

The Role of the Chevra Kadisha/Burial Society

Preparing a Jewish people for burial is an especially great Mitzvah.

Throughout Jewish history, being a member of the *Chevra Kadisha* has been regarded as a great honor. Members of the Burial Society are selected for their character, integrity and personal devotion to Jewish Tradition. These men and women are on call 24 hours a day, to perform a *Tahara* and to ensure that the laws and traditions of Jewish burial are followed properly. Their greatest concern is the sensitive care, modesty and dignity of the deceased. Men care for men, women care for women, Jew cares for fellow Jew. There is no better way to ensure the dignity of the deceased than by entrusting his or her care to the *Chevra Kadisha*.

What is a Jewish Funeral?

Hotza'ah - Removal

Traditionally, the body is removed from the place of death and transported to the funeral home by members of the Chevra Kadisha (Sacred Society). Chevra Kadisha members close the eyes and straighten the limbs of the deceased in accordance with Jewish tradition. They collect all effects that must be buried together with the deceased (such as blood saturated bandages and linen). Removal by a trained member of the Chevra is particularly important when the deceased remains attached to I.V. tubing or other medical aperture that may cause loss of blood or fluids if removed without great care.

Tahara - Purification

The traditional preparation of the deceased includes the washing and dressing of the body with dignity. Members of the Chevra Kadisha (Sacred Society) perform the Tahara while reciting special prayers and Psalms. Men prepare male deceased while women prepare women in accordance with Jewish traditional law. Embalming, cosmetizing or any other artificial preparation of any remains is not permitted by Jewish law.

Tachrichim - the burial shrouds

A full set of traditional white clothing, preferably made of linen, includes: hat, shirt, pants, jacket, belt and wrapping sheet. Their simple uniformity symbolizes equality and purity.

Shmira - the Watch

A "watchman" remains close to the deceased at all times never leaving the body alone until the time of burial. This is considered a great showing of respect to the departed. The watchman (or Shomer) traditionally recites selections from Psalms during the Vigil.

Aron - the burial casket

We use a simple wooden casket which will naturally decompose and permit the body to return to its source. This is in keeping with the Biblical teaching "For dust art thou and to the dust thou shalt return" (Geneses 3:19). A simple wooden Aron facilitates the essential requirement of Kvura B'Karka.

Kvurah b'Karka - burial in the ground

The burial must be in the ground with earth filling the grave completely until a mound is formed. To participate in filling the grave is a religious privilege and duty. It is an expression of honor for the deceased. *Cremation* is unquestionably an abhorrent violation of Jewish law and remains are not permitted burial in a Jewish cemetery according to Halacha. So fundamental is this requirement that we must even set aside the specific request of the departed who elected for cremation. The will of G-d takes precedence.

Having stressed the importance of in ground burial we certainly understand that *mausoleums and above-ground burial* have no place in Jewish and Halachic law.

Some Basics:

- ❖ Seek education and learn about the beauty and the meaning of traditional Jewish burial practices.
- ❖ Call a Rabbi first to assist you and to guide the funeral arrangements you make
- ❖ Interment should not be unnecessarily delayed.
- ❖ Ostentation should be avoided.
- ❖ The dress and behavior of family and friends should reflect the dignity and solemnity of the occasion.
- ❖ Visiting with and viewing of the remains are contrary to Jewish law
- ❖ Flowers and music have no place at the Jewish funeral service.