Jewish tradition calls for as little delay as possible between death and burial. Accommodations may be made for close out of town family. The funeral may be held in a synagogue, funeral home or graveside at the cemetery. Funerals usually last about thirty minutes and seldom longer than one hour, and consist of the recitation of Psalms, Scripture readings and a eulogy. There will be no viewing of the body and the service is conducted with a closed casket. Prior to or after the services, the mourners perform the ritual of *K'riah,* the rending of the garment. This ancient custom is symbolic of the tear that's in the mourner's heart. Traditionally the clothing is torn, but many people today use a black ribbon that is attached to the outside of the clothing. When people see the torn ribbon or clothing, it is a sign that that person is a mourner.

If the funeral was not held at the gravesite, the family and close friends will go to the cemetery where additional prayers are said. Upon lowering the casket into the grave it is considered a *mitzvah*, a sign of compassion and of respect, to help bury the deceased by placing a few shovels of earth onto the casket or vault. It is customary to wash one's hands after leaving the burial.

For Jews, the initial mourning period is called *Shiva* (Hebrew for seven). *Shiva* lasts for seven days after the funeral and in a traditional community the *minyan* (prayer service) will be conducted every day so that *Kaddish* (special prayer for mourners) can be said. During *shiva* there are restrictions imposed upon the mourners to enable them to take the time to grieve. They must not work, attend school, wear makeup or shave, listen to music, or engage in activities that are purely for pleasure. The relatives for whom one sits *shiva* are only from the immediate family – a father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter or spouse. Other family members can be present but aren't required to observe the full restrictions. It is considered a great *mitzvah*, or commandment, of loving kindness and compassion to pay a home visit to the mourners.

Please take note:

- An open casket or cremation is not generally accepted in the Jewish tradition. Unless local laws require, embalming is avoided.
- Tradition calls for a simple wooden casket, made without metal parts.
- Most traditional funerals do not have flowers.
- When making a shiva call, just walk in. Do not ring the doorbell. The front door of most shiva homes will be left open or unlocked, since all are invited to comfort the mourners. This eliminates the need for the mourners to answer the door.
- The mirrors in the shiva house may be covered, the mourners may not be wearing shoes and may be sitting on low, wooden chairs. Women mourners do not wear makeup and men do not shave.
- One does not need to be friendly with or even know the mourner to make a *shiva* call. Paying condolences and attending a *shiva minyan* (service of mourning) is the responsibility of members of the community. Mourning is understood to be a communal obligation and not a private event. If unsure about whether to attend,

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consider going even if only for a little while. Being there to support the bereaved is important.

- When entering the house, go up to the mourner. It can often be difficult to think of what to say. Because no one can know what the mourner needs, Jewish tradition suggests not talking at first, which allows the mourner to begin the conversation. Giving a hug or putting an arm around the mourner is more important than any words.

- It is the responsibility of the community to feed the mourners, thus it is customary to bring food when attending a shiva minyan. In Jewish tradition, one does not bring flowers.

- The food at a shiva minyan is for everyone, so feel free to eat. It is respectful to allow the mourners to eat first or to bring them a plate.

- It is appropriate to make a donation in memory of the person who died, either to the synagogue or another meaningful organization.

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