

HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR DEATH?

*A Gift of Comfort and Information
Prepared by the Chevra Kavod Hamet of the
Adath Jeshurun Congregation,
Minnetonka, MN.*

DEDICATION

This booklet is dedicated in loving memory of Dinah Elkin, z"l, and Jerry Zweigbaum, z"l, who were tireless volunteers for the Chevra Kavod Hamet from its inception over 30 years ago. Jerry, a past President of the Adath Jeshurun Congregation, was a trusted guide, friend, leader, teacher, and a *gute neshome* (a good soul). Dinah held several volunteer positions with the *Chevra Kavod Hamet* and was a dear friend, a beautiful person, and an *Eshet Chayil* (A Woman of Valor). Both were recipients of Adath's Shem Tov Award for exemplary involvement and leadership in the congregation. Their physical presence among us is deeply missed, but their *mitzvot* and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness), and beautiful memories of them, remain with us.

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INTRODUCTION

How do we prepare for death?

Preparing yourself for death isn't easy, nor should it be. No one wants to be hurt and saddened. No one wants to feel the pain of separation, loss, vulnerability, or emptiness. But everyone must go through it, both directly and vicariously.

How, then, should we prepare for death? Ironically, to live is to prepare for death.

What does it mean, "to live?"

Become involved with people so that when someone you love dies, there will be a community that will surround you with love and support. Experience your connectedness to others who have felt the pain of death by making *shivah* calls and making yourself available to help in their time of need. They will reconnect when you are in need.

Accept the world as imperfect. Natural disasters, accidents, illness, and human acts of free will are expressions of an imperfect world and imperfect people. Even when our own actions bring on suffering, these actions are the result of our limitations and weaknesses. Regardless of how much we may love someone, care for them, and attend to their needs, that person will die. Accept your own limitations and be humble. Let things go that are beyond your control.

Death is a natural part of living. And the suffering that comes about because of a death is also a natural part of living that should be used as a way of embracing life even more. The Jewish response to suffering is to give to charity, perform *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness), and work towards *Tikkun Olam* (mending the world).

Explore your Judaism. Practice your Judaism. Integrate it into your life because responses to suffering, pain, and complex questions are there in the wisdom of our ancestors. Then, when death occurs, you will find comfort in the traditions and nuances of Judaism. Even when your Jewish faith is challenged or even shattered and leaves you doubting all that you found helpful and comforting and you find yourself shaking your fist at the world asking why, ironically, that is the best time to return to study because comfort is there.

Finally, how does a Jew prepare for death? A Jew prepares for death by living a good life, a life of *Torah*, *mitzvot*, and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness).

THE DETAILS OF PLANNING AHEAD

Planning for Death--Life Planning

Planning for death makes good sense. Planning can take several forms: (a) a financial will for your physical assets; (b) a gift in your will--or before-- gifts that will outlive you; (c) a living will conveying your wishes about medical treatment; and (d) an ethical will so that you can share your life long ethical values with your family and other loved ones separate and apart from your physical assets.

Financial Will

Visiting an attorney for this is often the best approach. Wills are considered formal documents that must eliminate any ambiguities and should be drafted by an expert. Remember, you will not be there to explain what you meant.

Gifts

You can leave a legacy, a chance to live forever. Two easy ways to do this are to give to the Adath Jeshurun Congregation Foundation and/or to the Jewish Community Foundation.

HERE ARE FOUR EASY STEPS TO HELP DEFINE AND CREATE YOUR OWN CHARITABLE LEGACY

- Reflect on your life values. Think about what has been important in your life and what kind of legacy you want to leave.
- Contact your favorite charitable organization and talk to them about how your gift would help their work.
- Evaluate your finances. Consult a professional advisor such as an attorney, an accountant, or a financial advisor. They can help you set up a charitable gift plan to meet your goals and will explain the tax and financial advantages. Remember, almost everyone has the financial capacity to leave a legacy.
- Take action. Work with your professional advisor to put your plans into place to reflect your values. Write or review your will or estate plan, check the beneficiary designations on IRA or other retirement plans and life insurance policies.

By including Adath Jeshurun Congregation Foundation in your will, your commitment to Adath Jeshurun Congregation lives on. In recent years, many donors have included a gift to this Foundation in their wills or other estate documents. These gifts will have a tremendous impact on our ability to sustain a sacred community dedicated to *Torah* (learning and tradition), *Avodah* (prayer and spirituality), and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of loving-kindness). If you would like information, please contact the Foundation President, Alan Gingold, at 763.784.6938 or the Development Director, Jennifer Spiller, at 952.215.3916.

You can also contact the Jewish Community Foundation at 13100 Wayzata Blvd. Suite #200, Minnetonka, MN 55305, 952.417.2343, fax 952.593.2544, or website www.twincities.ujcfedweb.org/page.html?ArticleID=35330.

Living Will-- Health Care Directive

What used to be called a living will is now called a Health Care Directive in Minnesota. Your attorney will often include this as a part of the will drafting process. General questions and answers on Health Care Directives may be found on the Internet at the Minnesota Department of Health website of www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fpc/profinfo/advdir.htm.

A form that complies with Minnesota law can be obtained on the Minnesota Board on Aging website at www.mnaging.org/advisor/directive.htm. The form is written in plain English and walks you through information about the Health Care Directive law with instructions on completing the form. That agency's Senior LinkAge Line ® can mail you the form and answer questions by phone at 1.800.333.2433. Your health care provider may also be able to give you a form (it may look different from the one on the Minnesota Board on Aging website, but the law does not require that all forms look alike).

The Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has published a pamphlet entitled *Jewish Medical Directives for Health Care*, available at the website www.rabbinicalassembly.org/docs/medical%20directives.pdf. This document discusses health care decisions that can be made on your behalf should you lose your capacity to decide for yourself and contains a sample health care directive form.

You may want to consult with an advisor such as your personal attorney to be sure that any form you use complies with Minnesota Law. If you decide to draft a directive, please also consider sending a copy to the synagogue office for inclusion in your family file.

Ethical wills

Physical assets are one thing, but leaving your ethical values is quite another. We all wish we could imbue our children with the values we have gained over a lifetime. Unless we tell them what our values are, we certainly can't. For information on Ethical Wills, see the works of Jack Riemer and Dr. Barry Baines in the Resources section of this pamphlet.

Burial Plot

It is said that the first obligation of a Jewish Community is to establish a cemetery even before a school. It has been Jewish custom to purchase a grave site during one's lifetime as Abraham acquired a family burial site the cave of *Makhpela*. (Genesis 23:3-20)

The Adath Chesed Shel Emes Cemetery at 3800 Winnetka Avenue North in Crystal is the Adath Jeshurun Congregational Cemetery. Of course, burial can be at other cemeteries, too.

Because Jewish Law prescribes that a burial should take place as soon as possible having a prepaid plot eliminates stress during a hectic time. If there has been no planning, a family will have to quickly make major critical decisions. This added burden on a family is easily removed with some simple advance planning.

To arrange a confidential appointment to discuss these or other matters relating to advance funeral planning contact the Cemetery Superintendent, Michael Morris, at 612.998.0077.

Funeral

A funeral comforts the survivors and gives honor to the deceased. The Adath Jeshurun Burial Society, the *Chevra Kavod Hamet*, is available to Adath Jeshurun members to provide a traditional Jewish funeral upon request and at modest cost. One call to the Rabbis is all that is needed to begin this process.

The *Chevra* is staffed by Adath volunteers of all ages who are dedicated to honoring the deceased – and strengthening the living – through traditional rituals full of compassion and meaning.

A *Chevra* funeral may be requested by completing an *Expression of Guidance* form prior to one's death or by one's heirs at the time of death. A copy of this form is available through the Adath office or on the Adath website.

A videotape and DVD on the *Chevra* is available in the Adath library, or you may call the synagogue office and they will put you in contact with a representative of the *Chevra*.

If another funeral service is chosen, we urge a simple and dignified service in keeping with Jewish values.

End of Life

Just as soon as family or friends become aware that a loved one is critically ill and may die it is important to call the synagogue office at 952.545.2424 to inform the Rabbis.

The Rabbis provide the guidance of Jewish tradition and support to the ill person and their families. Just the presence of the Rabbi quietly listening to the ill person and family can be a great solace. For other critically ill people saying the Vidui may bring comfort and relief. The Vidui is the traditional Jewish confessional prayer recited when one may be near death.

Yad Sima Tova, Adath's Caring Community, provides help, support, and comfort for our members who are dealing with illness and aging. For information or services for a loved one or for yourself, please contact our Congregational Nurse at 952.215.3936 or the Adath office at 952.545.2424 to learn more details.

Community resources that may be appropriate are the Twin Cities Jewish Healing Program, which is a community wide program housed at the Jewish Family and Children Service, telephone 952.542.4840. This program provides a range of services including trained Jewish volunteers who visit Jewish patients in local hospices and grief counseling.

Our Rabbis also help a family begin to plan for what will happen if the critically ill person does not survive. They can explain options for a Jewish burial including the use of Adath *Chevra Kavod Hamet* or a funeral home, and they can help the family begin to think about the details of the Jewish mourning process; for example, *Shmira*, the guarding of the *met/meta* (deceased), and *Shiva*, the seven days of mourning.

Consideration may also wish be given to the writing of an obituary before the time of need. Because Jewish practice dictates a burial within days and because of the emotional impact of bereavement, writing an obituary when the mind is clearer and the emotions less intense may be wise. Another consideration, which may be easier if preplanned, is the charity to which the family wishes donations made and which would be listed in an obituary. A possible choice of a charity is to designate a fund at the Adath set up in the name of the ill family member because the family can then later decide on the exact distribution of the funds.

RESOURCES

Many of the books are available in the Adath Library or directly from the Rabbis at the time of need.

Books about Jewish Traditions Related to Death

A Time to Mourn A Time to Comfort, Wolfson, Ron, Jewish Lights Publishing, second ed. 2005.

The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, Lamm, Maurice, Jonathan David Publishers, 1994.

Additional Reading

Consolation, The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief, Lamm, Maurice, The Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

Does The Soul Survive, Spitz, Rabbi Elie Kaplan, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000

Embracing Life & Facing Death, A Jewish Guide to Palliative Care, Brenner, Rabbi Daniel, Blanchard, Rabbi Tsvi, Fins, Joseph, Hirschfield, Rabbi Bradley, CLAL, The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper, Baines, Barry K., M.D., Perseus Publishing, 2001.

Ethical Will Writing Guide Workbook and The Ethical Will Resource Kit, Baines, Barry K., M.D. You can order from Brochin's Book and Gift Shop in St. Louis Park, MN, telephone 952.926.2011 or toll-free 1.877.827.7323, or order from Amazon.com.

Final Gifts, Callanan, Maggie and Kelley, Patricia, Bantam Books, 1997.

From Age-ing to Sage-ing, Schacter-Shalomi, Zalman and Miller, Ronald Warner Books, 1997.

Guiding Your Child Through Grief, Emswiler, Mary Ann, Emswiler, James P, Bantam Books, 2000.

Jewish Medical Directives for Health Care, The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, The Rabbinical Assembly 1994.

Kitchen Table Wisdom, Remen, Rachel Naomi M.D. Riverhead Books, 1996.

Living when A Loved One Has Died, Grollman, Earl A, Beacon Press, 1977, 1987, 1995.

Mourning & Mitzvah, a Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing, Brener, Ann, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993.

So That Your Values Live On, Riemer, Jack and Stampfer, Nathaniel, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991.

The Death of Death, Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought, Gilman, Neil, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997.

Tuesdays With Morrie, Albom, Mitch, Doubleday, 1997.

What Happens After I Die?, Sonsino, Rifat & Syme, Daniel B, UAHC Press, 1990.

When a Grandparent Dies, Liss-Levinson, Nechama, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1995.

Additional Resources on Ethical Wills

www.ethicalwill.com is the only website devoted exclusively to the topic of ethical wills. More than twenty modern ethical wills are posted on the site.

Putting Your Values on Paper™: The Ethical Will Writing Guide, by Barry K. Baines, MD and Wm. Bradley Rouse. This computer software helps you complete a draft copy of an ethical will and is available directly from www.ethicalwill.com.

The Legacy Center is an organization dedicated to “preserving stories, values, and meaning” for individuals and families, organizations and communities. They can be contacted at 612.333.2833, by e-mail at info@thelegacycenter.net or visit their website at www.thelegacycenter.net.