The Ultimate Passage

Frequently Asked Shaylos

The end of life is a difficult time. It can also be a blessing which allows one to be there for one's loved one and help them through this passage in life.

What is viduy?

Viduy at the end of life is acknowledging the faults in one's life and acknowledging that the process of death should be an atonement. This is noted in the Mishna in Sanhedrin 43b

> ואם אינו יודע להתוודות אומרים לו אמור תהא מיתתי כפרה על כל עונותי ר' יהודה אומר אם היה יודע שהוא מזומם אומר תהא מיתתי כפרה על כל עונותי
>
> **And if** the condemned man **does not know how to confess,** either from ignorance or out of confusion, **they say to him: Say** simply: **Let my death be an atonement for all my sins. Rabbi Yehuda says: If** the condemned man **knows that he was convicted by the testimony of conspiring witnesses,** but in fact he is innocent, **he says: Let my death be an atonement for all my sins.**

How much is said?

Preferably one should say the full viduy like one does on Yom Kippur including ashamnu and al cheit.

If that is not possible, the most basic formulation should be:

"מיתתי תהא כפרה על כל עונותי"

May my death be an atonement for all my sins.[1]

Isn't going to scare the person saying it?

One should encourage the sick person to say it themselves when they can and note that many have said viduy and recovered and many have missed it and not recovered.[2]

Is there anything else which is said?

Yes, there are many other tefillos which are associated with this passage?

Yes, there are additional tefillos to be included. Please ask Rabbi Trump for the texts. Included in these are: Tehillim 121, 130, 91, Yigdal, Adon Olam, Ana Bekoach and Al Kein Nekaveh.

What else can I do?

a. It is important to be present with the sick person. Your being there, even without saying much, is of great value to a person at a dark time with an unclear future.
b. It is important also to take the time to sing with the patient. Think of songs they would enjoy around the Shabbos table and at family gatherings. Music has a deep way of penetrating even at times when lucidity is distant.
c. Take time to say all the things you would want said like how much you love them and asking for forgiveness for things not addressed.

Do I need to speak to the funeral home and cemetery before the end of life?

It is not necessary to make the arrangements before the end of life. However, it is a good idea to find out the following details:

1. Where is the plot which was bought for one's loved one?
2. Where are the papers so they will be accessible?
3. Was there a funeral home they set up an arrangement with?
4. If not, which funeral home would one want to use and does one have their number?

[1] Shulchan Aruch YD 338:1

[2] Shulchan Aruch YD 338:1

If I see that my loved one is in the process of passing away, what should I do?

Most importantly one should be present and be a voice of strength and calm with them. If one sees that they are dying, one should say the following pesukim as the soul departs:

Once

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד:

Hear, O Israel! Hashem is our God, Hashem is one

Three times

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Blessed [is His] Name, Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.

Seven times

ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹקִים.

Hashem is God

Once

ה' מֶלֶךְ ה' מָלָךְ ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד:

Hashem is King, Hashem was King; Hashem will be King forever and ever.

Is there anything to say right afterwards?

Yes. After the soul departs on should say the following:

ה' נָתַן וה' לָקָח יְהִי שֵׁם ה' מְבוֹרָךְ:

Hashem gave, Hashem took. May His name be blessed.

הַצּוּר תָּמִים פָּעֳלוֹ כִּי כָל־דְּרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵ-ל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עָוֶל צַדִּיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא:

The Rock is perfect in action. All His ways are just. A faithful God and there is no corruption. He is righteous and upright.

What do I do first if/when my loved one passes away?

When a person passes away it is important to ensure the following issues are addressed:

a. The hands should be opened
b. The mouth and eyes should be closed
c. The arms should be straight alongside the body
d. The legs should be straightened
e. The body should be covered by a sheet
f. If one is at home and it is possible, the body should be lowered to the floor, feet facing the door
g. If one is in the hospital, the bed should lowered to the flat position and lowest setting
h. One should instruct the nurse not to remove any lines from the body

When something happens, who do I call first?

The first call is to the Rabbi who will help walk through the necessary steps.

The second call is to the funeral home which will initiate a funeral director and shomer to pick up the niftar/nifteres. They will also be in charge of contacting the cemetery to open up the plot.

I know that a tahara needs to be done. How do I arrange that?

A tahara is the processing of ritual cleansing the body and preparing it for the final passage. It is done extremely carefully and in a truly honorable fashion. One does not need to arrange that. That is arranged by the Rabbi in concert with the funeral home. Sometimes it is performed by the shul's chevra Kadisha and sometimes by the town's chevra Kadisha. The Rabbi will confirm those arrangement.

Do we need a shomer?

The halacha is that someone should be with the deceased all the time from the time of death until the funeral. This is to protect the body from rodents[3] and for kabbalistic reasons.[4] This is even true in a morgue. That would mean waiting with the deceased until the funeral director arrived. Usually, the Chevra Kadisha will help provide but one should inquire about this.

Is there anything special I should do in the house the person passed away in?

Yes. Any open liquids at the time of passing should be poured out. This is a way of subtly conveying the passing and also because there is impurity in the wake of death.[5]

What can we not do in the presence of the deceased?

One should be careful not to talk about things unrelated to the deceased or Divrei Torah in the presence of the deceased.[6]

[3] Chochmas Adam, Matzeiva Moshe sk 14
[4] Igros Moshe YD I:225, Maavor Yabok Sfas Emes 24
[5] Shach YD 339 sk 9
[6] Shulchan Aruch YD 340:16