

# GUIDELINES TO FUNERAL PRACTICES

## **Based on the Guide to Funeral Practices of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**

A Jewish funeral is a sacred occasion and should be conducted with dignity and simplicity as required by Jewish tradition. Ostentation and practices which would deny recognition of the reality of death should be avoided. Requests which violate Jewish tradition as interpreted by the Rabbi of Congregation Brith Sholom based on the current practices of Conservative Judaism will not be honored. When a death occurs, families should contact the Rabbi first so that he may offer his support and comfort as well as advise on all matters pertaining to death, burial and mourning.

### **Preparatory Arrangements**

The major principle which guides Jewish law in the area of death is Kavod Hamet, the honoring of the deceased, and this includes both the human body and spirit. In consonance with Jewish tradition, all of the following must be observed.

1. The funeral should be held as soon as possible after a death, and should be delayed only to enable close relatives to be present at the service.
2. Cremation, embalming and related procedures are offensive to the spirit of Jewish tradition and are forbidden except where required by civil law.
3. The Chevra Kadisha will prepare the deceased by taharah (ritual cleansing) and dress him/her in tachrichim (white linen shrouds). The body of a man is also dressed in a tallit and if possible this tallit should be one that he wore during his lifetime.
4. The family must provide a wooden casket, keeping in mind that ostentation is contrary to Jewish practice.
5. In accordance with Jewish tradition, anyone who commits suicide and who suffered from any degree of insanity or from extreme anxiety; who was under the influence of drugs or liquor; or who repented his/her action even at the last moment of life, should be accorded a normal burial.

### **Conduct at Services**

1. The viewing of the deceased is contrary to Jewish tradition. Therefore, the casket is to be closed throughout the service and viewing of the deceased prior to and after the service will not be allowed.
2. The kriah ceremony should be performed under the direction of the Rabbi.
3. Flowers at the service and in the chapel are not in accordance with Jewish practice. Instead, Judaism encourages contributions to charitable causes in memory of the deceased.
4. When attending a funeral, one should dress in a manner befitting the solemnity of the occasion. While waiting for the service to commence, one should conduct oneself with respect for the deceased. One should refrain from ordinary socializing and loud conversation.

### **At the house of mourning**

Shivah is a seven day period of mourning observed by the immediate family of the deceased. One observes shiva for parent, a sibling, a spouse or a child.

It is in keeping with Jewish tradition that neighbors and friends prepare the seudat havra-ah meal to be served at the house of mourning for those returning from the cemetery. When there is no local house of mourning, or when otherwise appropriate, the family may request to have the seudat havra-ah, meal of condolence, at Congregation Brith Sholom. Such requests should be made through the Rabbi and will be honored if Brith Sholom is available.

Mourners shall not deem themselves as hosts who are obligated to serve their visitors during the shivah period. Similarly, in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion, visitors making a shivah call shall not encourage the creation of festive hospitality.

It is traditional that religious services be held in the house of mourning. The custom of Congregation Brith Sholom is to make such services possible in the evening. Whenever it is not practical to hold services in the house of mourning, mourners may attend morning and evening services at the synagogue. Our tradition emphasizes that mourners should return directly to the house of mourning following each service.

### **Burial of a Non-Jewish Spouse and Children**

Congregation Brith Sholom has approved the practice of, and established a separate section for, the burial of non-Jewish spouses and/or children of Brith Sholom members. This section is physically separated from the existing Brith Sholom Cemetery by a permanent path of specific, halakhically meaningful dimensions as defined by the Committee of Jewish Laws and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly. The purpose of the path is to recognize that those who were interred prior to our Congregation's acceptance of this practice could neither object to the practice, nor select a different burial location. The path serves to divide the east section of the Cemetery into north and south sections, herein referred to as the Upper East Side and the Lower East Side, respectively. The guidelines listed below are to be adhered to during non-Jewish interments.

1. By virtue of the path's location, only the Upper East Side may be used for burial of either Jews or non-Jews. Other sections of the Cemetery may only be used for interment of Jews.
2. Resolution of any situations not directly addressed herein will be determined by the Brith Sholom rabbi (who contractually makes all religious decisions) in consultation with the Cemetery Committee. All problem resolutions must be guided by the principle of protecting the sanctity of the Brith Sholom cemetery.

3. Funeral services for a non-Jewish spouse or child may be held graveside, in a funeral parlor or church conducted at the discretion of the family. All interments and graveside services should be conducted by the Brith Sholom rabbi.
4. Graveside funerals and interment ceremonies held at the Brith Sholom Cemetery must not contain non-Jewish rituals. The ceremony may include Psalms, a eulogy and appropriate prayers as determined by the rabbi of Brith Sholom.
5. Funerals and interments of non-Jewish spouses and children must not be held on Shabbat or other major Jewish holidays.
6. Tombstones must not be engraved with any non-Jewish religious symbols, and must otherwise conform with restrictions listed in "Rules and Regulations Governing the Cemeteries of Congregation Brith Sholom." In particular, in keeping with Jewish tradition, flowers should not be placed at the gravesite.