

History Timeline of Events in the World and Jewish Death Practices



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Jews have been taking care of their dead in respectful and loving ways throughout our history. While we base many of today's death-related practices on ideas from 1626 when the *Ma'avar Yabok* was published in Italy, our timeline goes back to the beginning of Judaism and extends to the present.

Every effort has been made to assure the dates and facts listed are accurate. If you find errors, please notify us of the correct information, to make this as accurate as possible.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (2000 BCE–500 BCE) Biblical times - The **biblical record** lays the groundwork for traditional Jewish funeral and burial practices, including these (all Torah, except Job reference):
 - Burial at Machpelah: Gen 23
 - Joseph's (false) death: Gen 37: 29-35
 - Jacob's burial: Gen 47:28-31, Gen 50:1-14
 - Aaron's death: Num 20:24-29
 - Miriam's death: Num 20:1
 - Moses' death: Deut 34:1-8
 - Same-day burial: Deut 21:23
 - Shiva: Job 2:13
 - Parah Aduma: Num 19
 - Eglah Arufah: Deut 21:1-9

Historical Contextual Events

- (167–161 BCE) The Maccabean revolt against the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire
- (3–4 BCE) Herod's reign
- (10 CE) Death of Hillel the Elder
- (6–66 CE) Land of Israel becomes Roman Province "Judaea."
- (66–73 CE) The First Jewish–Roman War ends with destruction of the Second Temple and the fall of Jerusalem. 1,100,000 people are killed by the Romans during the siege, and 97,000 captured and enslaved.
- (68–70 CE) The Sanhedrin is relocated to Yavneh by **Yochanan ben Zakai**.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (200 BCE–500 CE) Talmudic requirement to bury (**Sotah 14a**): The Holy one, blessed be God, buried the dead, for it is written (Deut. 34:6): *And God buried him in the valley*, so do you also bury the dead.
- (200 BCE–500 CE) Other related texts (eg., **S'machot 7:5**, roughly 300 CE) imply the existence of “*haburot*”, societies, to visit the sick and collect bones of the dead, but no evidence of organizations to care for the dead.
- (200 BCE–500 CE) The *baraita* in **Baba Batra 8a**, which taxed burials for people who lived in a town longer than 9 months, meant that communities provided the means for the burial of impoverished people. This belief that there was a form of a public association for burying the dead is substantiated in **Moed Katan 27b**. These communities would have been in the area then called Babylonia.

Historical Contextual Events

- (70 CE) Fall of Jerusalem
- (73 CE) Masada falls
- (70–220 CE) Period of the **Tannaim**. (The decisions of the *Tannaim* are contained in the *Mishnah*, *Baraita*, *Tosefta*, and various Midrash compilations.)
- (115–117 CE) Kitos War (revolt against Trajan, a series of diaspora revolts) – this second Jewish-Roman War leads to mutual killing of hundreds of thousands of Jews, Greeks, and Romans, ending with a total defeat of Jewish rebels and complete extermination of Jews in Cyprus and Cyrene by Roman Emperor Hadrian.
- (132–135 CE) Bar Kokhba Revolt. Most of the Jewish population is annihilated (about 580,000 killed). Rabbi Akiva is martyred in 136 CE.
- (135–219 CE) Life of **Judah haNasi** who redacted the *Mishnah* (as a summary of the oral law) in approximately 200 CE.
- (200 CE) Redaction of the **Mishnah**
- (220–500 CE) Period of the **Amoraim**
- (330 CE) Constantine accepts Christianity - Roman Empire becomes Byzantium.
- (358 CE) Hillel II creates a mathematical calendar for calculating the Jewish month.
- (425 CE) Redaction of the **Jerusalem Talmud**
- (475–500 CE) Redaction of the **Babylonian Talmud**
- (6th century CE) Period of the **Savoraim**
- (700–1038 CE) Period of the **Gaonim**
- (760 CE [or 765]) The Karaites reject the authority of the oral law and split off from rabbinic Judaism.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1000 CE) Establishment in Worms, Germany of the first known Jewish communal cemetery outside of Israel.
- (1000–1200's CE) As early as the 11th century there were large settlements of Jews in Europe, but **Sefer Hasidim** seems to prove that there were no burial societies in Germany then.
- (1138–1204 CE) Life of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (**Maimonides** or the Rambam); he wrote the **Mishneh Torah** and the **Guide for the Perplexed**. His Laws Concerning Mourning (Treatise IV) appears to be the first compilation of mourning rules since that of *S'machot* (about 300 CE).
- (circa 1200 CE) **Torah ha-Adam** was written by Moshe ben Nachman (**Nachmanides** or the Ramban) (1194-1270). It represents a major step in the evolution of *Chevrah Kadisha* literature because it is the first post-Talmudic comprehensive collection of customs and laws specifically focused on the continuum of illness, death, and mourning.
- (1300 CE) ROSH Teshuva: The oldest responsum that deals with elements of the *Chevrah Kadisha*. **Asher ben Jehiel** (1250-1328) was an eminent Talmudist. He is often referred to as Rabbenu Asher, or by the Hebrew acronym, the ROSH. His commentaries were finally published in 1517.

Historical Contextual Events

- (912–1013 CE) The Golden age of Jewish culture in Spain. Jewish poets, scholars, scientists, statesmen and philosophers flourish in and are an integral part of the extensive Arab civilization. This period ends with the Cordoba massacre in 1013 CE.
- (1013–1073 CE) Life of Rabbi Yitchaki Alfassi (from Morocco, later Spain) who wrote the **Rif**.
- (1040–1105 CE) Life of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (**Rashi**) who wrote important commentaries on almost the entire Tanakh and Talmud.
- (1040–1550CE) Period of the **Rishonim**
- (1095–1291 CE) Christian Crusades begin, sparking warfare with Islam in Palestine. Crusaders temporarily capture Jerusalem in 1099. Tens of thousands of Jews are killed by European crusaders throughout Europe and in the Middle East.
- (1100–1275 CE) Period of the **Tosafot**
- (1240–1305 CE) Life of **Moses de Leon**, of Spain, who published the **Zohar** in the 13th century, thus beginning the modern form of Kabbalah.
- (1264 CE) Statute of Kalizs, the oldest grant of privileges to Jews of Poland.
- (1306 – 1394 CE) Jews repeatedly expelled from France, then readmitted for a price.
- (1343 CE) Persecuted Jews invited to Poland.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1300's, 1400's CE) By the late 1300's the evolution of the full-fledged *Chevrah Kadisha* began in earnest. Ironically, two radically disparate sets of events – the killing, expulsion, and emigration of Spanish Jews, and the rise of the Lurianic Kabbalists – set the stage for the *Chevrah Kadisha* to expand and develop. The proliferation of burial societies followed the path traced by the Sephardic exiles first to Italy and from there to the Ashkenazic communities of Northern and Central Europe. In 13th century Spain, we find, for the first time, evidence of Jewish Brotherhoods (burial societies) in the fully developed traditional pattern that exists today. These are documented in the time of Solomon Ben Avraham ibn Adret (1265-1310). Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, there appeared various societies that busied themselves with burying the dead, education and support for the poor, providing for orphan brides, and providing for the sick. These are detailed in the statutes of the Huesca Burial Society of 1323.
- (1390's–1560's CE) Spanish exiles carry customs to other parts of Europe. Some 70 years after the Spanish exile, *Chevrah Kadisha* Brotherhoods began to show up in German lands. These became well established in the 16th century.

Historical Contextual Events

- (1348–1520 CE) Jews scapegoated as the cause of the growing Black Death.
- (1349 CE) Strasbourg massacre: The Strasbourg massacre occurred on February 14, 1349, when several hundred Jews were publicly burnt to death, and the rest of them expelled from the city as part of the Black Death persecutions. It was one of the first and worst pogroms in pre-modern history.
- (1348 CE) Pope Clement VI urges clergy to protect Jews.
- (circa 1439 CE) Gutenberg invents the printing press.
- (1452 CE) Gutenberg Bible printed
- (1478 CE) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain institute the Spanish Inquisition
- (1486 CE [or 1488]) First Jewish prayer book published in Italy
- (1488–1575 CE) Life of Rabbi **Joseph Karo** who spent 20 years compiling the *Beit Yosef*, an enormous guide to Jewish law. He then wrote a more concise guide, the *Shulchan Aruch* (written in 1563, published in Venice two years later), that becomes the standard law guide, continuing as such to the present day. Born in Spain, Karo lived and died in Safed.
- (1492 CE) The Alhambra Decree: Approximately 200,000 Jews are expelled from Spain. Many Jews remain in Spain after publicly converting to Christianity, becoming Crypto-Jews.
- (1493 CE [or 1497]) Jews expelled from Sicily. As many as 137,000 exiled.
- (1496 CE) Jews expelled from Portugal and from many German cities.
- (1516 CE) Ghetto of Venice established, the first Jewish ghetto in Europe. Many others follow.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (circa 1516 CE) By 1516, there was a well-developed organization called the *Hebrat Gemilut Hasadim* in Modena, which provided not only for the care of the dead, but also for visiting, praying for, and support of the sick. The constitution of this society was borrowed from Ferrara, which was identical to the one to which the *Abrabanel*s, the Spanish exiles, belonged.
- (1564 CE) The **Prague Act of 1564** creates the Prague *Chevrah Kadisha* and, along with the Prague Placards (paintings that were mostly done in 1772, with a few created between 1835-1840, depicting all aspects of Jewish death ritual), documents the full scope of Jewish death practices at the time.
- (1615–1710 CE) During the 17th century, the Spanish Jews bring the confraternity idea to Italy; others developed a Kabbalistic school of thought in Palestine, a school of thought that laid great emphasis on spiritual meaning of death, and the protection of the soul before and after departure from the body. This concentration on the spiritual care of the dying and dead expresses itself in special liturgies for the death-bed (and after death), which were developed in classical form during the period 1615-1710.
- (1619 CE) The publication of *Balm for the Soul and Cure for the Bone* by Leon Modena in 1619,

Historical Contextual Events

- (1534 CE) King Sigismund I of Poland abolishes the law that required Jews to wear special clothes.
- (1534–1572 CE) Life of **Isaac Luria** ("The Ari") who taught Kabbalah in Jerusalem and Safed
- (1550 CE) Jews expelled from Genoa, Italy.
- (1550 CE) **Moses ben Jacob Cordovero** founds a Kabbalah academy in Safed.
- (1567 CE) First Jewish University Yeshiva is founded in Poland.
- (1577 CE) A Hebrew printing press is established in Safed, the first press in Palestine and the first in Asia.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

inaugurates a new genre in Jewish literature of books for the sick and dying.

- (1626 CE) *Ma'avar Yabok*, by Aaron Berekhiah ben Moshe of Modena, is published in Mantua, Italy. It is the most comprehensive compilation of Jewish laws, prayers, and customs relating to sickness, dying, burial and mourning published to date, and the first document to give thorough details on how to care for the dead.
- (1662 CE) *Sefer Minhagim* by Isaac Tyrnau is published, explaining codes and customs for proper conduct at life cycle events.
- (1700's CE) *Sefer Hahayim* (1703) by Simeon Frankfurter and *Sefer Sha'ar Shimon* (circa 1750) by Moses Frankfurter, compile prayers and laws for the *Chevrah Kadisha* to use when visiting the sick, tending to a dying person and arranging a burial.

Historical Contextual Events

- (1626–1676 CE) Life of “False Messiah” Shabbetai Tzvi
- (1648–1649 CE) The Ukrainian Cossack Bohdan Chmielnicki leads a massacre of Polish gentry and Jewry that leaves an estimated 65,000 Jews dead and a similar number of gentiles. The total decrease in the number of Jews is estimated at 100,000. Additional attacks continued through 1656.
- (1655 CE) Jews readmitted to England by Oliver Cromwell.
- (1660 CE) Destruction of Safed
- (1679 CE) Jews of Yemen expelled
- (1698–1760 CE) Life of Yisrael ben Eliezer, known as the **Baal Shem Tov**, who founded Hasidic Judaism.
- (1720–1797 CE) Life of Elijah ben Solomon Zalman of Vilna, known as the **Vilna Gaon**
- (1729–1786 CE) Life of Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement. He strives to bring an end to the isolation of the Jews so that they will be able to embrace the culture of the Western world, and in turn be embraced by gentiles as equals. The Haskalah opens the door for the development of all the modern Jewish denominations.
- (1740 CE) Parliament of Great Britain passes a general act permitting Jews to be naturalized in the American colonies. Previously, several colonies had also permitted Jews to be naturalized without taking the standard oath "upon the true faith of a Christian."
- (1740 CE) Ottoman authorities invite Rabbi Haim Abulafia (1660–1744), renowned Kabbalist and

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1800's CE) Establishment of **Landsmanshaftn** model of communal burial services in northern Europe and North America.
- (1827 CE) The oldest existing Jewish philanthropic society in New York, the *Hebra Hased Va-Amet* of Congregation Shearith Israel, published a ***Compendium of the Order of the Burial Service and Rules for the Mournings***.

Historical Contextual Events

Rabbi of Izmir, to come to the Holy Land. Rabbi Abulafia is to rebuild the city of Tiberias, which had lain desolate for some 70 years.

- (1775–1781 CE) American Revolution guarantees the freedom of religion.
- (1789 CE) The French Revolution. In 1791 France grants full right to Jews and allows them to become citizens, under certain conditions.
- (1790 CE) In the USA, President George Washington sends a letter to the Jewish community in Rhode Island. He writes that he envisions a country “which gives bigotry no sanction...persecution no assistance”.
- (1791 CE) Russia creates the **Pale of Settlement**, which includes land acquired from Poland with a huge Jewish population.
- (1818 CE) Beginning of the rise of classical Reform Judaism, with the first Reform congregation founded in Hamburg, Germany.
- (1830 CE) Greece grants citizenship to Jews.
- (1836 CE) The beginning of the rise of contemporary Orthodox Judaism with Samson Raphael Hirsch publishing *Nineteen Letters on Judaism* to defend against the Reform movement introducing his brand of neo-orthodoxy.
- (1838–1933 CE) Life of Rabbi Yisroel Meir ha-Kohen, known as the **Chofetz Chaim**, opened an important yeshiva. He wrote an authoritative Halakhic work, ***Mishnah Berurah***.
- (1840's–1860's CE) Rabbi Israel Salanter develops the Mussar Movement.
- (1840's–1860's CE) Beginning of the rise of Positive-Historical Judaism, later known as Conservative Judaism.
- (1868 CE) Benjamin Disraeli becomes Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.
- (1875 CE) Reform Judaism's Hebrew Union College is founded in Cincinnati.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1880–1900 CE) Establishment of first Jewish funeral homes in the U.S.
- (1900's CE) The for-profit funeral home becomes the primary mode of operation for the death industry in America.

Historical Contextual Events

- (1877 CE) New Hampshire becomes the last state to give Jews equal political rights.
- (1881–1884, 1903–1906, 1918–1920 CE) Three major waves of pogroms kill tens of thousands of Jews in Russia and Ukraine. More than two million Russian Jews emigrate in the period 1881–1920.
- (1886 CE) Rabbi Sabato Morais and Alexander Kohut begin to champion the Conservative Jewish reaction to American Reform; they establish The Jewish Theological Seminary of America as a school of “enlightened Orthodoxy.”
- (1895 CE) First published book by **Sigmund Freud**.
- (1897 CE) In response to the Dreyfus affair, Theodore Herzl writes *Der Judenstaat* (“The Jewish State”), advocating the creation of a free and independent Jewish state in Israel.
- (1918–1920 CE) Russian Communist Revolution and the civil wars that followed include pogroms.
- (1914–1918 CE) World War I
- (1915 CE) Yeshiva College (later University) and its Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary is established in New York City for training in a Modern Orthodox milieu.
- (1917 CE) The Pale of Settlement is abolished, and Jews get equal rights. The Russian civil war leads to over 2,000 pogroms with tens of thousands murdered and hundreds of thousand made homeless.
- (1922 CE) Reform **Rabbi Stephen S. Wise** establishes the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. (It merged with Hebrew Union College in 1950.)
- (1929 CE) Attacks by Arabs on Jews result in the 1929 Hebron massacre, the 1929 Safed pogrom, and violence against Jews in Jerusalem.
- (1933 CE) Hitler takes over Germany; his anti-Semitic sentiments are well-known, prompting numerous Jews to emigrate.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1947 CE) Rabbi Jacob Rader Marcus writes ***Communal Sick-care in the German Ghetto***.
- (1947 CE) Rabbis from the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements write ***Responsa in War Time***.
- (1949 CE) ***Gesher HaChayim*** is first published by **Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky**, who was motivated by a desire “to provide the public with a comprehensive work that would contain all the *halachot* and customs pertaining to the transition from this life to another, in a clear and authoritative manner.” The sources for all these customs were meticulously researched, and *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* were quoted to establish the firm basis for governing the conduct of the *Chevrah Kadisha* in *Eretz Yisrael*. Tucazinsky's son continued the work after his esteemed father's passing, adding the emendations and clarifications that the elder rabbi had collected since the first publishing. The most recent edition was published in 1983. It remains one of the most authoritative and comprehensive works of this kind.
- (1960's CE) **Tri-Partite Commission** and **Rabbi Sidney Applbaum** (Orthodox)

Historical Contextual Events

- (1937 CE) **Adin Steinsaltz** born, author of the first comprehensive Babylonian Talmud commentary since Rashi in the 11th century.
- (1938–1945 CE) **The Holocaust** (*HaShoah*), resulting in the methodical extermination of nearly 6 million Jews across Europe.
- (1940's CE) Responsa from World War II
- (November 29, 1947 CE) The United Nations approves the creation of a Jewish State and an Arab State in the British mandate of Palestine.
- (May 14, 1948 CE) The State of Israel declares itself as an independent Jewish state hours before the British Mandate is due to expire.
- (May 15, 1948 CE) Arab-Israeli War: Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon and Egypt invade Israel hours after its creation.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1963 CE) **Rabbi Samuel Dresner** (Conservative) publishes *The Scandal of the Jewish Funeral*.
- (1963 CE) **Jessica Mitford** publishes *The American Way of Death*.
- (1969 CE) **Rabbi Maurice Lamm** publishes *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*
- (1973 CE) **Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross** publishes *On Death and Dying*
- (1975 CE) **Rabbi Arnold Goodman** establishes first “new wave” *Chevrah Kadisha*. The story is recorded in a 1980 book *A Plain Pine Box* and a nationally-broadcast television documentary.
- (1975 CE) Federal Trade Commission investigates abuses in the funeral industry. It was not until 1984 that the FTC rules were put into place.
- (1976 CE) **Synagogue Council of America** writes a scathing critique of the Jewish Funeral Industry
- (1980’s CE – present day) Revitalization of Jewish death-related *mitzvot* gathers momentum and spreads.

Historical Contextual Events

- (June 5–10, 1967 CE) The Six-Day War. Israel launches a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Israeli aircraft destroy the bulk of the Arab air forces on the ground in a surprise attack, followed by Israeli ground offensives which see Israel decisively defeat the Arab forces and capture the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights.
- (1968 CE) **Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan** formally creates a separate Reconstructionist Judaism movement by setting up the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia.
- (October 6–24, 1973 CE) The Yom Kippur War. Egypt and Syria, backed up by expeditionary forces from other Arab nations, launch a surprise attack against Israel on Yom Kippur.
- (September 18, 1978 CE) At Camp David, near Washington D.C., Israel and Egypt sign a comprehensive peace treaty, **The Camp David Accord**, which included the withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai.
- (1978 CE) Yiddish writer **Isaac Bashevis Singer** receives Nobel Prize.
- (1979 CE) Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Anwar Sadat are awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

Jewish Death Practice-Related Events

- (1989 CE) Sylvie-Anne Goldberg writes in French ***Crossing the Jabbok***, a comprehensive history of the Prague *Chevrah Kadisha*. It is translated into English in 1996.
- (2000 CE) **Kavod v'Nichum** is established as the first North American organization dedicated to Jewish death practices.
- (2003 CE) Kavod v'Nichum sponsors the first North American *Chevrah Kadisha* and Jewish Cemetery conference in Rockville, Maryland.
- (2010 CE) **Gamliel Institute** is established as the first North American educational institution dedicated to the study of Jewish death practices and the development of a leadership group in the field of *Chevrah Kadisha* work.
- (2023 CE) **Jewish Association for Death Education (JADE)** is established to train local education champions throughout North America.
- (2023 CE) **The Ben Zakkai Institute** is established as an esteemed institute dedicated to text-based learning and discovery around Jewish death practices.

Historical Contextual Events

- (1989 CE) Fall of the Berlin Wall, between East and West Germany, collapse of the communist East German government, and the beginning of Germany's reunification (which formally begins in October 1990).
- (1990 CE) The Soviet Union opens its borders for the three million Soviet Jews who had been held as virtual prisoners within their own country. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews choose to leave the Soviet Union and move to Israel.
- (September 13, 1993 CE) Israel and PLO sign the Oslo Accords.
- (1994 CE) Death of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.
- (October 26, 1994 CE) Israel and Jordan sign an official peace treaty.