Funeral
Frequently Asked Shaylos

Timing and Location

What is the rule about the timing of the funeral?
The general rule is sooner better. That means that one wants to ensure the person is buried within the first day. If not possible, as soon as possible.[1]

Where should one make the funeral?
Today most funerals are conducted at chapels or at the cemetery. For a great sage, one may make the funeral in the shul.[2] However, even so, there are those who were concerned even about that.[3]

What if we need to wait for family members to get in?
If it is for children of the deceased and it would be disrespectful for the deceased if they were absent, one may wait. For other family members, one should not wait.[4]

Overview of Levaya

How is the levaya structured?

- The aveilim wait in a side room before the funeral while everyone finds their seats in the chapel.
- Once this is done, the aveilim enter the chapel and stand around the aron to perform kria.
- The officiant recites Tehillim or offers Rabbis or family members to say them.
- Eulogies are offered.
- The officiant recites Kel Malei Rachamim.
- The details of the shiva are announced.
- The deceased is escorted to the hearse, while Tehillim 91 is said.

The Coffin – The Aron

What kind of casket or coffin should be used?
The halacha is to make something very simple without adornments or even handles. The fancy pinewood and beveled caskets is a non-Jewish custom and should be avoided. A fancy casket is not able to help a person who has passed away. On the contrary, there is a custom for a person who hosted many poor people around their table to have that table made into a coffin. That reflects the merit of what they achieved in this world.[5]

Kria

What is kria?
This is the practice of the mourners to rip their garments upon the death of their loved one.

Why do we do kria?
There are many reasons but one is that it is a demonstration of what is going on inside – that there is a part of one which feels torn asunder.

When does one do kria?
Although there it seems that the practice was to tear kria upon the death of one's relative[6], the predominant practice today is to tear kria at the funeral today.[7]

Who does kria?
One performs kria upon the loss of one of the following relatives: a spouse, a parent, a sibling or a child.[8]

What garment is to be torn (so I can plan what I am going to wear)?
One does not tear an overcoat nor undershirt.[9] Regular aveilim tear the outermost garment they wear. Aveilim for their parents will tear all garments (except coat and undershirt).[10]
This torn garment should be something one feels comfortable tearing but also one feels comfortable wearing for the rest of shiva.

What about the black ribbons?
Black ribbons which some funeral homes hand out to ceremonially rip instead of the shirt does not fulfil the obligation of kria.

How is it done?
Because our garments have hems, one will have a difficult time just tearing it with bear hands. One needs someone

[1] Shulchan Aruch YD 357:1
[2] Shulchan Aruch YD 340;19-20
[3] Halichos Shlomo 19:sk 3
[4] Nitei Gavriel, Aveilus 24:6,7
[5] Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 199:1
[6] Shulchan Aruch YD 339:3
[7] Pnei Baruch 1:sk 26
[8] Shulchan Aruch YD 340:1
[9] Ramo YD 240:10
[10] Shulchan Aruch YD 240:9

else to use a blade or scissor to start the cut so the aveilim can do the tear.[11]
The cut and rip needs to be from the neckline of the garment.[12]
For a parent it is made on the left side of the neckline. For a non-parent it is made on the right side of the neckline. [13]
The cut should be horizonal and the rip should be vertical.[14] It should be a rip of at least 3 inches.[15]

In what position is it done?
Kria needs to be done in a standing position.[16]

Does one say anything during kria?
Yes. Before one starts they say the bracha of 'dayan haemes' – acknowledging Hashem as the fair judge, as having a plan even though it is sometimes hard to understand that plan.

What if I am not comfortable tearing the clothing I am wearing at the funeral?
One may change the clothing they are wearing to tear less expensive clothing at the funeral since the obligation is on the avel not the clothing.[17]

What if I need to switch the shirt/blouse that I am wearing during shiva, do I need to rip the replacement?
An avel for one's parent would need to. Other aveilim do not need to.[18]

Does a child need kria when they lose a relative?
Even though aveilus does not fully apply to children, kria is done.[19]

Is kria done at a funeral on chol hamoed?
For someone who lost a parent, kria is definitely done. For someone who lost another relative, it is debate whether kria is done – in Yerushalayim it is not, outside of Yerushalayim, it is done.[20] Either way, the ripped garment must be changed after the funeral for chol hamoed cloths and then put back on Motzei Yom Tov.

Eulogies

What is the goal of the eulogy?
The gemara debates the goal of the eulogy.
TB Sanhedrin 46b

איבעיא להו הספידא יקרא דחיי הוי או יקרא דשכבי הוי

A dilemma was raised before the Sages: **Is the eulogy** delivered for **the honor of the living** relatives of the deceased, **or is it** delivered for **the honor of the dead?**

The gemara ends up proving that the primary point is for the honor of the deceased which is why a person may waive eulogies at their funeral. However, it is important to bear in mind that the primary beneficiary of the eulogy is the deceased and secondarily those in the room.

How long should the eulogies be?
One has to strike a balance between teaching the values the deceased stood for and also respecting those gathered and ensuring a timely burial. For a parent, one is allowed to be lengthier out of respect to them. For anyone else (including grandchildren) it should be expeditious.
If it is an erev Shabbos, it should be expeditious for all involved.[21]
Not every grand child needs to speak. A representative for all the rest or all their siblings is appropriate.

When preparing a eulogy what should I be thinking?
One should focus on the good qualities of the deceased and share them in a way which will evoke emotion.
One should take care not to exaggerate nor talk about virtues absent from the deceased. If one does, there is judgement on the eulogizer and the deceased.[22]
We are taught that the deceased does hear the eulogies, just as a person would experience a dream.[23]

When can one not eulogize?
On a happier day in the Jewish calendar, one may not offer eulogies. This usually matches up with the days tachanun is omitted. If it is for a talmid chacham one is allowed to offer a eulogy. [24] One may still offer divrei chizuk, positive lessons learned from the deceased. If the funeral is on chol hamoed, then no eulogies are allowed, even for a talmid chacham.[25]

Kel Malei

When is Kel Malei omitted?
It is usually omitted on days when tachanun is omitted. In its place one recites Tehillim 16.

Funeral Etiquette

Are there any other practices one should know about at the funeral?

[11] Pischei Teshuva YD 240 sk1, Pnei Baruch 1 sk 37
[12] Ramo YD 340:12
[13] Taz YD 240 sk 6
[14] Pischei Teshuva YD 240 sk 2
[15] Shulchan Aruch YD 240:9
[16] Ramo YD 240:1
[17] Chochmas Adam 152:6
[18] Shulchan Aruch YD 340:14
[19] Shulchan Aruch YD 340:27
[20] Shulchan Aruch, Ramo YD 240:31, Nitei Gavriel 61:2
[21] Shulchan Aruch YD 357:2
[22] Shulchan Aruch YD 340:1
[23] Taz, ad loc. sk 1
[24] Nitei Gavriel 52:3
[25] Biur Halacha 547 'shemutar'

One should not greet others or extend a hand in greeting at a funeral when the body is present or at the cemetery.[26]

Overview of Kevura

How is the burial ceremony structured?

- The hearse travels with a car procession to the cemetery.
- The family members sign the paperwork for burial.
- Those who have not been in a cemetery for 30 days recite the bracha.
- The hearse drives to the graveside.
- The deceased is carried to the grave while Tehillim 91 is recited.
- The body is lowered into the ground.
- Mechila is asked for.
- The grave is filled.
- Tziduk hadin is recited.
- Tehillim 16 is recited.
- Special kaddish is recited.
- Kel Malei is recited.
- A shura is formed for the aveilim to walk through.

Cemetery Etiquette

What are some basics that I should be aware of when entering a cemetery?

Out of honor of the dead, one needs to act in a respectful manner.[27] That includes:

- Not eating or drinking,
- Not using the cemetery as a restroom
- Not letting animals graze there
- Not picking any grass or fruit that grows there.
- Not making it a shortcut.

In addition, one needs to be careful not to perform a mitzva in the immediate proximity of the graves.[28] This includes:

- Not wearing Tefillin or Tzitzis
- Not learning Torah or saying Tehillim except if for the deceased.

One should not walk over graves unless it is to bury the dead.[29]

Can I visit another grave after the funeral is finished?

Yes. There is a notion that when one visits the kever of one's parent on the yahrzeit not to visit another kever out of respect. But that seems to be a function of honoring one's parent on the yahrzeit.

Can pregnant women come to the funeral?

If she is pregnant with a potential kohen boy then many say she should avoid it.

If not, this is a difficult question. There are a number of later opinions who suggest that since the cemetery is a place of impure and potentially damaging spiritual agencies, a pregnant woman should avoid entering a cemetery.

Others dismiss this claim citing very little evidence in the Mishna, Gemara and classic halacha. Rav Elyashiv allowed pregnant women to enter a cemetery but suggested they remain 4 amos from the graves.[30] Rav Gavriel Zinner suggests that those who are concerned should avoid it and those who are not need not.

Bracha at the Cemetery

I have never heard of this bracha before. What is it about?

This bracha acknowledges Hashem's plan in the world and also discusses the axiom of resurrection of the dead. It should be said by all who have not been to a cemetery in the last 30 days,[31] except the aveilim because when they first came to the cemetery, they were in the state of aninus.[32]

The procession

What is going on with the stopping and starting?

The practice is that when one escorts the body to the grave to make a number of stops.[33] This is to remove negative spirits and also for the people to stop and reflect. The practice today is to recite Tehillim 91 and make 7 stop[34]s for each word of the pasuk: "כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמורך בכל דרכיך"

Another reason for this practice is to reflect the process of judgement a person undergoes after death.[35]

The Burial

Why do people use the back of the shovel?

This demonstrates a reluctance to bury the deceased. For the same reason, the shovel is not passed from hand to hand, rather place back in the ground.

May the aveilim partake in the burial?

There are different opinions on this topic. Some suggest they may not at all. Others suggest they may but only once the aron is covered.

How much do we need to do?

[26] Shulchan Aruch 343:2, Ramo
[27] Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 199:16
[28] Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 199:15
[29] Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 199:14
[30] Tziyunei Halacha page 615
[31] Shulchan Aruch OC 224:12
[32] Pnei Baruch 5:22
[33] Ramo YD 358:3
[34] Based on TB Bava Basra 100b
[35] Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 198:12

We take pride in performing the mitzva of burial completely and filling the grave to the top. The practice is to create a tzuras hakever which is a raised area above the grave.[36] The area by the head should be slightly higher.

Tziduk Hadin

What is tziduk hadin?
Tziduk hadin is a prayer which talks about the justice of Hashem, acknowledging that even though we do not understand it, we know there is a plan.

Where does it come from?
The most basic form already appears in the gemara as having been said by R. Chananya ben Teradyon and his family as they were martyred by the Romans.
TB Avoda Zara 17b-18a

מיד גזרו עליו לשריפה ועל אשתו להריגה ועל בתו לישב בקובה של זונות

They immediately sentenced him to death by means of **burning, and** they sentenced **his wife to execution** by decapitation, **and his daughter** was condemned **to sit in a brothel [*kubba shel zonot*].**

בשעה שיצאו שלשתן צדקו עליהם את הדין הוא אמר (דברים לב, ד) הצור תמים פעלו [וגו'] ואשתו אמרה (דברים לב, ד) אל אמונה ואין עול בתו אמרה (ירמיהו לב, יט) גדול העצה ורב העליליה אשר עיניך פקוחות על כל דרכי וגו' אמר רבי [כמה] גדולים צדיקים הללו שנזדמנו להן שלש מקראות של צדוק הדין בשעת צדוק הדין

The Gemara relates: **When the three of them went out** after being sentenced, **they accepted the** justice of God's **judgment.** Rabbi Ḥanina ben Teradyon **said: "The Rock, His work is perfect;** for all His ways are justice" (Deuteronomy 32:4). **And his wife said** the continuation of the verse: **"A God of faithfulness and without iniquity." His daughter said: "Great in counsel, and mighty in work; whose eyes are open upon all the ways** of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways" (Jeremiah 32:19). **Rabbi** Yehuda HaNasi **said: How great are these righteous people, that** these **three verses,** which speak **of** the **acceptance of** God's **judgment, occurred to them at the time of accepting the** righteousness of His **judgment.**

When is it said?
It is said right after the burial has been concluded.[37]

When is it not said?
It is not said on days tachanun is omitted.[38]

Kaddish

What is different about this kaddish?

This kaddish has a large addition to the first paragraph which describes in Aramaic the future time when Hashem will bring redemption and resurrection of the dead.

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעָלְמָא דִּי הוּא עָתִיד לְאִתְחַדְּתָא. וּלְאַחָיָאה מֵתַיָּא. וּלְאַסָּקָא יַתְהוֹן לְחַיֵּי עָלְמָא. וּלְמִבְנָא קִרְתָּא דִּי יְרוּשְׁלֵם. וּלְשַׁכְלְלָא הֵיכְלֵהּ בְּגַוָּהּ. וּלְמֶעֱקַר פּוּלְחָנָא נוּכְרָאָה מִן אַרְעָא. וּלְאָתָבָא פּוּלְחָנָא דִּי שְׁמַיָּא לְאַתְרֵהּ. וְיִמְלִיךְ קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא בְּמַלְכוּתֵהּ וְיקָרֵהּ. בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב. וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May your great name be made holier and greater, in this world that he is destined to renew and to give life to the dead and raise them to eternal life, to build the city of Yerushalayim, and complete the Beis HaMikdosh in its midst. And to uproot idol worship from the Land, return the service of the Heaven to its place, and the Holy One Blessed Be He shall rule in his majesty and splendor in our lives, and in the lifetime of the entire household of Israel, swiftly and in the near future; and say, Amen.

Where is it said?
Some have the practice to distance oneself from the grave 4 amos to say it. Othere s

When is it not said?
If it is on a day on which tachanun is omitted, one would only say the regular kaddish.

Shura

Why do people make those lines after the funeral?
These 2 lines are the first opportunity for the community to offer nichum aveilim since up till now they have been in a state of aninus.[39]

When do we change our shoes?
One should change out of leather shoes after the burial is complete and tziduk hadin is said, before the shura.[40]

Post Funeral

What else do we need to do afterwards?
There are a few practices:

a. Some take grass and throw it over their shoulders. While they do this, they recite: זכור כי עפר אנחנו[41]
b. Some recite the following statement directed at the deceased:

לך בשלום ותנוח על משכבך בשלום, ותעמד לגורלך לקץ הימין :for a male

לכי בשלום ותנוחי על משכבך בשלום, ותעמדי לגורלך לקץ הימין :for a female

[36] Nitei Gavriel, Aveilus 76:7-8
[37] Gesher Hachaim 16:1
[38] Ramo YD 401:6
[39] Shulchan Aruch OC 72:4
[40] Shulchan Aruch YD 376:4
[41] Shulchan Aruch YD 376:4 and Shach sk 4

c. After one leaves the cemetery, one should wash their hands to remove any of the negative energy from the cemetery.[42]

Travelling to a different country

When do the family start sitting shiva if someone of us are going to Israel and some are not?

The part of the family going to Israel will only start shiva after the burial. The part of the family that stays behind will begin shiva from the time they leave the deceased (whether from the funeral home or the airport).[43] If the gadol habayis goes with the deceased and remains in Israel, then even those staying behind will only start after burial.[44]

When does the shiva end for different parties?

It depends:

No gadol habayis:

a. If the Israel party remains in Israel, they count shiva from burial and those in the diaspora from the time they left the deceased.
b. If the Israel party returns, they join the already started shiva and end early.

Yes gadol habayis:

a. If he/she goes and returns from Israel, then they join the party who remained behind and end earlier.
b. If he/she does not go to Israel, the returning party join the shiva and end earlier. [45]

If we are not able to fly to the funeral, when does aveilus begin?

If one cannot make it to the funeral, then aninus is suspended from the time in the deceased was handed over to the chevra Kadisha.[46]

Aveilus should begin immediately, unless one will be involved in speaking at the funeral via Zoom/phone.[47]

Isn't it true that one can bury the deceased on the 2nd day of Yom Tov?

While it is true that the Shulchan Aruch does allow such a thing, it is not done today in the diaspora. This is because we have refrigeration today and the concern of decomposition is less. Additionally, it would inevitably lead to people who are not supposed to attend to be mechalel Yom Tov.[48]

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[42] Pnei Baruch 5:23-24
[43] Shulchan Aruch YD 375:2 and see Igros Moshe YD II:170
[44] Shulchan Aruch 375:2
[45] Shach YD 341:sk 2 There are some who disagree and the returning party keeps shiva from burial.
[46] Nitei Gavriel 14;3
[47] Nishmas Yisrael I:167
[48] Igros Moshe YD III:161