

## Last Acts of Compassion: A Guide for the Maui Chevrah Kadisha



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דַּרְכֵיהָ דַרְכֵי נַעַם וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם

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## Intention of the document

This document is meant to inform all the wonderful people connected with the Maui Chevrah Kadisha concerning our protocols. We have addressed a variety of questions that have come up, or may come up in our island community. Each of the questions below have been the topic of much discussion and we have based our answers, to the best of our ability, on sound halakhic sources based in compassion.<sup>1</sup> We use as our polestar the foundational principle and value that our Torah is a code of behavior which is meant to bring peace and harmony to the world. This is an evolving process and the document will be reviewed and edited as needed.

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<sup>1</sup> The intricate system of laws and practices of mourning is not meant to tell people what they must do when mourning, but rather to facilitate the mourning process for them. This is clearly reflected in the Halakhic statement: הלכה כדברי המקל באבל – we always follow the most lenient opinion regarding mourning (*Eruvin 46a:19; Moed Katan 18a:1*).

We also learn, from the numerous mourning practices mentioned in the Shulhan Arukh which were later abandoned (*Yoreh Deah 352 on*), that mourning practices depend on contemporary and local social norms.

## Introduction

In ancient times, as well as during the second Temple and Mishnaic periods, traditional practices concerning death and mourning were performed by the family or, lacking family resources, the tight knit communities. As time went on and communities became larger and more urban the idea of formal Chevrah Kadisha organizations began to develop in order to meet the end-of-life needs of Jews. Historic practices concerning the dead have not always corresponded to the Mishnaic and Talmudic discussions, nor later foundational works such as the Mishneh Torah and Shulhan Arukh. Some customs spread widely amongst and across Jewish communities, while others were region specific or used for a time then set aside.

Details of practice still vary among different Jewish communities, though consensuses have become normalized. In certain groups customs have been passed down from generation to generation creating normalization in certain communities. The Maui Chevrah Kadisha recognizes the diversity in our island community and does our best to accommodate, whenever possible, the expressed desires of those who have passed and the loved ones they left behind.

## A Holy Society

As members of a holy society the intention of the Maui Chevrah Kadisha is to be pure and holy and to act in ways that (in order of priority):

1. Honor the dignity and sanctity of the met/ah (Kavod haMetim) and, to the greatest extent possible, acquiesce to their expressed desires.
2. Take into consideration the feelings and needs of their family members and close friends (Kavod haChai).
3. Take into consideration the feelings and needs of the community as a whole.

## Chevrah Kadisha

**Question:** Who can become a member of the Maui Chevrah Kadisha?

**Answer:** Anyone in the Jewish community. There are many tasks to choose from that can be within everyone's comfort level and are age appropriate.

**Question:** Does becoming a member of the Chevrah mean that one has to always participate if called?

**Answer:** No. Any member of the Chevrah may choose at any time to withdraw from participation in a specific event due to individual reasons and still be an active member in the Holy Society.

**Question:** What are the Chevrah's protocols on confidentiality?

**Answer:** We ask our members to agree to not divulge any information about the met/ah or the mourning family learned through participating in the chevrah.<sup>2</sup> This includes speaking about the specifics of a Taharah and not identifying to others outside the group who was in attendance at a particular Taharah.

**Question:** Does confidentiality imply invisibility/secretcy?

**Answer:** No. Confidentiality implies a culture of respect, honor, and privacy not secretcy or invisibility.<sup>3</sup>

**Question:** Can a man who is a Kohen serve in the Chevrah Kadisha?

**Answer:** Kohenim can serve in the Chevrah Kadisha but they usually serve in administrative or other supportive positions within the Chevrah Kadisha.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is a foundational principle of the Holy Society to protect the privacy of the met/ah, CK members and the mourning family. There is a strong tradition of confidentiality within Chevrah Kadisha as this is an issue of honoring the met/ah.

<sup>3</sup> The Chevra Kadisha is a foundational group that is a visible and essential part of the Jewish and greater community to disseminate information on and participate publicly in many arenas that are part of Jewish end of life practices.

<sup>4</sup> Vaikra/Leviticus 21:1-4 forbids the Kohenim from becoming Tame met (impure from touching a dead body). The reason why this was forbidden is not known. One idea is that the Torah desires to emphasize life and therefore wanted to remove the people as much as possible from the death culture of Egypt.

**Question:** Do the members of the Chevrah need to be “Shomer Kashrut”, “Shomer Shabbat”, and “Shomer Taharat HaMishpaḥa”?

**Answer:** It is very important that everyone involved in our Chevrah Kadisha come to this holy work with clear intention, purity of spirit, and a positive Jewish spiritual approach to death and dying with an emphasis on k'vod hamet (respect for the dead). We do not ask our members if they are “shomrei shabbat, kashrut and taharat hamishpaḥa” as these are relative terms and we do not pry into the personal spiritual lives of our members.

**Question:** If my family is “shomrei shabbat, kashrut and taharat hamishpaḥa” can the Chevrah care for my family?

**Answer:** Yes. The desires and minhagim of each met/ah and their families are respected and the Chevrah will attempt to accommodate each circumstance to the best of its ability.

**Question:** If my family is not 'religious' can the Chevrah care for my family?

**Answer:** Yes. The desires and minhagim of each met/ah and their families are respected and the Chevrah will attempt to accommodate each circumstance to the best of its ability.

## Taharah

### Tahara Teams

**Question:** Does the Chevrah have separate Taharah teams for men and women?

**Answer:** Yes. The generally accepted practice is for a men's team to take care of a *met* (m) and for a women's team to take care of a *metah* (f).<sup>5</sup>

**Question:** How does the Chevrah honor the lived experience of gender non-conforming Jews at the time of their deaths? Does this affect the Taharah?

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Another possibility is that this practice allowed mourning to stay in the hands of the family and not be institutionalized (until recently).

<sup>5</sup> This may be modified if circumstances require. According to *Shulḥan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 352* women can do Taharah for a man (though not the opposite).

**Answer:** The Chevrah's role is to reflect the met/ah's understanding of themselves with dignity, love, and complete acceptance. Unless specifically requested otherwise, our women's taharah team cares for all gender non-conforming Jews. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

#### Tahara Providers/Washers

**Question:** Does the Chevrah permit family members or close friends of the met/ah to take part in the Taharah?

**Answer:** This is something that can be accommodated, although experienced Chevrah members have noted that the mourning process is best supported if family members and close friends of the met/ah do not participate in the Taharah or be in the room when the Taharah is taking place.<sup>6</sup> If desired, however, they may be involved in the ceremony after the met/ah is shrouded and placed in the Aron.<sup>7</sup> Ideally this is arranged beforehand with the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator, Rosh/a, or officiant.

**Question:** Can a woman who is pregnant participate in Taharah?

**Answer:** No. Because of potential health issues, as well as the physical strain often required, it is our minhag to not allow pregnant women to participate in Taharah.

**Question:** Is there a dress code in the taharah room?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Explanation:** Taharah is usually done in a mortuary prep room. Personal protective equipment like gowns, gloves and masks are provided for each team member to wear over their own clothes. Individuals are required to dress for one's own personal protection including shoes that are not slippery and waterproof if desired.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah require men to cover their heads while performing a Taharah?

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<sup>6</sup> Many families report feelings of support and care when others, even strangers, have volunteered to lovingly care for their family member and this leaves them sacred space for their grief. When others take over this intimate and sacred ceremony they report relief, gratitude, and a feeling of being part of a community and tradition that unites them to the Jewish people

<sup>7</sup> This could include wheeling the coffin from the room (depending on mortuary rules), spreading Israeli soil over their loved one, arranging *Tallit* and *Tzitzit*, *hakafot*, concluding prayers, *shmirah*, etc.

**Answer:** No. We do not require men to cover their heads while performing a Taharah.<sup>8</sup> If one customarily wears a kippah for prayer or when in the presence of the Torah they are encouraged to do so in the taharah room.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah require women to cover their heads while performing a Taharah?

**Answer:** No. We do not require women to cover their heads while performing a Taharah. If one customarily wears a head covering for prayer or when in the presence of the Torah they are encouraged to do so in the taharah room.

#### Tahara Specifics

**Question:** Does Taharah always include the physical washing and purification ceremony?

**Answer:** No. There are cases when washing and pouring water over the body is not feasible. In this case the ceremony is modified.

Note: In extreme cases, when it is impossible to be near the body, the Chevrah offers a Taharah Ruchanit/Spiritual Taharah, a type of Taharah that can be done virtually. This special Tahara was developed for use by our CK during Covid19.

**Question:** Is it necessary to request the entire end of life ritual of washing, purification/taharah, dressing/halbashah and coffining/aroning?

**Answer:** We encourage it as it is a beautiful time honored tradition and we feel there are spiritual benefits to the *niftar* in receiving the entire process. That said, please notify the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator or Rosh/a of your requests. Each situation will be assessed separately, discussed with the family and the ritual modified if possible. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

#### Tahara Room Etiquette

**Question:** Do the Chevrah members speak in the Taharah room?

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<sup>8</sup> Covering one's head is a minhag.



**Answer:** We ask our members to speak only as needed in the Taharah room in order to create and hold a Sacred space as much as possible and to focus on the task at hand. That said, there are portions of the liturgy that speak directly to the met/ah in which all the members may take part.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah permit members to sing in the Taharah room?

**Answer:** We encourage singing parts of the liturgy, as well as *niggunim* when appropriate. This choice is left to the decision of the rosh/a of each team however, and often depends on the circumstances.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah permit the use of a diffuser with essential oils in the Taharah room?

**Answer:** Yes.<sup>9</sup>

#### Minhagim/Customs

**Question:** Does the Chevrah place *sherblach* (pottery shards) on the eyes and mouth of the met/ah during Taharah?

**Answer:** Though we generally do not perform this custom when a Taharah is requested, we offer the option if it is your family's custom.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah wash the face and hair of the met/ah with egg and/or vinegar/wine during Taharah?

**Answer:** No. We have chosen not to offer this custom.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In a series of rulings to preserve the honor of the dead, the Babylonian Talmud in Moed Katan 27B mentions how they used to place incense under the bed of one who died of a stomach illness to prevent stench. From this we learn that the use of fragrance in the taharah room is acceptable. We consider it a *hiddur mitzvah*, which literally means “the beautification of a mitzvah,” and refers to actions meant to beautify or enhance the observances and celebrations within Jewish tradition.

<sup>10</sup> As always, however, if the met/ah had a strong desire for this custom we will do our best to accommodate. This must be arranged beforehand with the chevrah kadisha administrator, rosh/a, or officiant.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah dress the met/ah during *halbasha* in a simple shroud or in coverings modeled after the clothing of the Kohen Gadol (Takhrikhim)?<sup>11</sup>

**Answer:** It is your choice.

- a) The Maui Chevrah Kadisha has adopted the minhag of dressing the met/ah in a simple cotton muslin shroud since we find this custom beautiful. We wrap the sheet in four ways representing the lower four soul consciousness levels. The fifth and highest level is represented by the tallit or the Sovev. After the met/ah is lovingly wrapped, four ties made from the same material are used to keep the shroud in place and they are tied with the same ritual knots used to tie the takhrikhim.
  
- b) If takhrikhim, coverings modeled after the clothing of the Kohen Gadol, are desired they may be purchased for use during the Taharah. This needs to be arranged beforehand with the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator, Rosh/a, or officiant to have them available for the taharah ritual.

**Question:** Can the met/ah be dressed in regular clothing?

**Answer:** Our preference is to use a shroud or takhrikhim. We can accommodate this if it is important as long as the clothing is loose and does not inhibit the ability of the chevrah to dress the met/ah. The garments need to be made out of natural fibers

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<sup>11</sup> The earliest mention in the Tanakh about burial clothing is when the prophet Shmuel is raised from his grave. The word used there is 'me'il' and from this Rashi understands that people were buried in the clothing that they wore during their lifetime, most likely at that time a robe of some sort. Unfortunately, during the late Second Temple period, it became common for the wealthy to purchase expensive shrouds (the Romans were painting elaborate sheets of material for burial use) or to be buried with their best clothes. No one seems to be sure which, but it is clear that this custom caused social problems. This social inequality was showing up in other mourning rituals as well. In response, the Sages instituted rules of conformity in mourning practices to avoid shaming the poor (see BT Moed Katan 27a/b; Ketubot 8b:14; Moed Katan 27b:4). After listing several problems and subsequent rulings, the gemara states that things had gotten so out of hand that the poor were abandoning their dead! The gemara then concludes with, "This lasted until Rabban Gamliel (the grandson of Rabbi Hillel, second century C.E. about 50 years after the destruction of the second Beit haMikdash) came and acted with frivolity, meaning that he waived his dignity, by leaving instructions that he be taken out for burial b'khlei pishtan (in flax, linen-the cheapest material). And the people adopted this practice after him and had themselves taken out for burial b'khlei pishtan. Rav Pappa said: And nowadays, everyone follows the practice of taking out the dead for burial even in plain hemp [tzerada] that cost only a dinar." Amazingly, this custom of showing that we are all equal in death lasts until today.

without metal and be biodegradable.<sup>12</sup> Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

Note: Although there are multiple discussions in the Talmud concerning burial there is no one guideline or halakha concerning what a met/ah should wear. Archeological evidence from the Greco Roman and Byzantine Periods support the use of light colored fabrics, most often linen.<sup>13</sup>

Who may receive Taharah

**Question:** If the body of a met/ah is going to be transported to the mainland or to Israel for burial can their body be cared for by the Chevrah here and be prepared using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** If a body is going to be transported off island it is preferable that the Taharah be done here before transport unless there is a specific request that it be done at the destination.

**Question:** If a met/ah has a tattoo will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** Yes.<sup>14</sup>

**Question:** If a baby under 30 days old dies will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

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<sup>12</sup> Shrouds for the dead, and the packsaddle of a donkey are not subject to the law of kilayim. Mishna Kelaiyim 9:4

<sup>13</sup> When exactly the practice of dressing the met/ah in uniform clothing modeled after the clothing of the Kohen Gadol began, the authors have so far been unsuccessful in finding out. In the book of Esther, the word Takhrikh (wrap) is used to refer to an outer cloak that was wrapped around the body. When the verses from Vayikra, that are now traditional to recite as each piece of clothing is placed on the met/ah, began to be used is also an enigma. The custom most likely stemmed from the discussion in BT Zevahim 88b:6 where it states, "priestly vestments effect atonement...tunic atones for bloodshed...trousers atone for forbidden sexual relations...cap atones for the arrogant... belt atones for thought of the heart...breastplate atones for improper judgments...ephod atones for idol worships...robe atones for malicious speech. If you have sources for the origin of this custom please contact us.

<sup>14</sup> There are differing opinions concerning whether getting a tattoo is permitted halakhically, but even those who posken (make a decision according to halakha) that getting a tattoo is forbidden do not prohibit Jewish end of life rituals or burial in a Jewish cemetery.

**Answer:** Yes, if the family desires. We consider this the decision of the parents or guardians.<sup>15</sup>

**Question:** If someone has died by suicide will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** Yes. We do not differentiate between suicide and any other causes of death.<sup>16</sup>

**Question:** If someone has chosen to be cremated will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** Yes. If one has chosen to be cremated we still offer Taharah. The Chevrah serves to aid, to the best of our ability, in the elevation of the soul of the *niftar* and to offer honor and respect to the met/ah. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

**Question:** If someone has chosen hydrolysis and composting will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** Yes. The Chevrah serves to aid, to the best of our ability, in the elevation of the soul of the *niftar* and to offer honor and respect to the met/ah. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

**Question:** If someone has chosen to be buried at sea will the Chevrah care for the body and prepare it using Jewish end of life rituals?

**Answer:** Yes. The Chevrah serves to aid, to the best of our ability, in the elevation of the soul of the *niftar* and to offer honor and respect to the met/ah. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

**Question:** Can Taharah be done for someone who is an organ donor?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Since the laws of mourning were meant to facilitate the mourning process we feel it is important to offer Taharah to even those infants who lived less than thirty days if that will help facilitate the mourning process of the parents.

<sup>16</sup> Suicide has been forbidden in halakha/Jewish Law only when defined as 'willful suicide' which requires specific requirements and has many exceptions (see BT Semahot 2:1-3). The practice of exclusion was discouraged by many halakhic authorities and today all suicide is considered as if it were done unintentionally.

<sup>17</sup> Organ donation today is seen in many communities to be life saving, which is a mitzvah that is considered above all else, and each life saved by organ donations is worth more than the idea of burying a whole body. This stance is presently supported by most Conservative and many Orthodox rabbis,

**Answer:** Yes, though the ritual might need to be slightly modified (such as in the case of skin or long bone donation).

**Note:** The Halakhic Organ Donation Society (HODS) handles all aspects of organ donation in a halakhically permitted way. For more info [click here](#).

**Question:** Can Taharah be done on a person who has dedicated their remains to Science?<sup>18</sup>

**Answer:** Yes, though the ritual might need to be modified and some restrictions may apply. Please contact the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator for specifics.

**Question:** Can Taharah be done for someone who has had an autopsy?<sup>19</sup>

**Answer:** Yes, though the ritual might need to be slightly modified depending on the extent of the autopsy. Please contact the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator for specifics.

**Question:** Can Taharah be done for someone who has had embalming or cosmetic treatment?<sup>20</sup>

**Answer:** No. According to Jewish practice the blood is considered a part of the body that needs to be buried with the deceased.<sup>21</sup>

**Question:** Is Taharah available for K'rovei Yisrael?

**Answer:** Yes, we offer a special Taharah ritual modified for the comfort of K'rovei Yisrael. The Taharah ritual for Krovei Yisrael parallels the Jewish Taharah ritual with some minor differences. By including this ritual we honor both the dignity of the met/ah and their connection to the Jewish community.

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among them Rabbi Yosef Messas zt"l, former chief rabbi of Haifa, who argued that it is an honor and joy for the deceased to know that because of him or her, lives were saved, and that Hashem does not need the body in order to revive the dead (see *Mayim Qedoshim*, 109, Meknes, Adar 1, 1951). For a translation of Rabbi Messas's article on organ transplants and autopsies [click here](#).

<sup>18</sup> Donating one's body to science is not forbidden if there is a clear notion of benefiting mankind. These are of course very sensitive issues which differ significantly from case to case, and one should therefore consult an expert on these matters.

<sup>19</sup> Contrary to popular belief, autopsy is not forbidden as long as there is a possibility that the knowledge gleaned from the procedure will contribute to the enhancement of medical science or crime fighting.

<sup>20</sup> Embalming is not something that is done in Jewish practice. It was done to Yaakov Avinu because he was considered Egyption royalty.

<sup>21</sup> The process of embalming involves flushing the blood from the veins and replacing it with a formaldehyde-based solution.

**Note:** The definition of K'rovei Israel, for our purposes, is: a non-Jew who is an active member of a Jewish community, or whose spouse or loved one is an active member of a Jewish community; a non-Jew who lives a Jewish lifestyle or is in the process of learning how to live a Jewish lifestyle who has not (yet) converted.

Hashkava

**Question:** What kind of coffin can be used for burial?

**Answer:** Wooden or other natural material.<sup>22</sup>

**Question:** Does the Chevrah permit a met/ah be wrapped in their *tallit katan* or *tallit*?<sup>23</sup>

**Answer:** Yes. Today it is generally accepted that if one wears a tallit *katan* daily and/or regularly wears a tallit he/she should be buried in it as long as there is no metal thread or fasteners that would make it not biodegradable.

Note: Maui Minhag is to cut off one of the *tzitzit* before placing the tallit in the *aron*. The tallit is then positioned in the *aron* so it can be wrapped around the met/ah and the *tzitzit* is placed horizontally on the tallit at the neck area.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah permit personal belongings or flowers to be placed in the coffin and buried with the met/ah?<sup>24</sup>

**Answer:** In keeping with our emphasis on the last act of kindness (*Talmud, Sota 14a*), biodegradable items may be included (within reason) if the met/ah specifically requested it or the family will feel emotionally comforted by it. This needs to be arranged beforehand by the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator or Rosh/a. Individual Chevrah members may choose to participate in this or not.

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<sup>22</sup> "Kosher" coffins are made without any metal parts or animal-based glue and are not built on Shabbat.

<sup>23</sup> The idea of putting tzitzit in the shroud was a question of debate. Today all options have halakhic support though the normative minhag is to cut off one of the tzitzit since the met/ah no longer has the mitzvah associated with it (see *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 351 and Tur Yoreh Deah 351*).

<sup>24</sup> Placing items in the coffin alongside the deceased (except for geniza of sacred texts) is generally frowned on in Jewish law for both theological and practical reasons though the practice is mentioned in the Mishna so it was done. **Theological:** Judaism sees the afterlife as a place where the soul lives on, lacking in physicality. Unlike the ancient Egyptians who believed that physical items were needed in the afterlife, Jews hold that one should go out of this world like they came in and that there is no need for anything from this life in the afterlife. **Practical:** The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 349) discourages placing items in the coffin due to the issue of not using items designated for burial for any other purpose. By extension it also brings issues of *ba'al tashchit!* unnecessary waste. We learn from Yoreh Deah 350 however that people used to put belongings of the deceased in the coffin. The halakha made a compromise and allowed it.

## Shmirah

**Question:** Is *shmirah* (guarding the body) provided by the Chevrah?<sup>25</sup>

**Answer:** If *shmirah* is desired by the family we will provide it to the best of our ability. We may not be able to provide *shmirah* 24/7 as we are a small chevrah and our volunteer base is limited.

## Levayah

**Question:** Does the Chevrah plan the funeral ceremony?

**Answer:** No. This is usually done by the person officiating at the ceremony in conjunction with the family members.

**Question:** Does the Chevrah take part in the accompaniment of the coffin at the funeral?

**Answer:** The Chevrah is available to support the ceremony and accompany the Met/ah in any way that the officiant or family may wish to the best of our ability. Please let the Chevrah Kadisha Administrator know what those wishes may be and we would be honored to help fulfill them.

Note: We may not always be able to provide certain services as we are a small chevrah and our volunteer base is limited.

## Glossary of Mourning Terms

**Aninut** אֲנִינּוּת: Deep Sorrow; the time period between a loved one's death and their burial. A mourner during this period is referred to as an *onen* (oh-nehn).

**Anniversary of death:** There is a strong custom to light a 24-hour candle on the anniversary of the Hebrew date of a loved one's death. Some accompany this with a ceremony. Common references to this day are:

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<sup>25</sup> The Shomer's job is to guard the Met/ah physically, metaphysically and spiritually and to safeguard, respect, comfort and elevate the soul. The original role of a *shomer* was to protect the body from predators and pests. In a modern morgue/ funeral home this is obsolete.

**Yahrzeit** יאַרצייט (Yiddish for time of year); **Nachala** נַחְלָה (Hebrew for inheritance) ; **The Anyo/Anyos** (year(s) in Ladino); **Saal** (Persian for year) **Meldado** (also refers to a learning session held on the anniversary of the loved one's death in honor of the deceased.)

**Aron** אָרוֹן: casket/coffin (also used to refer to the cabinet where a Torah is stored).

**Avel (m)** אַבֵּל / **Avela (f)** אַבֵּלָה : a bereaved person after burial has taken place. Plural Avelim(m) אַבֵּלִים / Avelot (f) אַבֵּלוֹת.

**Avelut** אַבֵּלוּת : mourning/ a state of being in bereavement. Also used to describe the period of mourning.

**Barukh Dayan HaEmet** בָּרוּךְ דֵּינֵן הָאֱמֶת : a statement traditionally said upon hearing of a passing (Blessed is the true judge).

**Hesed Shel Emet** חֶסֶד שֶׁל אֱמֶת : use to describe the work of a chevrah kadisha/holy society or the caretaking of a grave (the lovingkindness of truth).

**Hevrah Kadisha** חֶבְרַה קַדִּישָׁא : used to refer to a Jewish End of Life society (holy society).

**Comforting the mourner:** Phrases used traditionally by those offering comfort to a mourner or leaving the Shiva house. These phrases are generally said in the plural form even if only one mourner is present. One possible reason for this is that it is being said as a comfort for both the mourner and the deceased.

**Hamakom y'naḥem etchem b'toch sh'ar avele tziyon ve'Yerushalayim**

הַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר אַבְלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם : May Place/Divine console comfort you along with the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem

**Min hashamayim tenuḥamu** מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם תְּנוּחָמוּ (or **tenuchamu min haShamayim**): May you be comforted from Heaven

**May you suffer no more; or my condolences.**

**El Male Raḥamim** אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים : El/Power full of mercy; a prayer that originated in the Jewish communities of Western and Eastern Europe, for the departed and for the elevation of their soul. This beautiful prayer is sung/chanted at many Ashkenazi Jewish funerals or memorial services, upon visiting the graves of relatives (especially during at



the unveiling of the tombstone or in the month of Elul), after having been called up to the reading of the Torah on the anniversary of the death of a close relative. In some Ashkenazi synagogues it is also sung in the Yizkor memorial service on Yom Kippur and on the last days of the Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

**Guf** גוף: refers to a living body which clothes the soul

**Gufah** גופה: refers to a corpse

**Goses(m)** גוסס / **Gossett (f)** גוססת : a rabbinic concept describing an individual whose death is imminent. Traditionally this has been defined as someone who will inevitably die within three days but this definition was never universally accepted and has little basis in traditional halakhic sources.

**Halvayah** הלוייה: Funeral; also refers to the mitzvah of escorting or accompanying the dead to their final resting place/grave. Also referred to as Levayah לוייה (Yiddish)

**Hashkavoth** השכבות: Jewish memorial service for the dead (remembrance) in the Sephardic tradition. Prayers are generally recited on Yom Kippur for all those who've died during the past year. Considered to aid in the elevation and purification of the soul. See Yizkor.

**Heshbon Hanefesh** השבון הנפש an accounting of the soul.

**Hesped** הספד: a speech/eulogy given in honor of the deceased usually at the funeral or burial. A hesped can also be given at other times throughout the first year of the passing in which case it is often referred to as an azkarah/ remembrance (a memorial offering).

**Kevurah** קבורה: interment.

**K'vod HaMet** כבוד המת: honoring the dead; respect for the body of the deceased. An extremely important tenet of chevrah kadisha which commences at the moment of death.

**K'ri'ah** קריעה: a common mourning custom of tearing one's garment at the time of death or during a funeral to alleviate or express grief. Also referred to as Kortar Kriah. Ashkenazim tend to do kriah at the beginning of the funeral while Sephardim generally rend their clothing at the end of the funeral. Sometimes a symbolic ribbon pinned to the shirt is preferred to be used by the bereaved.

**Met (m)/meta (f) מֵתָה / מֵתָ:** a dead body/deceased raiment. The term mitah/death can be applied to any living being (including animals) that experiences the separation of body and soul. Mitah is the conclusion of life.

**Mishmarah מִשְׁמָרָה:** a special meal and study session at the end of the Shiva and/or at the end of the Shloshim.

**Mourners Kaddish - קַדִּישׁ יְתוֹם Kaddish Yatom** (lit orphan's kaddish): an Aramaic prayer recited in memory of the dead, although it makes no mention of death but rather exults Hashem. This beautiful prayer is generally recited for the first time at interment, said daily during shiva, at the shloshim, and for those mourning a parent it is said daily throughout the mourning period.

**Neshamah נֶשְׁמָה:** the level of soul that transcends death. One of the foundations of our faith is the belief in the immortality of the soul, and in life after death. In Hebrew, death is often referred to as Yetziat HaNeshama/the departure of the soul.

**Niftar נִפְטָר:** a deceased person - “niftar from the world” (Mishna Peah 8:9). The root of the word niftar is peh-tet-reish (exit). A person is niftar when she/he exits this world, like someone who exits one room to enter another. Niftar is also related to patur/exempt. When a person's soul leaves the body, then the body is exempt from all obligations.

**Nihum Avelim נִחֻם אַבְלִים / Nihumim נִחְוּמִים:** comforting the mourners. Nichum Avelim is considered one of the most important acts of chesed/loving-kindness a Jew can perform.

**Onen אוֹנֵן:** a bereaved person before the burial; a state of utter grief from time of death to the burial. An Onen becomes an Avel אַבֵּל at the burial.

**Se'udat havra'ah סְעוּדַת הַבְּרִיאָה:** the first meal after the burial of a loved one. (meal of condolence/consolation)

**Shurah-Nihum Avelim שְׂוֹרָה - נִחְוּם אַבְלִים:** Two lines formed by the community through which the mourners pass and receive comfort when leaving the cemetery.

**Shiv'ah שִׁבְעָה:** the seven day mourning period beginning at time of burial (Hebrew for "seven"). Also referred to as **Los siete** (Ladino for “seven”). Commonly used in the phrase, “sitting Shiva”.

**Shiv`a Minyan** שְׁבַעַתָּה מִיָּנִין: a group of 10 adult Jews who assemble in the mourner's home so that they can recite the Mourner's Kaddish.

**Sh'loshim** שלושִׁים: the first 30 days of mourning including the seven-day Shiva counting the day of burial as first day (Shloshim is Hebrew for the number 30). Also referred to as **Korte de Mes** (the cutting/conclusion of the month in Ladino)

**Shomer** שׁוֹמֵר: someone who sits with the body before it is buried (Shomer: one who guards in Hebrew). One does shmira שְׁמִירָה, watching over the deceased.

**Shnem `asar hodesh** עֶשְׂרִים וְאֶחָד עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ (Hebrew- 12 months): the period of mourning for a parent. Some customs continue to say kaddish for the full 12 months, others take a week break after 11 months then say kaddish again for three weeks and some stop after 11 months.

**Taharah** טְהָרָה: the ritual cleaning and preparation of a body performed by members of a *chevrah kadisha* (see above) before the burial; purification ceremony.

**Takhrikhim** תַּכְרִיקִים: burial clothing patterned after the priestly vestments of the kohen gadol

**Unveiling/stone-setting:** A meaningful ceremony popularized in the late 19th century is the setting of a permanent and conspicuous grave marker following burial. Some communities hold the ceremony soon (even a week) after the burial. In Israel it is usually done after the shloshim. In the US it is most often done 11 months after the death, though traditions vary.

**Matzevah** מַצֵּבָה: Tombstone (Hebrew for "pillar", "statue", or "monument"): refers to either a grave marker or to a Matzavat Zikaron ceremony.

**Matzevat Zikaron** מַצֵּבַת זִכָּרוֹן refers to the unveiling or stone-setting ceremony of the gravestone or grave marker.

**Vidui** וִדּוּי: Confessional prayer traditionally said on the deathbed.

**Yizkor** יִזְכֹּר: Jewish memorial service for the dead (remembrance) in the Ashkenazi tradition. A compilation of prayers, poems and psalms of remembrance generally said on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret (the holiday right after Sukkot, featuring the prayer for

rain), the last day of Pesach, and the second day of Shavuot. Considered to aid in the elevation and purification of the soul. See Hashkavoth.



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