

Jewish end-of-life practice has two concerns: the person who died, and those who mourn. First we take care of the body of the person who died, then we come together as a community to comfort the mourners.

If death is expected, call the synagogue and let the rabbis know. They will help both with arrangements and with comfort.

Levayat hamet: accompanying the dead.

- When a person is dying, we try to make sure they are not alone.
- After death, the body is disturbed as little as possible, except for the requirements of law, and a simple cleaning of the body. Jews do not embalm a dead body. To be sure that Jewish practice is followed, use a Jewish funeral home if one is available.
- We do not display dead bodies, or have “open casket” funerals or visitations.
- The funeral is held as soon as is practical.

Nichum avelim: comforting the mourners.

- Before a funeral, the mourner’s only responsibility is to make funeral arrangements.
- Immediately after the burial, **shiva** begins and continues for seven days.
- At a shiva house, mourners sit and receive comforters. They do not entertain or act as hosts.
- The main way we comfort is with our presence. As the rabbis teach us, “Say little and do much.” (Pirkei Avot 1.15)
- Another way we comfort is by making sure mourners do not need to cook or go out. Bringing food or offering to run errands is very helpful.
- After shiva, there are 30 more days of mourning called **sheloshim**. During that time mourners are not expected to keep social obligations.
- For a parent, there is a year of mourning, during which mourners say the **Kaddish** at services.
- At four times during the year, there is a service at synagogue called **Yizkor** (“Remember”): Yom Kippur, the end of Sukkot, the end of Passover, and Shavuot. If you have lost someone, no matter how long ago, this is a time and a place designated for mourning. Our tradition recognizes that we do not “get over” the loss of loved ones and provides Yizkor as a time to remember them.