

Jewish Philosophy & Rituals on Death & Dying

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Sol Levinson's Funeral Home
A Tradition of Excellence. A Lifetime of Service.



FIFTH GENERATION

Kavod HaMet:
Respect for the dignity of
the dead

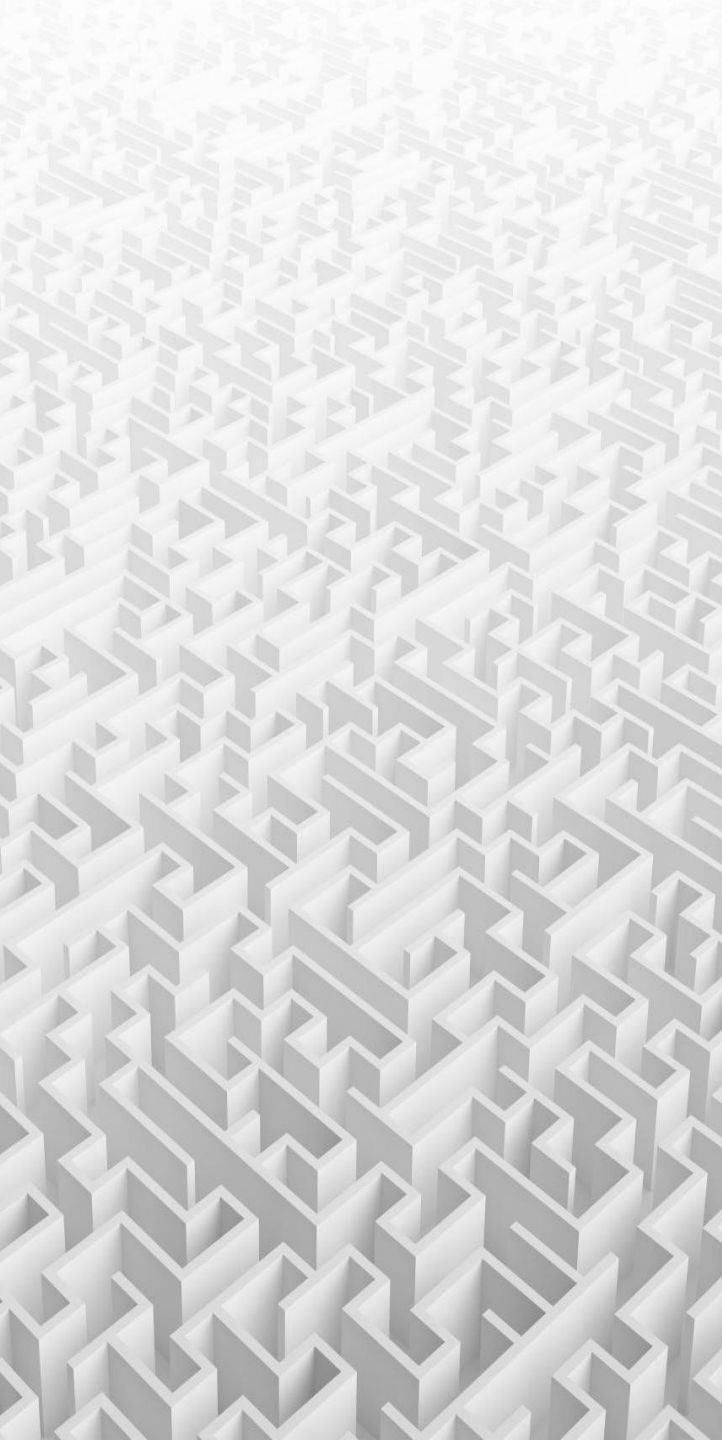
A Sacred Obligation:
Sol Levinson's commitment
to the community

In Jewish tradition, everything related to the deceased is done with this important concept in mind.

Sol Levinson & Bros. has been in business since 1892. The fourth and fifth generations of the Levinson family currently run the funeral home.

We feel the fact that we have been here so long speaks to our high level of service and compassion. Our mission is to "provide exceptional service to our community, from generation to generation, through compassion, education, and personalization."

At Levinson's we take that mission very seriously, and our goal is to handle as many of the details as possible, so your family doesn't have to.




What can I do when someone is dying?

Navigating the time leading up to the death of a loved one is challenging under the best of circumstances. Thousands of years of Jewish traditions provide a framework that can guide us through this time and provide a great deal of comfort.

Speaking with trusted clergy about traditional prayers of healing or psalms – even if we are praying for healing of a person’s soul and an easy transition – can be a meaningful way to channel overwhelming emotions into purpose.

Finding ways to comfort the person who is dying is a mitzvah. Play their favorite music, read to them, bring them comfort items, share memories, or anything else that may be meaningful and calming.



What happens when someone dies?

Jewish tradition tells us that the soul of a person remains near their body until after the burial.

This is one of the reasons for the tradition of a *shomer* – a person who stays with the deceased, so they are not left unattended.

It is important to the funeral home as soon as possible so the person can be transferred back to the care center right away. Unless there is a delay by an external party, we endeavor to do this within 1-2 hours of being notified, even in the middle of the night.

We want to ensure the person enters a refrigerated space as quickly as possible. Embalming is not required by law, though there may be times where it is recommended or required by a funeral home if certain services are selected. Embalming is considered contrary to Kavod HaMet because it is invasive.

Funeral Scheduling: Myth vs Fact


Myth: A Jewish person must be buried within 24 hours.

Fact: Judaism teaches that a burial should take place without any *unnecessary* delay. This is Kavod HaMet.

It is perfectly acceptable (and important) to wait for immediate mourners to travel from out of town. However, it also means that you shouldn't delay a burial to go on vacation. Most funerals are held within 1-3 days following a death.

Reality: Younger family members may have important school obligations, someone may have a medical procedure scheduled, or a birthday may fall on one of the intervening days. The funeral home follows the lead of the family in terms of deciding what day a funeral should be held.





Jewish Cemeteries: Myth vs Fact

Myth: You can't be buried in a Jewish cemetery if you have tattoos, aren't Jewish, are cremated, et cetera.

Fact: You can be buried in any Jewish cemetery if you have tattoos. In addition, there are Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and unaffiliated Jewish cemeteries throughout the area. Several offer burial for interfaith families or burial of cremated remains, including Temple Adas Shalom's Harford Jewish Center cemetery in Rosedale.

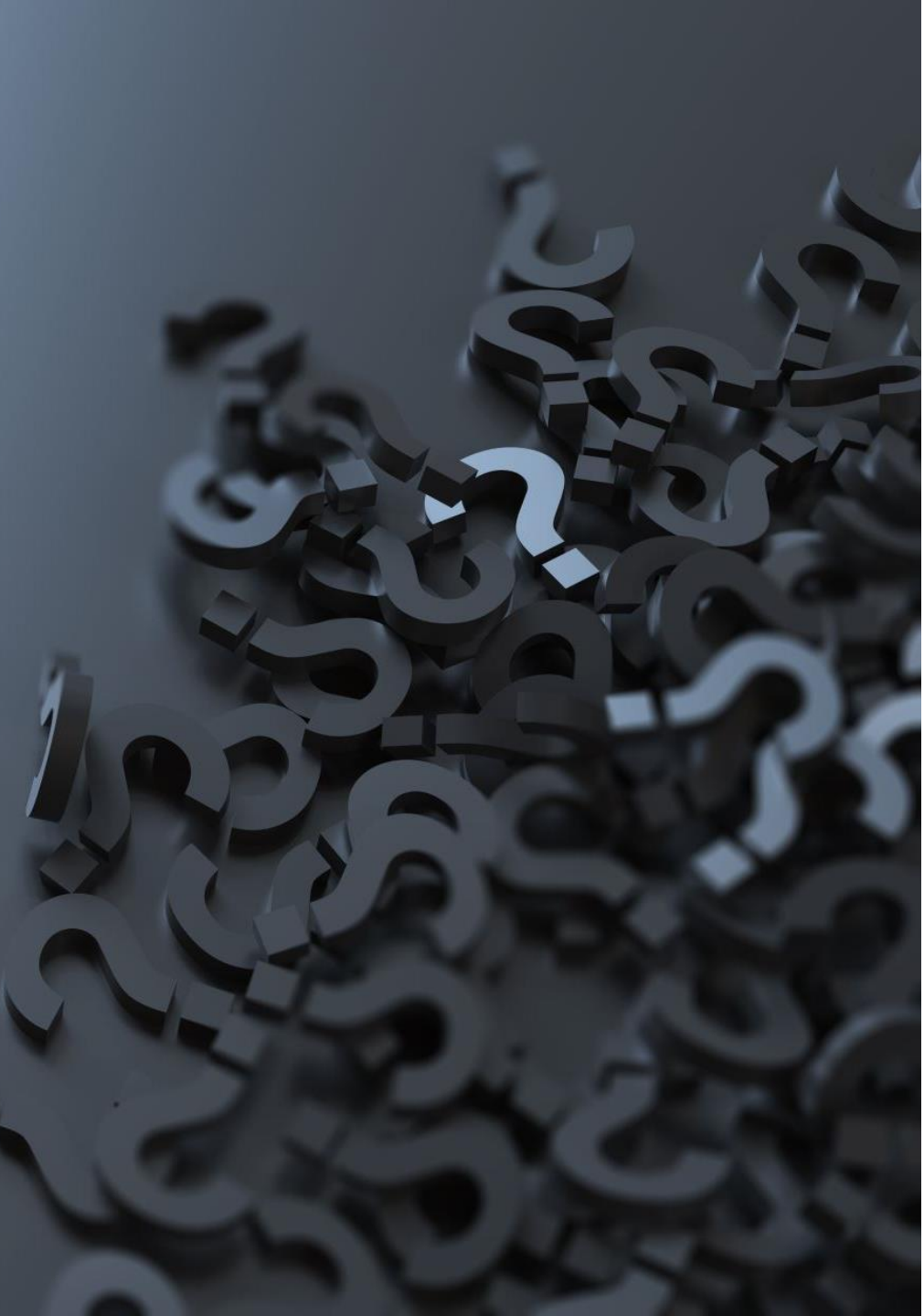
We are here to be a resource as you explore the options.

You're thinking about this ahead of time. That's great!

Funeral or memorial choices are not an end-of-life decision. You can make the process much easier on your family at an incredibly difficult time. Advance planning allows you to:

- Lessen the risk of family conflict
- Ensure your wishes are followed
- Give careful thought to the needs of the mourners
- Provide some input about personalizing the service
- Reduce the financial impact to your family





What is Advance Planning?

Simply put, it is speaking with one of Levinson's Advance Planning Specialists to:

- Ask questions
- Gather information
- Make informed decisions

It all comes down to Preparation, Education, and Peace of Mind

What information will we go over?



Family names for announcements



Statistical information for legal documents



Decisions on services you'd like us to provide



Options for personalizing the service

That doesn't seem like very much. Can't my family just do that at the time?

When someone dies, your family and friends must coordinate travel, notify people, set up any post-funeral gatherings, and handle many other tasks - all while grieving.

Advance Planning takes a major burden off them.

When you pre-plan, we discuss:

- The type of services you would like us to provide (traditional burial, green funeral, memorial service only, or any other alternative plans)
- Any clergy you'd like to officiate, or whether we should engage clergy for the family
- Cemetery plot information or options for cemeteries, if applicable
- The process if you live out of town and will be buried here (the short answer: just call Levinson's)
- The process if you live here and will be buried elsewhere (the short answer: just call Levinson's)
- How you would like to be dressed

- Limousines
- Newspaper notices and website information, including important life accomplishments you would like mentioned
- Charities where you want contributions made in your memory
- Statistical information for the death certificate and how many death certificates might be needed
- Religious information for the clergy, such as a Hebrew name
- Casket options
- Vault (based on cemetery requirements)
- Flag and military honors for a veteran?
- Personalization: special requests you have regarding who does (or does not) speak, a favorite poem or reading, a favorite song
- How many days you'd like your family to sit shiva or receive people
- Any other details about the service you feel strongly about
- The options for pre-payment

Burial and Cremation: Myths vs Facts

Background: Abraham buying the Cave of Machpelah for Sarah's interment is one of the first recorded real estate transactions.

Burial is so important in Judaism that one of the first things a new community should do is establish a cemetery. Even if you don't have family in the area, cemeteries are evidence of the history of a community. In addition, it can bring surviving family comfort knowing that you have a *place*.

Myth: Jewish people don't cremate.

Fact: Some Jewish people do opt for cremation. In theory, it is considered contrary to the idea of Kavod HaMet – respect for the body of the deceased. The reality is some people feel strongly that this is what they want.

Myth: You can't bury cremated remains.

Fact: As mentioned earlier, you can bury cremated remains at some cemeteries.

Myth: Cremation is more environmentally friendly.

Fact: Cremation is extremely energy intensive and cremated remains can be toxic to plants. Green burial (more on this later) or a simple Jewish burial has the potential to be much less environmentally impactful.

Myth: Cremation is simpler.

Fact: There are a surprising number of decisions that go into cremation and leaving certain decisions to family (such as what should happen with the cremated remains) can be an added burden. In addition, a cremation without a service does not necessarily make things "easier" on surviving family and friends.



Taharah, Shroud, or Clothing

At many cemeteries, you have an option for how you would like to be dressed. You can often choose to be dressed in your own clothing. However, the traditional Jewish preparation for burial involves the following:

Taharah – a ritual cleansing ceremony where the deceased is spiritually purified like the ceremony at a mikvah. A minimum of a certain amount of water is poured over the person in a particular order, some prayers are said for the soul of the person, and then they are dressed in a shroud. Some cemeteries require this ritual to be buried there.

Chevra Kadisha – a group of men or women whose role it is to provide care for the deceased by performing the taharah

Shroud – a garment made of pure linen, cotton, or even bamboo. It is shaped like a simple pair of pajamas with a tunic top.

Caskets: Myth vs Fact

Myth: For Jewish burial, you must use a pine coffin.

Fact: Jewish law requires that a casket be entirely made of wood or other completely biodegradable material. There is no requirement as to the type of wood.

Pine became traditional to use because it was what was easily and affordably available to us in Eastern Europe. In addition, the underlying belief is that a casket should not be overly ornate. Everyone has a different idea as to what that means.

Caskets can be made of pine, poplar, oak, maple, cherry, pecan, mahogany, or walnut. Green burial coffins are now available in seagrass, willow, and bamboo.

Different types of wood or materials biodegrade more quickly than others.

Kriah: tearing

Prior to entering the chapel for the funeral service, the family, led by the rabbi or cantor, will tear Kriah (“rending of the garment”)

When Jacob thought his son, Joseph, had died, he tore his garment to symbolize his loss and grief.

Kriah is done by the immediate family of the deceased and involves the tearing of their garment or symbolic black ribbon. It is meant to be an outward symbol of loss the mourners are experiencing.

Kevurah: burial

Those in attendance at the cemetery will perform the mitzvah of helping to bury the deceased, either with a small garden trowel, or completely filling in the grave by hand with large shovels.

Shiva: the first days of mourning

Shiva begins upon completion of the burial. It is the time when immediate mourners are not supposed to work or even leave the house.

Shiva means “seven” in Hebrew, which is the traditional number of days that the family will be receiving visitors. However, many families sit shiva for a shorter period. Typically, a short service is held to allow the family the opportunity to recite Mourner’s Kaddish.

Sheloshim: the 30 days of mourning

The secondary period of mourning includes the first thirty days after the funeral.

Traditionally, mourners resume normal social and professional interactions, but avoid participating in any festivity or amusement.

The year and yahrzeit

For a child mourning a parent, the tradition is to continue to recite Mourner's Kaddish for 11 months following the burial, then to continue to attend minyans and stand during the Mourner's Kaddish for the remaining month.

The ***Yahrzeit*** commemorates the anniversary of the date of death and is observed annually, in accordance with the Hebrew calendar.

On the yahrzeit, a 24-hour candle is lit the evening before the yahrzeit date on the Gregorian calendar

The unveiling

The unveiling is the formal dedication of the headstone.

Often, the unveiling takes place 12 months after the funeral, to mark the end of the formal mourning period. However, the unveiling may take place any time after Sheloshim (30 days).

What is Green Burial?

A Green Burial is designed to have as little impact as possible on the environment.

Everyone's definition of a green burial is a little different. At its most strict, it entails:

- No embalming (which is in keeping with Jewish tradition, anyway)
- Biodegradable cleansers
- Burial in a shroud with handles, green burial certified coffin, pine or flattop poplar unfinished coffins
- Only a flat, locally-sourced stone to mark the grave
- No vault (Myth: the state requires vaults. Fact: each cemetery sets their own requirements)
- Digging of the grave and filling it in should have minimal impact
- Burials at a shallower depth, to allow for more rapid decomposition of the deceased
- Cemetery should not be landscaped nor mowed frequently

Traditional Jewish burial follows most of these restrictions. There are several cemeteries with green burial sections of varying levels of requirements. For people who already own a plot at a non-green burial cemetery, we can provide guidance on how to make the burial as green as possible. In addition, we have hybrid vehicles we can use whenever possible.



Other frequently asked questions:

- **What if:**
 - My family is interfaith?
 - I'm not heterosexual, not cisgender, or there's anything else I worry might impact my funeral or burial?
 - I die somewhere else?
 - I don't want anything fancy?
 - I don't want a traditional burial?
- **What is a Medicaid spenddown?**

You don't have to figure this out alone. As funeral, burial, and memorialization experts, we are here to help answer all these questions!

What about the future? What if I want to make changes?

Pre-arrangements can always be changed or adjusted, even when you have prepaid.*

The main reasons for having the preplanning conversation with a funeral professional come directly from people we've met with:

“This is the greatest gift I can give my daughter. She doesn't understand why I'm doing this now, but she'll appreciate it later.”

“It just makes sense.”

How do I get started?

- Go to our [online scheduler](#) to set an in-person, Zoom, or phone appointment.
- See the [Advance Planning section](#) of our website. From there you can also click to “Begin Planning” and fill out some background information.
- Call us at 410-653-9908 with any questions.
- Email us directly at planahead@sollevinson.com

A Tradition of Excellence ~ A Lifetime of Service
www.sollevinson.com

Funeral Home & Arrangement Office Locations:
Pikesville 410-653-8900 | 8900 Reisterstown Road
Columbia 410-730-7230 | 5560 Sterrett Place, Suite 204
Annapolis 410-881-0801 | 170 Jennifer Road, Suite 150