

On returning from the funeral

- It is the practice for neighbours or friends to prepare the first meal that the mourners eat. This is called the Meal of Condolence. It usually consists of bagels (or soft round rolls) and hard boiled eggs, accompanied by a drink.
- It is not the custom for food or drink to be provided for friends and family on returning to the shiva house. However, those who have travelled a long way may be offered some light refreshment.

The Shiva

- This is the seven day period of mourning, which begins on the day of the funeral (inclusive) and continues until the morning of the seventh day, e.g. if the funeral were to take place on Monday daytime, the shiva would terminate Sunday morning. The rules of shiva are different on Shabbat. On Shabbat we do not wear torn clothing or non-leather shoes. Instead, normal Shabbat clothes and shoes are worn. The full seven days of shiva are not observed if a Yomtov intervenes. In such cases, you should speak to your local Rabbi for advice.
- During the week of shiva, your local synagogue can arrange services. You must ask them for help and guidance on these matters. If you do not wish, or are able to have prayers in the shiva house, mourners can attend services at the synagogue. It is advisable to check times and availability beforehand.
- The Shiva house is traditionally open to visitors to pay condolences during the day and until after evening services. However, mourners do need to be able to rest and eat, and it is quite acceptable to ask people not to call at certain times.
- Someone who is not one of the actual mourners should prepare meals, open the door to visitors (some people leave it slightly open all the time), and answer the telephone.

The United Synagogue Burial Society is here to help you. If at any time you have questions for us please feel free to get in touch:

The contact number for the Burial Office and the Cemetery Maintenance Department is 020 8950 7767

A brief guide for bereavement



This guide is not a comprehensive set of burial and mourning laws. If further information is required, including laws relating to the first month and the first year, these should be obtained from your local community.

Some synagogues lend suitable books on mourning laws and customs to mourners and some mourners choose to donate books they themselves have found helpful to their communities for others to use.

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At this most difficult time, we hope these notes will be helpful and supportive.

Preparing for the funeral

All mourners are expected to tear items of clothing, which symbolizes the permanent rent that has taken place in their lives. This is called 'Kriah'. 'Kriah' is sometimes done as soon as the mourner hears of the death, but since there are specific rules as to the method of 'Kriah' it is normally done at the burial grounds prior to the funeral or, for mourners not attending the cemetery, at the shiva house. In the case of the latter, guidance should be sought from your Rabbi who will be able to offer assistance with 'Kriah'. These items are then worn throughout the shiva period, except for Shabbat. It is sensible not to wear good or new clothes for this purpose. Garments that are torn include: a suit jacket, cardigan or sweater and shirts or blouses.



- It is not our custom to require mourners to wear black at funerals or during the shiva.
- People should be dressed modestly (as they would when visiting a synagogue). Men and married women need to have suitable head covering.
- It is our custom that only the minister speaks at the funeral. However, ministers will certainly be willing to make use of notes about your loved one, prepared by the family. To discuss this further please contact your local minister.
- Other information about the funeral should be obtained from the Burial Office or your local Synagogue.

Preparing the Shiva house prior to the funeral

- A candle should burn throughout the shiva period – these can be bought at Jewish delicatessens and bookshops. Some burn for one day, some for three or seven days; there is no rule as to which should be used.
- Two candles in candlesticks should burn during every prayer service. These may be extinguished and used more than once.
- It is the custom to cover the mirrors in the home of the mourner, in the rooms that he/she will use (there is no need to cover television screens). The coverings can be removed for Shabbat.
- Mourners are the parents, brothers/sisters, spouse or children of your loved one. These are the only people for whom the laws of mourning apply. If other relatives, such as stepchildren or adopted children wish to be considered as mourners, they must consult their local Rabbi.
- All mourners should have non-leather footwear ready to put on after the funeral, which should be worn throughout the shiva.
- All mourners should sit on low chairs, which can be obtained from your local synagogue. If mourners have problems sitting on low chairs they should consult their local Rabbi.
- It is usual that some visitors will bring items of food, or will offer to prepare meals.
- It is not the practice to offer refreshments to visitors unless they come from a long distance.
- A shiva house should not be treated as a social occasion and traditionally visitors wait for the mourner to initiate conversation.
- Visitors may wish the mourners 'Long Life' or may pray that they be comforted among the other mourners.

How can we help you?

After the Funeral and Shiva you will need to arrange the stone setting. Nearly everyone would prefer this to take place on a Sunday. We will do all we can to help you although sometimes this is not possible. (Having a midweek stone setting should give you a much greater choice of times as well as avoiding the extra cost of one on a Sunday.)

When you have chosen your preferred stone mason (from our approved list) they will discuss with you the different type of stones that are available and the appropriate wording for the stone. Approximately 4 months before the stone setting an application for the erection of a stone will be sent to the Cemeteries Maintenance Department where the wording will be checked by a Rabbi and then the permit will be issued and the stone mason will then have permission to erect the stone, this should be done two weeks prior to the ceremony.

When the stone is erected it will look at its best and it would be very nice if it could be kept to that standard so we recommend you enquire about our "Caring For Their Memory" Programme.

