyan for Kaddish is not required at every *levayah*. Nevertheless, when requested, a proper minyan for Kaddish at the burial should be accommodated.
- b. Participating relatives should be limited to the surviving spouse, children of the deceased and their spouses, as well as siblings and parents, G-d forbid.
- c. If an experienced chevra kadisha, known to the cemetery, is directly overseeing the *kevurah* (burial), they should be permitted to do so with adherence to proper safety procedures regarding PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). See #2b, below, for details of safety procedures.
- d. In any case, no more than 20 people should be present; this includes all family, chevra kadisha, funeral directors, and clergy. Of course, we must comply with state and federal regulations, taking into account any exemptions they allow for such gatherings.

2. INFECTION CONTROL PROTOCOL

- a. All visitors who intend to exit their cars (to carry the *aron*, shovel, or to recite Kaddish) shall wear masks, and preferably gloves (to be provided by the family or funeral home).
- b. Active participation in the carrying of the *aron* (coffin) or *kevurah* requires wearing the following PPE, and adherence to the following procedures:**
 - Face mask
 - Disposable gloves
 - Protective gown (if available)
 - One shovel per individual — no sharing of shovels
 - All shovels to be sanitized by those using them **before and after use**
- c. It is recommended that the funeral home direct the family in these procedures and ensure PPE and shovels will be present and procedures adhered to.

3. CROWD CONTROL

- a. Any person who is Covid-19 positive or is experiencing symptoms associated with Covid-19, should not be in attendance under any circumstances.**
- b. All present must remain in their vehicles.** In cases where Kaddish is being accommodated, the minyan must remain inside their cars during the recitation of Kaddish, and respond without getting out of their vehicles. Only those saying Kaddish are permitted to leave their vehicles. It is imperative that all present maintain proper social distancing of at least 6 ft. from others. Masks must be utilized, and gloves are strongly recommended.

c. When a chevra kadisha is present, graves should be allowed to be filled by hand shoveling. (See 2b for shoveling procedures.) Cemeteries may request they fill only until the *aron* is fully covered. At that point there is usually a covering of 3 *tefachim* (approximately 1ft) over the entire *aron*. The remaining filling of the *kever* (grave) may be done by cemetery workers — ideally with shovels rather than by machine, if at all possible.

d. At no time may anyone approach the grave when cemetery workers are present, nor may anyone approach any cemetery worker. Anyone involved in the burial must leave the area of the grave, and must be more than 6 feet away from the grave, before the cemetery workers may be asked to return.

e. All *hespedim* (eulogies) at the cemetery should be postponed until the current crisis has passed, when proper memorialization of departed loved ones will, *be"H*, be possible in the presence of all who wish to honor them. Modern technology offers many options for eulogies to be heard or viewed by many.

Thank you for adhering to these protocols and for your understanding and patience during these unprecedented times. We pray for those infected with Covid-19, those caring for the sick, and those ensuring the proper burial of the deceased.

In the merit of protecting ourselves and others, and for the *chesed* (kindness) and *kavod* (honor) shown to those who have passed on, all of whom were created in the image of G-d, may we soon see the day when Hashem will permanently wipe the tears from every face.

**These guidelines were issued on April 7, 2020,
and will be updated as necessary.**