

Sydney Chevra Kadisha Guide

The Sydney Chevra Kadisha was first established in 1817, to fulfill the sacred obligation of attending, in accordance with Jewish Law, to Jewish Persons who pass away, and to assist members of the family at the difficult time of death. From the time of passing away, the major obligation is to show Kavod (honor) to the Met (deceased person). While staff are employed, the religious obligations of preparation for burial are attended to by The Sydney Chevra Kadisha in this "Chesed Shel Emet" (genuine kindness), on an honorary basis by religiously observant men and women of the Sydney Jewish community. The honorary members and volunteers of our Chevra Kadisha perform their duties, described below, without any personal or private gain.

This guide reflects the Jewish traditions concerning respect and dignity for the deceased and the consolation of the mourners. All laws and procedures apply equally to men and women.

NOTIFYING THE CHEVRA KADISHA OF THE DEATH

At any stage, the Sydney Chevra Kadisha can be contacted for advice regarding what steps need to be taken.

The first thing to do in the event of a death is to try to obtain a Medical Cause of Death certificate by the deceased's Doctor, or a Verification of Death certificate by the Registered Nurse, if the Doctor is not available.

NB: A burial cannot take place until a Medical Cause of Death certificate has been issued by the Doctor.

In Australia, the majority of deaths occur in hospital or other care facilities, in which case those authorities take care of the medical formalities.

If someone dies at home, if possible, you should contact the deceased's doctor who, if satisfied with the cause of death, will issue the Medical Cause of Death Certificate. In some cases you may be asked to collect the certificate from the surgery.

In the case of a nursing home death, their staff should liaise with the doctor of the deceased to arrange the Medical Cause Of Death Certificate. The nursing home will then liaise with the Sydney Chevra Kadisha regarding release of the deceased into our care.

In certain instances, it may not be legally possible for the doctor to issue a Medical Cause of Death Certificate, and it may be necessary for Police and Coronial involvement. Such instances may include; death other than by natural causes, including violence, accidental or unusual causes; whilst under anaesthetic (or within 24 hours of the administration of an anaesthetic); unexpected death; death of a person in an institution, a prison or in police custody, drug or alcohol rehabilitation centre; when the cause of death is unknown. In such instances, Coronial staff or a Government appointed Funeral Company will transfer the deceased to the Coroner. You should immediately advise the Police Officer in charge that the deceased is of Jewish faith and that you oppose to an invasive autopsy (according to Jewish Law). It is important that the family obtain the name and contact details of one, preferably the most senior, of the police officers who attend. The Sydney Chevra Kadisha should be contacted immediately on death as they will be able to assist the family in the ongoing process.

A post mortem examination, also known as autopsy, is a detailed examination externally and of internal organs to establish the cause of death. This examination is conducted by a doctor known as a pathologist.

It may be helpful if the family can provide the names and contact details of the deceased's general practitioner and other treating doctors. A detailed medical history often provides the best information that will convince a coroner not to order a post-mortem examination.

You may also want to contact your Rabbi who will be able to provide advice on all aspects of Jewish law, and provide emotional and comforting support to the family during this difficult period. Information is also available on our website www.sck.org.au.

Services which the Chevra Kadisha offers to the members of the Jewish Community

SHMIRA Watching	Monitoring the body of the deceased in the funeral home
TAHARA Purification	Tahara (purification of the body) and dressing the deceased in tachrichim (shrouds) by volunteer members trained to perform these duties, showing proper respect for the dead.
LEVAYA	Jewish Funeral service in accordance to Jewish Laws and Customs
K'VURAH	Burial in a Jewish Consecrated burial plot, in accordance to Jewish Laws and Customs
REPATRIATION	Overseas/Interstate transfers for Jewish burials
SHIVAH	The Chevra Kadisha assists that when there is a minyan in the house of mourning for daily services, by providing service books, kipot, and mourners low chairs as needed.
ARON KODESH	For holding the Sefer Torah at the home of the Mourners for services
MOURNER GUIDE	Booklets for Mourners, Visiting Cemetery, Consecration, etc.
Yahrzeit	Hilula / Yahrzeit / Anniversary reminder of the date of passing notification
PLAQUES	Memorial Plaques – lit on the Yahrzeit date (anniversary of the Jewish date of passing)

SHOMRIM - Watchers

From the time the deceased arrives at the Sydney Chevra Kadisha, refrigeration and monitoring take place until the beginning of the funeral. Monitoring is constant including throughout the night, on weekends and Jewish holidays. The family may arrange to be present and perform shmira in person at the Sydney Chevra Kadisha, however, it will incur additional charges. Additionally, it is not guaranteed that a guard can be arranged at short notice to provide access to the premises.

TAHARA - Purification

Before the funeral, the deceased is washed, cleansed and ritually purified, so that, in a symbolic way, the deceased leaves the world in the same condition as he/she entered it.

Only individuals of the same gender perform the Tahara for the deceased. The members of the Chevra Kadisha who perform this mitzvah are trained in the proper procedures to be followed and perform their duties with utmost concern and respect for preserving the dignity and honour of the deceased.

TACHRIKHIM - Shrouds

The deceased is dressed in linen garments, the same basic garments worn by the High Priest in Temple times on Yom Kippur. He/She is not adorned with cosmetics or dressed in a suit, dress, or any other conventional clothing. Jewish tradition impresses upon us that whether rich or poor, we are all equal before God. Our merit will not be based upon our material possessions, but only upon our deeds. Each of us should symbolically meet our Creator dressed as if we were the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

For a male, the family should provide the Sydney Chevra Kadisha with the deceased's Talit (Pray Shawl). If one is not provided, the Chevra Kadisha will provide one.

ARON - Coffin

It is Jewish tradition that all burials take place in identical plain coffins with no ornamentation. In this way, everyone is treated in the exact same way with no differentiation between us. All is returned to nature and, as the soul returns to God, the coffin, body, and shrouds are reunited with the earth, out of whose substance all life is continually made.

Since the deceased is no longer part of the living world, and no longer has control over his/her appearance or how he/she wants to present themselves to the public, it is considered a matter of disrespect to keep the coffin open for "viewing" by mourners and friends. The coffin is remained closed after the deceased has been placed in it.

Who is considered a Mourner in Jewish law?

Mourners consist of the following people:

1. Children of the deceased
2. Spouse of deceased
3. Brother or half-brother of the deceased
4. Sister or half-sister of the deceased
5. Parents of the deceased

KRI'AH - Rending of Garment

Immediately prior to the funeral, as an expression of grief, a cut or tear close to the heart is made in the clothing (external) of the mourner. Mourners are not expected to wear special or new attire. Old clothes are perfectly acceptable. In fact, one can change into old, plain garments for this act. The tradition of rending one's garments is a heritage that has its origins in Biblical times. Your Rabbi will advise you regarding this procedure.

Where to hold the Funeral Service?

It is common practice for the funeral service to be held as a ceremony in which all mourners, family and friends can share their respects.

The funeral service may be held at the actual graveside, or at the Jewish Chapel at the Cemetery (if one exists) or at the Sydney Chevra Kadisha premises. Please discuss your preference with the SCK who will be able to assist you.

VEHICLES

The coffin is transported in one of our black hearses.

Family and/or friends may choose mourning vehicles to pick them up and transport them to the funeral service and the burial. We can arrange either black sedans or black limousines depending on the number of passengers.

K'VURAH - Burial

When God informed Adam that he was going to die, He said to him, "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return" (Genesis 3:19), and later we read (Ecclesiastes 12:7), "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." Jewish law is explicit: a member of the Jewish community must be buried promptly after his death, and burial means exactly that the body must be placed in the ground. It is also traditional to add a small amount of earth from Jerusalem inside the coffin.

Embalming, cremation, concrete vaults, and above-ground burial in a mausoleum are contrary to Jewish law and equivalent to leaving the body unburied. From a Jewish standpoint, leaving a body unburied is a matter of great disrespect. While these prohibitions have always reflected the Judaic emphasis on returning the body gently and carefully to nature, it is especially important after the Holocaust to discourage cremation.

The grave is filled with earth before Kaddish (mourner's prayer) is recited. Kaddish may only be recited in the presence of 10 Jewish Men over the age of Bar Mitzvah (13 years old). Sharing the task of filling the grave is considered a privilege and duty. It is a way of saying a "last good bye" to the deceased, and the participants are joining in their last act of care and loving kindness for the departed.

Registering the Death

All deaths that occur in New South Wales must be registered with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages within 7 days. This is done on behalf of the family or executor by the Sydney Chevra Kadisha, electronically. Normally this occurs the next working day after the funeral.

To complete registration, it is necessary for the Sydney Chevra Kadisha to obtain a range of information about the deceased, for example the full name of spouse and place of marriage for all marriages of the deceased, the names and ages of all children etc. (to prepare to provide this information, you may wish to complete the [Personal Information record](#)). The law stipulates that this information must be provided to the best of the knowledge of the informant. Naturally, this information is treated as private and confidential by the Sydney Chevra Kadisha staff. It generally takes 2 to 3 weeks for the Sydney Chevra Kadisha to receive the Death Certificate, who will then contact the person that arranged the funeral to collect it.

SE'UDAT HAVRA'AH - Meal of Condolence

This is the first meal the mourners eat upon their return from the cemetery. It includes hard-boiled eggs, their roundness symbolizing the continuous nature of life.

SHIVAH - The First Week of Mourning

Seven days, starting immediately after the burial and ending on the morning of the seventh day, are set aside as a period of intense mourning when the mourners stay at home, abstaining from their normal activities and accepting visitors who come to offer consolation. Traditionally, the mourners sit on special low chairs. In addition, mourners are enjoined to refrain from personal grooming, wearing new clothes or conjugal relations. It is customary for mourners not to wear leather shoes but rather to wear slippers.

In memory of the deceased a special candle, provided by the Sydney Chevra Kadisha, remains lit for the period of the shivah.

Note: The Shivah period may differ if the burial occurs during a Jewish Holiday Period. Your Rabbi will be able to advise you further on this matter.

Who should visit the house of mourning? (Nichum Aveilim)

It is a great Mitzva to pay a visit to the mourners house, as it brings great support and comfort to them in their time of need. It is especially important to talk of the positive attributes of the deceased. When you conclude your visit, Jewish tradition offers a phrase to be spoken to each mourner: "May God comfort you together with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." The original Hebrew is:

Ha-Makom y'nakhem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar avelei Tziyon Virushalayim. The phrase reaffirms the connection of each Jew to Klal Yisrael, all the people of Israel, as it extends a hand of comfort to the mourner.

MINYAN and KADDISH

Daily services with a minyan (ten Jewish men over the age of bar mitzvah) are held during the Shivah period preferably in the house of the mourner so that the mourner may recite Kaddish, demonstrating respect and honour for the deceased. Mourners should not act as hosts during Shiva. This is the time for their family and friends to comfort them. It is a privilege and obligation to be part of the minyan in the house of mourning so that the mourner is assured of the opportunity to recite kaddish during shivah. It is not customary to bring flowers, but kosher food and groceries are acceptable.

Recitation of Kaddish continues after Shivah concludes. For a parent, kaddish is recited for 11 months; for other relatives, for one month. If one is unable to say Kaddish for the required period for whatever reason, please contact the Sydney Chevra Kadisha and we will provide contact details for people that may be able to say Kaddish on your behalf.

TZEDAKAH - Charity

Tzedakah is one of the traditional ways a Jew can give a meaningful, enduring tribute to the memory of the deceased. Making a contribution in the deceased name to the synagogue or Jewish organisation, is a sign of respect and praise and is an effective, positive way to keep his or her memory alive.