

# TEMPLE MOUNT SINAI

El Paso, Texas

## Important Numbers

- Temple office  
915 532-5959 (tel.)  
915 533-0092 (fax)
- Rabbi Bach  
915 328-0623 (m)
- Rabbi Bellush  
915 581-1124 (h)  
915 637-9335 (m)
- Sally Parke  
915 726-7503 (m)

## *Kavod V'nichum – Honor and Comfort*

### *A guide to funeral and burial procedures at Temple Mount Sinai*

*"Grief is universal. But, death strikes us as individuals, leaving pain and loneliness in its wake. You need not live through it alone. Jewish tradition provides for others to accompany you back from the darkness of deep sadness to the light of fresh promise. As your mourning progresses may you feel as if an outstretched hand that is greater than yourself is moving you toward hope and possibility." – Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning*

Temple Mount Sinai offers the following words of support and encouragement for you and your loved ones. Know that you are not alone in your time of need; our practices are designed to assist in the mundane decisions one faces at the time of bereavement. Reviewing this material prior to such a time will also prove useful.

## A word about costs

Many of the services described in this pamphlet are included with a congregational membership. Some fixed costs (e.g., Mount Sinai Cemetery lots, opening and closing of the grave) must be passed along to members. *In no case will anyone be denied a proper burial due to financial circumstances.*

Temple exists because of the commitment of its members. Without that ongoing commitment, we would not be here to offer these services to anyone. Accordingly, non-members will be charged special fees for the services described in this pamphlet.

A complete schedule of fees is available in the Temple office from Administrator Sally Parke.

## *Kavod V'nichum – Honor and Comfort*

*Kavod V'nichum* are the twin principles which guide the Jewish approach to death and mourning in general, and at Temple Mount Sinai in particular. *Kavod* means "honor;" *Nichum* means "comfort".

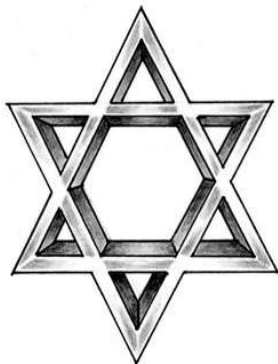
*Kavod* is the stance we take toward the dead, and *halakhah* – the path of Jewish Law – speaks often of *k'vod hamet* – honor and dignity for the deceased. It is our desire to show *k'vod hamet* that drives the Jewish tradition toward speedy funerals and the use of the *Chevrah Kadishah* – the sacred society that prepares the body for a Jewish burial. We understand the *meyt* – the body of the deceased – to be a recently abandoned

vessel for a living soul, and worthy of all honor and respect.

*Nichum* is the stance we take toward the living, and *halakhah* is concerned with *nichum aveilim* – comforting the mourners. The embrace of a caring community and the accommodation offered by our Rabbis and synagogue to a grieving family's special needs are examples of this principle in action. The purpose of *halakhah*, and certainly of the Reform approach to *halakhah*, in times of loss and grief is to provide comfort. Temple Mount Sinai provides this comfort by way of personal communication between Temple administration, the grieving family, our Rabbis,

and the funeral home.

Most decisions that need to be made around funerals and burials can be viewed through the lens of these twin values of *kavod v'nichum* and the demands they make. How do we balance the need for a speedy burial with the nature of today's geographically spread out families? How do we respond when a loved one expresses a desire to be cremated? When surviving families are troubled by specific requests, what do we do? We let *kavod v'nichum* guide us as we carefully and prayerfully make our decisions.



*“In the spirit of support and understanding, we will together walk gently through the rituals of mourning.”* -

A Jewish  
Mourner’s  
Handbook

## At the time of death...

Temple Mount Sinai can provide a great deal of help when a death occurs. We, along with the funeral home of your choice, will help you navigate many of the details which need to be addressed.

***When a death occurs, please call the Rabbis as soon as possible. If the Rabbis cannot be reached, contact Temple Administrator, Sally Parke. These numbers are conveniently located on the front of this booklet. An early call will allow us to be most helpful to you when you need us most.***

Setting a date and time for the funeral and having an obituary placed in the newspaper are typically among the first things that are done. More extensive visits with both the funeral home and Temple staff usually follow quickly thereafter.

## What the Temple offers at times of loss

Temple Mount Sinai has much to offer at times of loss, and in the weeks and months that follow.

***Se’udat Havra’ah (“Meal of Consolation”):*** Temple offers a way to provide meals to grieving families through its Caring Community Meal of Consolation Fund. This fund is used to help support families in times of crisis with donations going towards prepared foods to help them get through their time of grief. Utilizing this fund helps reduce food waste and duplication and allows specific dietary needs to be easily addressed. Please visit <http://www.templemountsinai.com/donate>, select the Special Funds for Ongoing Support tab, and scroll down to Caring Community Meal of Consolation Fund to donate.

***Chevrah Kadishah:*** An organization of Temple volunteers who are familiar with the Jewish funerary practices and are willing to help the mourners as well as prepare the deceased for burial.

***Preparing for the Funeral:*** The Rabbis or *Shlichei K’hilah* meet with the family prior to the funeral. The process of healing begins with the family sharing personal stories and insights about the deceased and provides an opportunity for the family to ask questions about Jewish mourning practices and rituals.

***Funerals and Memorial Services:*** The Temple will work with the funeral home of your choosing to coordinate the funeral or memorial service for your loved one.

***Shivah Minyan:*** Many families choose to have one or more prayer services in the home. These services, which provide the family members with the opportunity to recite *Mourner’s Kaddish* and allow the community the opportunity to offer support and condolences to the mourners, may be led by our Rabbis, *Shlichei K’hilah*, or members of the congregation.

***Unveilings:*** About five months after your loved one’s death, you should inquire about a headstone with a monument company. Since all stones are shipped to El Paso, you may need to allow extra time for ordering and engraving. Please have the headstone layout approved by one of our Rabbis prior to engraving. After the headstone has been ordered and you are ready to set it over the grave of your loved one, contact Sally Parke to arrange for a ceremony of dedication (“unveiling”). Typically, the unveiling is performed between the eleventh and twelfth months post burial. The headstone is covered with a cloth prior to the ceremony and is uncovered during the service.

***Grief Support:*** Through the Jo Ann Rothbardt Petersen Healing Resource Center and Zork Library, many useful books on a variety of topics are available. Pamphlets are available at both the Resource Center and in the Krupp Chapel foyer. Grief support sessions are offered throughout the year, and our Rabbis are available for personal meetings. Should you wish to meet with one of the Rabbis, please call the Temple office.

## The calendar of mourning

**Each of us responds to the loss of a loved one in our own way. It is important to stress that the periods described below are not meant to dictate a mourner's feelings, but only to offer guidance with regard to actions.**

For more complete explanations, please consult *A Jewish Mourner's Handbook* by Ron H. Isaacs and Kerry M. Olitzky. A copy is available for review in the Temple office.

The three periods of mourning in the Jewish calendar:

**Shivah (“seven”):** The seven days following the burial are often when the feelings of loss and emotions of grief are the most intense. The presence of friends and family (who come with nothing in mind but to be present for you) can be very comforting. Jewish tradition counts the day of interment as the first day of Shiva.

**Sh’loshim (“thirty”):** The month following interment includes the seven days of *Shivah*. *Sh’loshim* is less intense than *Shivah*; however, the grief of a loss does not magically vanish when *Shivah* ends. One returns to a normal daily routine such as work and school during *Sh’loshim*, and is encouraged to attend synagogue services to say *kaddish* with their community.

**Shanah (“year”):** This brings the formal mourning period to a close. While the mitzvah “to remember” applies to all our immediate relatives, an additional obligation “to honor” applies to parents. Over time, therefore, it becomes customary in the case of a parent who dies to continue saying *kaddish* for 11 months, not just the period of *Shivah*. Reform practice has extended this obligation to a full year.

**Yizkor and Yahrzeit:** *Yizkor* (“remembrance”) is a liturgy recited on the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) and on Yom Kippur. During the year following a death, the name of the deceased is said aloud at the *Yizkor* service. The name is also announced each year on the Sabbath following the anniversary of the death, called a *yahrzeit* (“year-time”). After names are read, *Mourner's Kaddish* is recited by the community.

“At the time when one should be joyous, be joyous; when it is time to mourn, mourn.”  
- Midrash Genesis Rabah 27:7

## What is Halakhah? What is Reform Halakhah?

*Halakhah*, which is most literally translated as “the path” or “the way”, is the Hebrew word for Jewish Law. Transmitted in both written and oral forms for thousands of years, *halakhah* speaks to the daily life of the Jew.

Reform Judaism has never understood itself to be entirely ruled by *halakhah*; and yet, we are not unconcerned with its teachings. Rabbi Solomon Freehof,

writing in 1960, coined the phrase which best describes our relationship to traditional *halakhah*. It is “our guidance but not our governance.”

Temple Mount Sinai realizes that families often desire to engage in the practices of Jewish burial and mourning. We offer mourners in the community the opportunity to have a traditional burial for deceased loved ones, while permit-

ting a fair amount of flexibility with respect to *halakhah*.

If you have questions about a particular practice, please contact our Rabbis. They will be happy to offer you counsel as you make your way through this difficult time.



*“There are stars up above, so far away we only see their light long, long after the star itself is gone. And so it is with people that we loved – their memories keep shining ever brightly though their time with us is done. But the stars that light up their darkest night, these are the lights that guide us. As we live our days, these are the ways we remember.”*

– Chanah Senesh

## *Chevrah Kadishah: The “Sacred Society”*

The *Chevrah Kadishah* (“Sacred Society”) is aptly named, as the work its members do is truly holy. The *Chevrah* is responsible for preparing the body of a Jew for burial. However, if cremation is planned, the work of the *Chevrah Kadishah* cannot be performed.

When a death occurs, the Temple office will ask the family if they would like the *Chevrah Kadishah* to prepare the body for burial. If the answer is “yes”, members of the *Chevrah* will be called and arrangements will be made with the funeral home for them to do their work. The family need not worry about the details.

With respect for modesty and dignity, there are two teams of volunteers, one female and one male. Each team performs these acts for no reason other than out of a sense of Jewish obligation.

The *Chevrah Kadishah* performs a ritual of purification and says traditional prayers. The *meyt* (“body of the deceased”) is dressed in a traditional white shroud before being placed in

a plain wooden casket. Earth from the Land of Israel is placed under the head before the casket is closed.

If families avail themselves of the *Chevrah Kadishah’s* services, they are ensured that their loved ones are prepared for burial according to Jewish tradition. If you have questions about the *Chevrah Kadishah*, please call Rabbi Bach, Rabbi Bellush, Ed Solomon, Deb Benedict, or Ellen Goodman.

***Sh’mirah* (“Guarding of the body”):** Adult Jews, male or female, may stay with the body from the end of the *Chevrah Kadishah’s* work until the time of burial. *Sh’mirah* volunteers are required to stay awake throughout their entire shift, reciting from Psalms, remaining focused and attentive to the body. They are excused from performing all other religious duties while on their shift. Usually shifts are scheduled in two to three hour increments throughout this period.

## **At the funeral...**

The wisdom of the Jewish funeral lies in the fact that it demands confrontation with the reality of death – an essential facet to healthy mourning. At the same time, the funeral liturgy affirms the immortality of the soul.

***K’riah*:** Close family members (traditionally parents, children, siblings, and spouse) place black ribbons on their clothing just before the funeral begins. By reciting a blessing and tearing the ribbons, they acknowledge their pain and affirm God’s presence even in the most difficult of times.

***Psalms*:** The recitation of Psalms or other inspirational passages from the Bible, Jewish literature, or general literature, is an important component of the service. Some of the passages we read often are included in a small pamphlet which will be available to those attending the funeral.

***Hesped* (*Eulogy*):** Usually delivered by a Rabbi or Temple leader. The purpose of the eulogy is to reflect on the loss and on the

lessons that we can learn from the life of the deceased. Sometimes one or two family members wish to offer a few words as well.

***El Malei Rachamim and Mourner’s Kaddish*:** Two prayers conclude the funeral liturgy. *El Malei Rachamim* (“God, full of compassion...”) is a prayer that the soul of the deceased will be received lovingly by God; *Mourner’s Kaddish*, recited at the funeral and at regular religious services, praises our God of life and affirms our belief in the ultimate redemption of the world.

***L’viyat Hamet* (“Accompanying the Dead”):** Perhaps the most direct confrontation with the reality of death comes at the very end of the burial service. In contrast with other cultures, at a Jewish funeral the coffin is lowered in the presence of the mourners, and we fulfill the *mitzvah* of *l’viyat hamet* by shoveling earth into the open grave. We use the backside of the shovel to indicate our reticence to say goodbye.

## Coping with the emotions of grief

Jewish tradition is sensitive to the various ways in which responses to grief take place. The rituals and practices of Jewish mourning assist the process of acknowledging loss, finding comfort in community and, in time, returning to the routines of daily life. However, everyone grieves differently and in his or her own time. The loss of a loved one brings a variety of emotions. Here are some thoughts that may help:

- Grief, the process of accepting the reality that someone has died, takes time. Initially, some people experience shock and numbness. The *shiva* period, in which one refrains from normal daily activity (e.g., going to work or school) provides time for the loss to be internalized. Experiencing the death of a loved one changes us forever, but the intensity of grief usually lessens over time.
- Symptoms of grief may include changes in sleep patterns, eating habits and physical health. Feelings of sadness or depression are normal. Many people also experience feelings of loneliness after the loss of a loved one. Feelings of anger or guilt may be part of grief as well. Consider self-care a priority during this emotionally trying time. If these feelings persist, seek the counsel of friends, family members or a trained professional counselor. It is helpful to express these feelings to someone you trust. It is important to reach out to other people during this time.
- Grief interferes with the ability to function. Adjust self-expectations to reflect your emotional state. Reach out to others. Family, friends and members of the Temple community want to help during this difficult time. Allow those who offer assistance to provide it.
- It is important to share your grief with people. Telling the story of your loss is an important part of the grief process. *Shiva* calls made by family and friends provide a place and time for the sharing of grief. While family members may be a source of support, remember that they also are dealing with their own grief, and that people within the same family may grieve in different ways. For example, on a particular day, one family member may be especially sad, while another might need to lovingly share a funny story about the deceased. Both are steps towards healing.
- Interfaith families may have conflicting traditions associated with mourning. Patience and understanding will allow for compromises to be reached. Support, honor and respect each other's beliefs. Many people find their faith is a source of comfort. Speak with one of the rabbis, read Psalms, and pray. It is important to recognize what gives you comfort and seek it out.
- When speaking to children about death, resist the temptation to use euphemisms such as "Grandma went to a better place" or "Mommy is sleeping for a very long time." Answer questions honestly, but appropriately for the age and developmental stage of the child. There is no one right way for children to respond to death. Some might be sad and cry. Others might want to remove themselves from the sadness around them and go play with friends. Include children in the healing traditions surrounding death and mourning. It is a chance for them to say goodbye.
- Although you might feel tempted to "stay busy", give yourself time to think and feel. Accepting loss and allowing yourself to grieve are the first steps toward healing. Coping with everyday living may seem difficult during the grieving process. Minor problems may seem overwhelming. Let those you trust provide perspective during *shiva* and *sh'loshim*. Set realistic goals for the future. It may be wise to delay making major life decisions during this time.

– Adopted in part from material prepared by Hospice of Cincinnati



*“What are we?  
Are we merely  
skin, flesh,  
blood, veins,  
nerves,  
muscle and  
tissue?  
No! What  
constitutes us  
is our soul; the  
rest being only  
the garments  
that cover our  
inner being.  
When we  
depart this  
Earth, we  
remove our  
outer  
coverings and  
continue to  
love by virtue  
of our soul,  
which is  
immortal.”  
- Zohar*

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*“Days are like scrolls; write on them what you want to be remembered.”*  
– Bachya Ibn Pakuda

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## Mount Sinai Cemetery

Mount Sinai Cemetery began as a Jewish burial society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and maintains a beautiful congregational burial ground. It is adjacent to historic Concordia Cemetery.

Mount Sinai Cemetery is governed by policies that honor *halakhah* and at the same time take into consideration the changing norms in the Jewish world. Among those policies are:

**Burial of non-Jews:** Members of the congregation who are not Jewish (e.g., spouses of Jewish members) may be buried in the cemetery, provided that the funeral service is not conducted according to the rites of another faith and the headstone includes no symbols or language associated with another faith.

**Military Honors and Fraternal Rites:** Military honors and fraternal rites may be included in a funeral service. The Rabbinical staff will determine the timing of such honors in the service.

**Caskets:** Caskets need not conform to a strict interpretation of *halakhah*, though a simple wooden casket is strongly encouraged.

**Vaults and Liners:** Metal or concrete “vaults” are not currently used in the Mount Sinai Cemetery.

**Financial Need:** It is Temple’s practice never to turn away anyone because of a lack of financial resources. Various donations from congregants as well as funeral homes help to defer costs in these situations.

**Tattoos:** There is no law prohibiting traditional Jewish burial if the deceased has tattoos.

**Cremation:** Although cremation is discouraged, it is not forbidden. When a loved one is cremated, a memorial service may be held either graveside or at Temple. However, the cremains may not be present at Temple during the service. Burial of the cremains in the Mount Sinai Cemetery is permitted.

**Suicide:** A compassionate interpretation of Jewish law understands suicide as a manifestation of illness and not of sin. Our community’s regular funeral, burial and mourning practices are followed.

**Embalming:** Embalming is contrary to Jewish practice and is incompatible with the work of the *Chevra Kaddisha*.

**Organ Donation:** According to Jewish law, the donation of internal organs, skin grafts, eyes, etc. is considered a mitzvah. Even with organ donation, the *Chevra Kadishah* will still be able to carry out its holy work. In some instances, the funeral director, in conjunction with the Rabbis, may conclude that the *Chevra Kadishah* may not be able to perform its work if organ donation is extensive.

**Violent Deaths:** The funeral director in conjunction with the Rabbis offer guidance on whether or not the *Chevra Kadishah* may perform its duties on a case-by-case basis.

**Visitation of the Deceased:** Jewish tradition discourages visitation after the work of *Chevra Kadishah* is performed. However, if a family wishes to view its loved one, they may do so in a very private manner.

**Floral Arrangements:** Jewish tradition encourages *tzedakah* as a way of memorializing loved ones. Flowers soon fade and wither, but an act of lovingkindness can have a profound and lasting effect. While there are no specific restrictions on providing floral arrangements, plans to bring flowers or floral arrangements to the Cemetery should be discussed with the officiating Rabbi prior to the service.

**Stones Left on Headstones:** Laying stones on monuments is a sign that someone has visited the cemetery, and thus an acknowledgement that the deceased is still loved and remembered. Please be aware that for safety reasons stones periodically may be removed when grounds maintenance takes place.

If you have questions about these, or any other Mount Sinai Cemetery policies, please

## *Shlichei K'hilah: Synagogue Associates*

Rabbinic officiation at worship services and life-cycle ceremonies, although customary, is neither required by Jewish law nor always possible. Talmudic texts teach that participation in leading worship and life-cycle events is the responsibility of all adult Jews.

The Reform movement trains lay leaders to serve in a rabbinic capacity for certain situations when a rabbi is not available. Although these programs have had various names over their more than twenty year history, the three individuals at Temple Mount Sinai

who trained to serve in this capacity did so during the *Sh'liach K'hilah* / Synagogue Associates program. Thus, each is referred to as a *Sh'liach K'hilah* (*Shlichei K'hilah* or *Shlihim* in the plural.)

*Shlichei K'hilah* learn a basic skill set with which to serve their communities. At Temple Mount Sinai, our three *Shlichei K'hilah*, Ellen Goodman, Ed Solomon and Tina Wolfe, enhance and enrich congregational life and often help when our Rabbis are unavailable, or when a family requests their assistance.

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## Special Memorial Contributions

Family and friends may choose to honor their loved ones through donations to various funds within Temple or a charity with special meaning to the deceased. While all charitable funds are equally important and beneficial, we would like to highlight a few.

**Caring Community Fund:** The projects of this valuable and rewarding fund are many. Volunteers participate in hospital visitations and home visitations to offer comfort to the sick and the lonely. Consoling those who have lost loved ones is part of the grief support network, which is a very important part of Caring Community. Your donations assist this committee and aid congregants in times of personal and financial difficulty.

**Mount Sinai Cemetery Fund:** Mount Sinai Cemetery is well known for its beautiful grounds and landscaping. It is a serene place to visit your departed loved ones and reflect on the peace and harmony of nature. Your donations to this fund assist in the upkeep of the cemetery, including irrigation and planting of shrubbery.

**Se'udat Havra'ah "Meal of Consolation" Fund:** This fund is used to help support families in times of crisis with donations going towards prepared foods from local restaurants to help them through their time of grief. Utilizing this fund helps reduce food waste and duplication and allows specific dietary needs to be easily addressed.

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## Jo Ann Rothbardt Petersen Healing Resource Center

One of Temple Mount Sinai's real treasures is the Jo Ann Rothbardt Petersen Healing Resource Center. Established in November 2001 by her family, the Resource Center pays tribute to a woman who lived with physical pain but also with an indomitable spirit.

Much of what we do as a congregation to support our members at times of grief and loss is underwritten by the Resource Center. The "Lifelines" grief support pamphlets our members receive during the year following a death, for example, are purchased with funds collected in Jo Ann's memory. We also

strive to keep current with the many books that are being written about the intersection of healing, grief, and spirituality. Finally, the Resource Center sponsors programs from time to time, including our grief support sessions.

Please take some time to visit the Resource Center, located in the Potash Study next to the Zork Library. Either of our Rabbis would be happy to meet with you there and offer recommendations regarding material you may find useful.

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*It is a fearful thing to love what death can touch.*

*A fearful thing to love, hope, dream: to be – to be, and oh! to lose.*

*A thing for fools this, and a holy thing, a holy thing to love.*

*For your life has lived in me, your laugh once lifted me, your word was gift to me.*

*To remember this brings a painful joy. 'Tis a human thing, love, a holy thing, to love what death has touched."*

– Chaim Stern

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## TEMPLE MOUNT SINAI

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## A Reform Jewish Congregation Serving El Paso, Texas

Temple Mount Sinai is a congregation of supportive, caring and diverse Reform Jews with a rich history.

Temple is a place for prayer, ritual, spirituality, education, wholeness and healing, social action, and celebration.

Join us as we explore, through these elements of Jewish life, the riches of our faith and tradition.

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## Some El Paso Mortuaries

Temple Mount Sinai has good relationships with several area mortuaries, and respects the family's right to choose a funeral home. Here are some mortuaries with a history of providing Jewish funerals in El Paso. It is not exhaustive, nor should a mortuary's listing be taken as an endorsement by Temple.

**Martin Funeral Home**  
128 N. Resler  
El Paso, TX 79912  
Tel. (915) 584-1234

**Sunset Funeral Home**  
480 N. Resler  
El Paso, TX 79912  
Tel. (915) 587-4408  
Contact: Chris Lujan

**Zamorano's Monument Co**  
3025 Gateway West Blvd.  
El Paso, TX 79903  
Tel. (915) 562-7062  
Contact: Olga Zamorano

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## *Additional Resources*

Address, Richard F., editor. *A Time to Prepare: A Practical Guide for Individuals and Families in Determining a Jewish Approach to Making Personal Arrangements, Establishing the Limits of Medical Care and Embracing Rituals at the End of Life.* New York: URJ Press 2002.

Brener, Anne. *Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993.

Grollman, Rabbi Earl. *Explaining Death to Children.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967.

Isaacs, Ron H. and Olitzky, Kerry M. *A Jewish Mourner's Handbook.* Hoboken, NJ:KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1991-08.

*Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning,* CCAR, New York, 2009.

Wolfson, Ron. *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008.