

Etiquette for a Jewish Funeral – Lastingpost.com

Introduction

The funeral will be conducted according to Orthodox Jewish or Reform Jewish customs. Orthodox Judaism is the traditional religion that interprets the scriptures literally and believes in a literal Messiah.

Reform Judaism began in the nineteenth century as a movement to modernise the religion.

On the day of the funeral

As a mark of respect, the deceased's body is buried as soon after death as possible. The funeral service will usually take place at the Synagogue.

Traditional Jewish funerals are simple, solemn occasions and relatively short. Psalms will be recited and prayers given. A eulogy honouring and celebrating the life of the deceased person will be delivered.

At the end of the funeral the coffin will be carried or wheeled from the room followed by the family mourners. Other people attending the funeral will remain standing until coffin and the family mourners have left.

Burial

After the funeral only family and close friends will proceed to the cemetery for the burial. At the cemetery the pallbearers will, in traditional services, stop seven times to recite Psalm 91.

Once the coffin is lowered into the ground family and close friends cover the coffin with handfuls of earth.

Mourning period

After the funeral has taken place, a traditional seven day period of mourning commences. The period is called Shiva. Many reform and other Jews now sit Shiva for three days and some for only one.

This mourning period is held at the home of the deceased's family. All day to day activities are suspended to allow the mourners to focus on their grief. It is customary for friends of the family to prepare the first meal after the funeral.

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In traditional Jewish households it is customary during the mourning period for mirrors in the house to be covered, a memorial candle to be lit and for male members of the family to stop shaving.

Friends should visit during the mourning period. They should take uncut fruit, baked kosher goods or other kosher foods as gifts for the family as the family in mourning are not supposed to have to worry about such mundane things as food.

Friends should avoid visiting on Shabbat (Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown) as Shiva does not take place on Shabbat. They should avoid trying to comfort the mourners as mourning is encouraged in Judaism. A simple statement on arrival along the lines of "I am very sorry" accompanied by a hug or a handshake is appropriate. The visit does not need to last more than half an hour or so.

Sending flowers

Flowers are not usually sent in a Jewish funeral. It is however a growing custom for friends to send flowers to the family of the deceased during the weeks following the funeral.

It is also customary for trees to be planted in memory of the deceased or for charitable donations to be made in the deceased's name.

Modest attire

Head coverings may be required. For an orthodox service, both men and women are required to cover their heads (men wear yarmulkes and women wear scarves).

For conservative services, men are required to wear yarmulkes and for women the choice is optional. For Reformed services, the choice for men and women is optional. Black and dark coloured conservative clothing is appropriate.

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