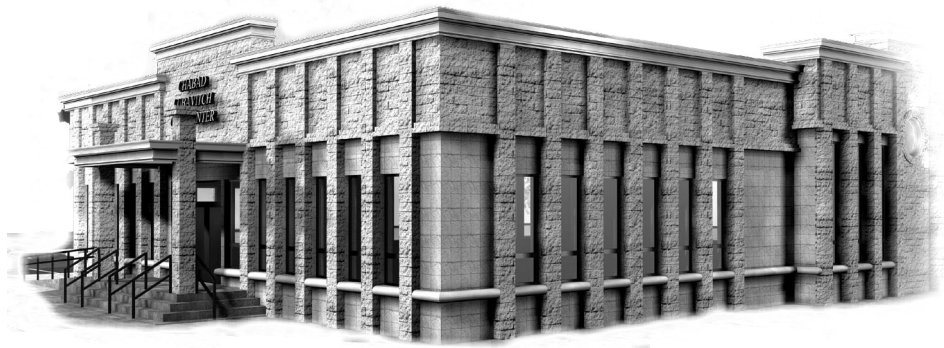


Part 1

The Chai Gardens Policies and Procedures



Part 2

End of Life Customs and Traditions

The Chai Center
501 Vanderbilt Parkway
Dix Hills, NY 11746
(631) 351-8672
www.TheChaiCenter.com



Dear Friends and Members

As the Chai Center grows in members and friends, so do the activities and programs which accommodate the growing needs of our community.

A recent addition to the Chai Center was the acquisition of the “Chai Gardens”, a section in the New Montefiore Jewish Cemetery in Wellwood, for the benefit of the Jewish community. This cemetery is to be used for all Jews of our community, the affiliated and non-affiliated alike.

The following booklet includes a short summary of the Jewish customs and traditions regarding the end of life, as well as policies and procedures which were adopted by the board of The Chai Center. Please review the booklet carefully.

I would like to thank Mr. Kevin Gray for his invaluable assistance.

Should you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to call the office or myself.

Rabbi Yakov Saacks

General Introduction

Because we love, when a loved one dies we feel sorrow and grief. These reactions are both normal and healthy. When death takes a loved one, life seems empty and the future dark. As Jews we have guidance at sad times in our lives and specific outlined ways to deal with death and its grief. The Jewish rituals and practices help us to express our grief rather than repress it, to talk about our loss with friends, and to move step by step from inactivity to normal living.

This booklet was written to provide a basic understanding of customs as observed in traditional Judaism, it does not include the entire Jewish law on this issue. This booklet also includes the policies and rules pertaining to the Chai Gardens at New Montefiore Cemetery in Wellwood. It is offered to guide our members and explain our traditions.

What To Do When a Death Occurs

Call a local funeral home that serves the Jewish community (you may obtain a list of funeral homes at the front desk) to arrange for proper care of your loved one. Contact Rabbi Saacks to assist you and to help arrange the funeral. If funeral prearrangements have not been made, you can ease the strain of planning the funeral by having someone, perhaps a close friend or family member, help you make decisions.

Before the Funeral

Set a time and place for the funeral with Rabbi Saacks and the funeral home. Our tradition prefers having the funeral as soon as possible after death occurs; however, there are times when a delay is proper. The service can be held at the synagogue, at the funeral home, or at the graveside. Telephone immediate family, close friends and employer or

business colleagues. Once the funeral time has been set, prepare the obituary. Items to consider including in the obituary are: age, place of birth, cause of death, occupation, college degrees, memberships in organizations, military service or noteworthy achievements. List survivors in the immediate family. Give the time and place of the funeral. Suggest where memorial contributions may be made. Choose the pallbearers. Pallbearers are six people who can carry the casket. You cannot choose a pallbearer who is a Kohen. It is customary not to choose immediate family members. You may choose as many others as you wish to serve as honorary pallbearers. You will need to discuss the eulogy with the Rabbi. Be open and give as much personal insight as possible. Avoid false or exaggerated praise. Tell the good things enthusiastically.

The Mourner

The period of time between death and burial is called *Aninut* and the bereaved is called an *Onen*. The prime responsibility of the *Onen* is to arrange the funeral. During this time, an *Onen* is exempt from positive *Mitzvot*. As such, *Teffilin* and prayer are not obligatory at this time. However, an *Onen* who finds it helpful to express feelings through prayers may do so. Only relatives or very close friends should visit during this time, primarily to help make arrangements for the funeral and *Shivah*. After the funeral, a mourner is known as an *Avel*. One is a mourner by obligation for parents, children, siblings or spouse.

Preparation for Burial

Our tradition has long stood for simplicity in funerals and mourning. A simple wooden casket is preferred. Cremation is not in keeping with Jewish tradition and Jewish law.

Before the *Met* (the one that passed) is dressed for burial, we observe the ritual of *Tahara*, of ritual washing, done by the *Chevra Kadisha*, the Holy Society. The *Chevra Kadisha* dresses the body only in traditional burial shrouds called *Tachrichim*, which are simple white garments.

Autopsy

Jewish tradition does not allow autopsies. However, there are times when an autopsy might be required by law. Each case must be reviewed independently, and you should speak to Rabbi Saacks for further information.

Embalming

Jewish tradition frowns on embalming and it is against Jewish law.

Flowers

Flowers are not part of Jewish mourning practice. In the spirit of honoring the memory of the dead by helping the living, suggest in the obituary that in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to an appropriate charity

Kriah

A few minutes before the funeral begins, the first formal act of mourning, *Kriah*, the tearing of one's garment takes place. *Kriah* is a centuries old symbol of inner grief and mourning. Mourners stand as they perform it. Before the cut is made, mourners recite a *Bracha* which is a reaffirmation of faith.

The Funeral Service

A funeral can be held at the synagogue, funeral home or the graveside. A service held only at graveside includes the same elements as those begun at another location. It is shorter because certain elements are repeated when a service is held in two locations. A graveside funeral is no less dignified nor less giving of honor to the deceased than any other service. The funeral service is brief. Selections are read from Psalms and a eulogy, depicting the life of the one that passed as a guide for the living, is presented. *Kel Maleh Rachamim*, which expresses our faith in the immortality of the soul, is recited on most days. Once at graveside, the service consists of recitation of *Tziduk Ha-din*, a prayer which expresses our acceptance of G-d's decisions, followed by the recitation of *Kaddish* and *Kel Maleh*.

After the burial, (except on special days) those attending the funeral form two lines to let the mourners pass between them. As they do, the following traditional words of comfort are said;

“Ha-makom Yinachem Et-chem Betoach She-ar Aveilei Tziyon Veyerushalayim, May G-d comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Shoveling Earth

After the casket is fully in the grave, the interment is begun by shoveling some earth into the grave. This *Mitzvah*, is known as *Chesed Shel Emet*, true loving kindness. This *Mitzvah* demonstrates our continuing concern for the one that passed as we make sure the final journey of the one that passed is completed. Participating in this *Mitzvah* has been shown to be of great psychological benefit for mourners since it serves as an important action of finality and closure.

Children at a Funeral

Should children attend a funeral? There is no hard and fast rule that applies. If a child is old enough to understand the purpose of the funeral and to know that people will be upset, then generally that child should attend the funeral. The child should sit with an adult he or she knows during the service. Remember that children need the opportunity to say “good-bye” to a loved one as do adults. It is not good to deprive a child who is old enough to understand, of an opportunity to say farewell and to begin to grieve.

After the Funeral

Shivah

Shivah lasts seven days. The day of the funeral is the first day and one hour of the seventh day counts as a full day. *Shivah* is suspended on Friday afternoon and is resumed after Shabbat is over. If a major holiday, such as Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur falls during the *Shivah* period, *Shivah* is concluded on the afternoon of the eve of the festival. Speak to Rabbi Saacks for further details.

The *Shivah* period begins after the interment with a simple meal called *Seudat Havra'ah*, the meal of consolation. There is a custom to rinse one's hands with water from a cup or vessel three times on each hand alternately before entering the house for the meal. This meal traditionally is not prepared by the mourners themselves, but rather provided by family and friends for the mourners. The menu traditionally includes hard-boiled eggs, which are symbols of life, and round food, such as lentils, which symbolize the turning of the wheel of life, with its ups and downs. Neither

meat nor wine, which are two symbols of joy, should be served at this meal.

Sitting Shivah

Mourners should try to stay together at the place where *Shivah* is observed. If they cannot, they may sleep in their own homes and return to the *Shivah* house in the morning. Mourners should not go to work during this time. In its wisdom, our tradition recognizes that when a major change in life has taken place, the survivor needs to step out of everyday activity for a while. If it is imperative for a person to go back to work, one may return after three full days. However, this does not end *Shivah*. After the work day is over, one should return home and resume *Shivah* observance.

There are a number of practices associated with observing *Shivah*. A seven-day candle is lit upon returning from the cemetery. Mourners refrain from sexual relations and avoid forms of entertainment during the week. There is also a custom to cover mirrors in the home, to show that we reduce the importance normally placed on personal vanity. Mourners are encouraged to observe the customs of not wearing leather shoes and sitting on low stools during *Shivah*, which show that we change the way we live during this time.

Visiting Mourners

People pay “*Shivah* calls” to fulfill the *Mitzvah* of *Nichum Aveilim*, comforting the mourners. These visits demonstrate community concern at the time of loss. The visits help the mourners release the feelings of isolation or desertion, both of which are natural feelings after the death of a loved one. Conversation should center on the life and memories of the

departed. Contrary to popular belief, talking about the departed is helpful to the mourner. Such conversations help the mourner to begin the process of getting over their grief. If you have been through a time of personal grief and the mourner asks you how you felt or how you managed, share your own experience. Mourners often take comfort in knowing that others have experienced similar feelings.

Mourners are not obligated to have food or drink available for those who come to visit.

Shivah Services

It is traditional to hold services at a house of *Shivah*. The Chai Center provides *Siddurim* and *Yarmulkas* for use in homes. Family members or friends can lead the service. Service times are set with Rabbi Saacks. If a family does not have morning and evening services in the home during the week of *Shivah*, it is proper to attend services at the synagogue and then return home. During *Shivah*, mourners attend Shabbat services at the synagogue: Friday evening and Saturday morning.

After Shivah

The length of the mourning period varies with the mourner's relation to the deceased. For all but parents, *Avelut*, the mourning period, ends with *Shloshim*, thirty days after the funeral. For parents, the mourning period lasts a full Hebrew year.

Shloshim, a thirty day period, is the second stage of mourning. Mourners may return to their regular activities in business and home. However, it is appropriate for mourners to refrain from festive activities such as going to movies, theater or parties.

Saying Kaddish

A Kaddish can only be said in the presence of ten men. Children are obligated to say *Kaddish*, as are parents who lose a child. Saying *Kaddish* is especially helpful to the surviving individual, since it offers both regularity in life and social contact with others at a disconcerting time.

When the mourning period is a year, *Kaddish* is recited for eleven months and a day. One can fulfill the obligation to recite *Kaddish* by attending daily and Shabbat services at The Chai Center.

If it is not possible to attend services daily, efforts should be made to say *Kaddish* on a regular basis, as often as possible, or at least on Shabbat. For those unable to attend services regularly, there is a custom of paying a “Kaddish sayer” to fulfill this obligation, contact the rabbi for further details.

Unveiling / Dedication of a Grave Marker

The dedication of a grave marker is mandatory, and is led by the rabbi. The usual dedication ceremony consists of reading selections from Psalms, a prayer, and the *Kel Maleh*. If there is a minyan the *Kaddish* is recited as well.

The usual custom is not to wait too long before having the unveiling ceremony, in any case, it should be done not more than a year after the passing occurred. For more information about an unveiling service, contact Rabbi Saacks.

Yartzeit

Yartzeit is observed each year on the date of death according to the Hebrew calendar. Therefore, the timing of *Yartzeit* on the secular calendar will vary from year to year. The synagogue notifies members of the secular date if the *Yartzeit* records are on file.

The *Yartzeit* observance lasts a full day and it is customary to attend services on the day of the *Yartzeit*. Those who come to observe *Yartzeit* recite the mourners *Kaddish* as part of the daily service and may lead portions of the service.

It is Jewish tradition to make contributions to charity on *Yartzeit*. Perhaps the best known custom for observing *Yartzeit* is lighting of a candle made to burn for at least 24 hours. The candle is lit the evening that the *Yartzeit* begins. If *Yartzeit* falls on Shabbat or Yom Tov, the candle is lit before the Shabbat or holiday candles. There is no formal blessing when lighting the candle, however a meditation such as the one which follows may be said. It is appropriate, of course, to use your own words and thoughts in addition or in place of this meditation:

Dear G-d, I light this candle on this *Yartzeit* of my dear _____. May I be inspired to deeds of charity and kindness to honor his/her memory. May the light of this candle be a reminder to me of the light my dear _____ brought to my life. May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life. Amen.

Yizkor

Yizkor, the memorial service, is recited four times a year: on Yom Kippur, Shmini Atzeret and the last days of Pesach and Shavuot, during the morning service. Our tradition wisely included this service on these days since it recognized that holiday times bring with them reminders of loved ones no longer with us. It is most appropriate to come to the synagogue on those mornings and join with the congregation in reciting *Yizkor*.

Memorial Funds

At The Chai Center, families have the opportunity to establish a Named Endowment Fund in memory of the departed. Once the fund reaches a minimum balance, the principal is held in perpetuity as an ongoing memorial. The family may suggest areas for which the income of the fund may be used. Contact the rabbi for further details.

Yartzeit Plaques

The Chai Center has *Yartzeit* tablets with plaques recording the Hebrew and English name of the departed and the Hebrew date of death. For further information about *Yartzeit* plaques, contact the office.

Dealing with Grief

Every person has different reactions to situations of stress, grief and loss. It is not unusual for a mourner to feel depressed one day and happy another, or for bouts of depression to come and go for a long period of time after the death of a loved one. These ups and downs are part of the process of returning to normal living. Our tradition understands that life will never be the same again after the death of a loved one; however it is important to try to regain a sense of normalcy as one goes through the mourning period. In cases of extreme depression or long-lasting grief,

mourners are urged to speak with Rabbi Saacks or another counselor to help get through this most difficult time. All the resources of The Chai Center are ready and available to be of help to those who are in need.

Organ Donation

The issue of organ donation is much larger than the scope of this booklet, however, the following clarifications should be made:

1. Overall, according to majority of Halachick rulers, in the case that an organ donation will save a life (and not for any other reason), it is considered one of the greatest *Mitzvot*.

2. The concept of organ donation is associated with a multitude of issues. Hence, it can potentially cause the transgression of many prohibitions. Therefore, anyone wishing to donate an organ to save a life, should consult a knowledgeable rabbi in this field. Donors should request that a rabbi be consulted and approve prior to the organ donation.

Conclusion

This booklet is intended to provide basic understanding of the Jewish traditions and practices regarding end of life. It is not meant to be an exhaustive description of traditional customs and laws. To better understand the end of life customs and practices, please contact the Rabbi who will be happy to provide further material and spend some time with further explanations. We hope that this booklet was helpful and educational to you. As always our entire staff are ready to serve you.