

WHAT ARE THE JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES FOR A SUICIDE?

Age-old Jewish burial practices include a ritual preparation of the body through washing, blessing, wrapping or clothing it in a white shroud and keeping the body company until the time of burial. The local Chevra Kadisha, or Jewish Burial Society, carries out these traditions. (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hevra-kaddisha-or-burial-society/>).

Jewish funerals generally take place as soon as possible, sometimes within 24 hours, as soon as family has had time to gather. The traditional response upon hearing of a death is the blessing, **“Baruch Dayan Ha-emet”** (or **“Blessed is the Judge of Truth”**). Immediate family members tear a part of their upper garment or wear a torn piece of cloth or ribbon.

Jewish burial practices include burying the dead in a white shroud in a closed, plain pine box in the ground. The service may take place at the graveside, in a chapel at the cemetery or funeral home, or in a synagogue sanctuary in as private or public of a ceremony as the family chooses, though there needs to be a quorum of ten adults in order to say certain prayers. The funeral generally includes the recitation of El Maleh Rachamim (God full of compassion, a short prayer sung to a mournful tune), a eulogy, and the recitation of the Kaddish Yatom (Mourner’s Kaddish) by family members or close community, depending on the tradition of the congregation. The community participates in covering the casket by shoveling dirt into the grave, and at the end of the service, friends wish the mourners **“comfort among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”**

Deviations from the customary burial rites usually are forbidden, especially cremation, but some communities allow different burial customs in certain cases.



WHAT ARE THE JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES FOR A SUICIDE?

After the funeral, mourners may participate in traditions that demarcate the period of mourning in increments of lessening intensity during the first seven days, thirty days, twelve months, and one year. Shiva is the seven-day period during which prayer services take place daily and visitors are invited to a mourner's home. Guests to the shiva house traditionally bring food rather than flowers for the mourners. Mourners traditionally sit close to the ground and cover their mirrors during the seven-day period. Sheloshim is the name of the thirty-day period when mourners return to some normal routine but continue to observe certain restrictions. Those who have lost a parent observe an additional eleven-month mourning period, reciting the Mourner's Kaddish daily. An "unveiling" of a gravestone is a ceremony at the cemetery within the year after the funeral. On each the "yahrtzeit," or anniversary of the death, mourners light candles, recite the Mourner's Kaddish, and make contributions in honor of their loved ones. When visiting a Jewish cemetery, loved ones place a stone on the grave. Many follow the custom of pouring running water over their hands upon leaving.

While all of these rituals and ways of supporting mourners are appropriate in most communities when someone dies by suicide, it can help to discuss special considerations that arise with a suicide. These include: How the rabbi or community leader will discuss or mention the cause of death or the mental health challenges of the person who died; what the mourners want the community to know about the death, as people often ask many questions when someone dies suddenly; how to talk to children in the family or community about the death; if there are any particular rituals or prayers the family would appreciate that address the particular pain of losing a loved one to suicide; and if mourners need any special supports for their own mental health in the face of a suicide.

These resources can be helpful for community members sitting shiva for a friend who has died by suicide:

[**Ritual Well Shiva Guide**](#)[**JCFS Suicide Loss**](#)