



Hospice as a Shelter of Peace Jewish Care at the End of Life

Life is precious, and never more so than at the end when the uncertainty about death raises concrete and existential concerns.

Hope is there at the frontier of death. Judaism maintains that hope inspires a will to live and, no matter how improbable it may be, hope is there at the end of life. There is a language of hope even in hospice. I hope I can recover. I hope my family is ok when I'm gone. I hope the dying process is less painful than I imagine. We hope our loved one has a peaceful end to a life filled with goodness.

Jewish Beliefs About Death

A person who is within 3 days of death is called a *Goses*. Family visitors and care-givers should avoid disturbing the patient in any way.

Judaism has differing viewpoints about death and what lies beyond.

- Many believe death is a window between two worlds; this world and the world to come (*Olam Habah*). Heaven, per se, is not a Jewish concept.
- Some, but not all, share a belief in resurrection.
- Some, but not all, believe in reincarnation.
- Some, but not all, believe what one accomplishes while living is what matters most, and whatever happens after death is pure speculation.
- Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, & other branches of Judaism offer various forms of Living Wills consistent with denominational end-of-life practices.
- Judaism teaches *the crown of a good name is the best legacy*. One's concern may be how they will be remembered. Helping families find the language of affirmations can provide consolation during this time.

Families worry that hospice may hasten death when, in fact, hospice provides more care when it is most needed. Families worry about the Jewish ethic which says one is not allowed to shorten life or hasten death, nor should we prolong dying even when our technological expertise can. Withholding nutrition and hydrations are contrary to Jewish beliefs. Jewish families may have concerns about limiting these even for the actively dying.

- Orthodox families may wish to consult with their rabbi before any changes in the plan of care.
- Others may want their rabbi notified about impending death to allow time for an EOL ritual (*Vidui*).

Approaching death is a difficult path requiring guidance to help families understand the landscape of dying and death. Most Jewish families have little direct experience with death. Trust must be earned. Those who provide care to the dying can earn a family's trust by:

- Interviewing family members about their religious history. It may be quite diverse. Limited knowledge about Judaism can lead to limited assumptions.
- Inviting patients to share the importance of their Jewish heritage.
- Avoiding asking direct questions about affiliations.
- Exploring cultural considerations, before speaking openly about dying.

Fifty percent of Jewish Americans are not affiliated with organized religious institutions. Therefore, it is very important to explore what Judaism means to the individuals who are in your care. Judaism is very diverse with a broad spectrum of beliefs, practices, and choices of affiliations.

- Be mindful about assumptions you may have about Judaism. They may not apply in many cases.

Rabbi Dale Schreiber, M.A., BCC-APC, NAJC
Jewish Care Coordinator
Pathways Hospice and Palliative Care
14805 North Outer 40 Rd., Suite 160, Chesterfield, MO 63017
636-733-7399
www.delmargardens.com ; www.pathwayshpc.com

Jewish Burial Practices General Guidelines

Orthodox standards for burial are followed by many but, among secular Jews, there is a growing trend towards non-traditional burials.

- The deceased is treated with the utmost respect at all times.
- Autopsy is generally forbidden by Jewish Law
- At the time of death, eyes and mouth are closed.
- The body is typically not left alone while awaiting transport to the funeral home.
- Jewish funeral homes will provide the appropriate rituals often required by Jewish cemeteries.
- While some families prefer to dress the deceased in their own clothes, traditional practice prescribes the use of a shroud.
- Judaism teaches all are equal in death. It is a general practice to place the deceased in an unadorned wooden casket.
- Tradition encourages burial within one day. However out of respect for the deceased, it may take time for family members to arrive. Funerals, therefore are scheduled within three days of death, and never on the Sabbath.
- Embalming is prohibited.
- Viewing the body is subject to Jewish custom.
- Cremation is generally discouraged, but is subject to cultural custom and personal beliefs.
- Visitation immediately following the burial is subject to prescribed religious practices. When the deceased was buried within 24 hours, family would observe seven days of Shiva (sitting) before returning to routines.
- Yartzheit is the memorial anniversary of the death at the same time each year according to the Jewish calendar.

Visiting the Sick *Bikkur Cholim*

Tending to the sick is a primary obligation in Judaism. The term *Bikkur Cholim* means 'investigate' the sick. Visiting involves lifting the spirits of those who are ill as well as providing companionship during difficult times. Individual and Communal prayers for healing are routinely offered during synagogue services. There are no magical remedies in Judaism. There is a deep sentiment that one is never alone, the Healer of the Broken Hearted, one of the many names for God, is accessible, whatever the hardship.

When to Pray & What to Say

Misheberach

May the Source who blessed our ancestors be present to bless ___name___ with as much healing as possible; with strength and courage in the time to come; with an easy mind and a peaceful heart. May ___name___

continue to feel safe within the shelter of care from family and staff. Amen.

Please:

Ask if you can keep a patient or family in your prayers.
Avoid asking if you can pray with them unless they request one.
Use appropriate names for God such as *God of All Creation*.
Avoid Christian names for God or *God, Our Father*.

Prayer as expression of hope:

Ask the patient/family what they are hoping for. Use their language to express your hope for them. *My hope is that you find as much healing as possible, that you're able to tell us what is most needed for your wellbeing, peace of mind, and comfort in every way.*

Resources

National Institute for Jewish Hospice

Jewish Ritual, Response, and Ritual at the End of Life: A Guide to Caring for Jewish Patients and Their Families by Rabbi Mark Popovsky for the Duke Institute of Care at the End of Life; <https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/tmc/Jewish-Ritual.pdf>

Advance Directives

Orthodox

https://www.jlaw.com/Forms/hlw_mo.html

The Rabbinic Assembly

<http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/docs/medical%20directives.pdf>

Reform

<http://www.huc.edu/kalsman/IllnessWellness/resources/>

Jewish Funeral Homes

Berger Memorial 314 361 0622

Rindskopf-Roth 314 367-0438