It's a Very Personal Decision

You'll never regret exploring the benefits of burial before finalizing your choice

LAST KINDNESS



At the heart of the decision is the universal question

What will happen to my body after I die?

It's one of those awkward, let's-change-the-subject kind of topics that many of us would rather avoid. But everyone dies eventually. Exploring your options and having a plan in place for after-life care will help you and your loved ones face the inevitable with serenity.

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LAST KINDNESS

Last Kindness was founded in 2021 as a sister organization to NASCK (National Association of Chevra Kadisha in America).

For 40 years, NASCK has led 152 volunteer burial societies in honoring 95,000 departed Jews by preparing them for burial.

About Last Kindness

OUR MISSION

We believe every Jew, no matter their religious affiliation, has the right to Jewish burial. No one should have to choose cremation because of financial or logistical considerations.

Our mission is to give Jews access to the information, assistance, and resources they need to make an educated decision regarding after-life care.

WHY WE CARE

In the Jewish view, helping a fellow Jew with burial is considered kindness on the highest level, as there is no expectation of a return favor.

By choosing burial for yourself, you're performing a kindness as well. It's a kindness for your loved ones, a kindness for the planet, and a kindness for yourself. **And it may be the only kindness you can perform after you leave this world.**

Connect with a Kind Counselor

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Celebratory send-offs, like blasting cremated remains into space, shooting them from a cannon, or auctioning them off have glorified cremation.

But for most Jews, it's not the need to make headlines that compels them to cremate. It just seems so much easier and more affordable than a traditional burial.

The $2.3B cremation industry presents the world with a sanitized image of the process. But the facts are surprising — and important — especially since cremation is irreversible.

Questions to consider

- What is best for my body and soul?
- How does the pricing compare to a simple burial?
- Is cremation really better for the environment?
- How will my family be impacted by the choice I make?
- Does cremation align with my values?

Queen Elizabeth II and You

Remember the respectful treatment the Queen's body received? **You deserve no less. Really.**

Blue blood doesn't make a bit of difference at the end. **Every human body should be treated with respect.**

But what exactly constitutes respect? Respect can mean different things to different people.

In some Eastern countries, like India and Nepal, open-air pyres are the norm. In stark contrast, Jewish law and tradition always forbade the burning of bodies. So did Islam and many Christian sects.

It was only when the Catholic Church lifted its ban on cremation in 1963 that the practice started spreading across Western society.

But does its trending status in Western society make it right for you?



Cremation & Burial

A candid comparison
of both options
and their impact on
the body,
the soul,
the planet,
and your loved ones

Cremation is Harsh

In preparation for cremation, medical devices, implants, and prosthetics are cut out of the body so as not to damage the crematorium ovens. The body is subjected to temperatures of up to 2000°F for about 2 hours until all body tissue has melted, leaving only charred bones. The skeletal remains are then pulverized and collected to place inside an urn. The cremation process is unnatural and violent.

Consider this

Do you want your body treated so harshly? Burning the flag of your country is an act of desecration. Don't our bodies, which served us throughout our lives, deserve at least as much respect as our flag?

< Learn more about the cremation process

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS CONTENT MAY BE DISTURBING.



Burial is Kinder to the Body

Judaism accords every person with respect — both in life and in death. The human body is sacred — and should be treated as such.

Jewish burial is particularly gentle and kind in its treatment. Throughout the entire process, the overarching principle is respect for the deceased. The procedure is carried out quietly, gently, and with great reverence, treating the body as a sacred creation.

Traditional Jewish burial uses a simple pine coffin. In Israel, where coffins are not required by law, the deceased is often just wrapped in shrouds before being lowered into the ground. The body, which consists of all organic elements, decomposes gradually and becomes one with the earth.

We don't burn things we love

Remember when your childhood pet died? You carried it sadly, lovingly, and gently, and bid it farewell in a full backyard funeral service. Had anyone mentioned throwing it into a bonfire, you would have been appalled.
You loved your pet.

Cremation is Spiritually Painful

"I won't even know or feel what happens to my body after I die. So why should I care how it's treated?"

That's a common question, because many people assume that the end of life is like the flip of a switch.

The Jewish view is different. Your body is not your true essence — your soul is, and it lives forever. Yet the soul remains with the body even after the two are separated at death. The soul still feels connected to its body, and is sensitive to how its lifelong partner is being treated.

Survivors of near-death experiences almost always describe an out-of-body experience, in which they feel like they are floating above their bodies, observing the scene. This aligns perfectly with Jewish teachings.

Cremation is not only an act of violence against the deceased, which pains the soul, it actually severs the connection between body and soul, causing the soul eternal pain.

Burial is Kinder to the Soul

Because the soul remains connected to the body after death, Jews go to great lengths — and spare no effort — to treat the body with dignity, from the moment of passing until it is gently laid in the ground. Doing so is considered the highest form of kindness.

The Bible teaches that, "The body is returned to the earth it came from, and the soul returns to G-d, who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This tells us that only once the body is returned to the ground — its source, is the soul free to return to G-d — its Source. Burial allows the soul to find complete peace.



Just Like a Seed

Surprising to many, resurrection is a traditional Jewish belief mentioned in the daily liturgy. Unlike Hollywood's depiction of zombies emerging from graves, Jewish resurrection is a mystical concept of body and soul reuniting in an elevated future state. Like a seed that decomposes in the ground and then sprouts forth future growth, Jewish burial is planting for the future.

Cremation is Toxic

Cremation has been touted as the more environmentally friendly choice. This is a myth. It may be marginally better than conventional burial, where embalming, lacquered caskets, and metal finishings leach toxins into the earth for decades to come, but considering cremation an earth-friendly process is a real stretch.

How can incinerating a body be good for the environment? Burning anything is harmful to the environment.

Cremation requires heavy gas-guzzling machinery. It also belches lots of toxins into the air — the average cremation produces 534 pounds of carbon dioxide, along with poisons such as soot, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and heavy metals (such as mercury from dental fillings).



Ashes, Ashes, Everywhere

Some of the prettiest spots in the United States, like Lake Tahoe, became popular spots for the scattering of ashes. Before long, the pristine waters and beautiful beaches became clogged with ash. Scattering remains is now prohibited to protect the safety of visitors.

Burial is Kinder to the Planet

While it is true that conventional burial is toxic to the environment, this is not the case with Jewish burial.

Traditional Jewish burial is green burial. There is no embalming of the body, no makeup, formaldehyde, or other harmful chemicals. Caskets are made of plain, unfinished pine, and the body is dressed in linen shrouds, both of which are organic and will decompose naturally, along with the body.

Everything is biodegradable, and as the body decomposes, it provides nutrients to the earth which nurtured and sustained it throughout its life.

For this reason, more an
people who care about t
environment are choosir
green burial over cremat
or conventional burial.

With Green Burial, you give back from the grave.



Cremation Erases Your Existence

Once the body is cremated, no trace remains of the life that once lived in it. The 2-5 pounds of ash and pulverized bone that are left don't even contain DNA; the person they came from has been utterly annihilated.

Family members often grasp this intuitively, and are surprised at how hard it is to achieve closure after a loved one is cremated. A woman whose teenage daughter died tragically and was cremated told a Last Kindness counselor, "I feel like my daughter never even lived."

Can you imagine a world where there is nothing left of those who came before us? No resting place for generations past? Not even a stone to mark their name? The people in such a world would be rootless, living without connection to their own history.



I feel like my daughter never even lived."

Burial is Kinder to Your Loved Ones

Even if it's not important to you or your loved ones right now, you never know when someone you love will seek comfort and closure at a physical place after you're gone. Should they want to recite a prayer for your soul and connect with you, it'll be that much more meaningful at your burial site.

Why not leave a little spot on earth to help future generations remember you? With rising interest in genealogy, having a gravestone to read can help future generations learn about and connect with their history.



Virtual Visits

With cemeteries starting to offer virtual graveside visits, even if your family lives far away, they'll be able to "visit" and tell their children about you.

Your Jewish Identity Matters

Every Jew, no matter how 'Jewish' they were – or weren't – during their life, has the right to die as a Jew.

Your heritage matters and having a Jewish burial tells the world you are proud of it. Your burial also creates a historical record of your community for the future.

If you were born a Jew, you deserve to die as a Jew.



JEWISH CUSTOMS

Are you familiar with these terms? Here are some of the traditional ways to show honor to those who have passed away:

SHMIRA

VIGIL

Jewish bodies are not left alone. Someone stays with them until the burial is arranged.

TAHARA

PURIFICATION

The body is cleansed and dressed in shrouds to prepare it for burial.

KEVURA B'KARKA

INGROUND BURIAL

There is an explicit obligation to provide inground burial for every Jew.

MATZEIVA

MARKER

The burial site is marked with a stone identifying and honoring the deceased.

SHIVA

Seven-day mourning period after the funeral.

KADDISH

MOURNER'S PRAYER

Daily prayer recited for 11 months following the passing, bringing comfort and merit to the soul of the deceased.

YIZKOR

PRAYERS OF REMEMBRANCE

These prayers are recited by children and other close relatives several times a year on designated days.

YAHRTZEIT

ANNIVERSARY OF A PASSING

The annual Jewish date of the passing is marked by prayers, charity and other good deeds in the merit of the deceased.

Hindsight & Hard Choices

REFLECTIONS FROM REAL PEOPLE



REBEL

My brother, Rebel, was one-of-a-kind. His name said it all. He was a free spirit and a self-proclaimed hippie. Though Rebel was not a practicing Jew, he was very proud of his heritage.

Our family is comforted knowing that Rebel's final resting place is in an eco-friendly cemetery and his burial was in accordance with Jewish laws.

> MARLENE'S FULL STORY



AUNT FRANCINE

Aunt Francine died four months from the day she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I had her cremated, just like she wanted. But I wish we could have talked about it before she died. It bothers me that there's no real place where Francine is.

I would have liked a physical place to connect with her. My parents were buried and I can visit them anytime. But Francine just doesn't exist anymore.

> TERI'S FULL STORY



DAD

My dad wanted to be cremated. We are not very observant, and only later did I learn that cremation is prohibited in Judaism. It was too late to do anything about my father, but it got me thinking about my mother, who also wants to be cremated. So I began talking to her about it, and she changed her mind.

I deeply regret having cremated my father. I just didn't know better. I feel relieved and grateful that my mother will be treated in a way that aligns with our Jewish and moral values.

> HOLLY'S FULL STORY



MOM

Our family is secular, and everyone is strapped for cash, so when Mom died, the idea of cremation came up. It would have been a quick and easy decision. But it just didn't rest well with me. My mother was a Jew. She had a Jewish soul. I wasn't going to be the one to desecrate that.

After the burial, my family intimated to me that they were happy that we didn't cremate her. I fought for that, and I'm glad I did. There are times in your life where you need to find the courage to do the right thing. This was one of those times.

> DEBORAH'S FULL STORY

You might be left with questions after reading all this. Here are some that many people ask. Of course, you're not many people, you're you. So if there's anything at all on your mind, please ask.

Questions People Ask

I don't have children or friends who will visit my grave, so it feels a bit pointless.

The primary reason we choose burial is that it's a mitzvah (a Jewish obligation) to bury the dead. Moses was the greatest Jew who ever lived. Do you know how many people have visited Moses' gravesite? Zero. God himself buried Moses and then hid his grave from any future visitors. Although visiting a loved one's grave does provide closure and comfort, burial has intrinsic value regardless if there are visitors or not.

If cremation is prohibited by Jewish law, why do I see JEWISH CREMATION advertised?

Simple. It's a profitable business. The invention of the term "Jewish cremation" is a marketing tool meant to attract people with little Jewish knowledge. But it has no historical basis — outside of what our enemies have done to us.

But hey, everyone does it, why shouldn't I?

Cremation is in vogue right now largely due to the billions poured into promoting the practice. But with green burial emerging as the most earth-friendly option, it's likely that the trend will shift in the coming years. It will be too late, though, for millions of people who were swept up by the false allure of cremation.

I really like the idea of giving each of my children a piece of me to keep in their homes. How can I do that if I am buried?

Urns may be meaningful to your children now, but they're unlikely to remain so in the long term. As time moves on, urns tend to become unwanted clutter your grandchildren feel guilty to dispose of. Instead, you can create a small memorial created with pictures, favorite mementos, or even urns filled with earth from your burial plot to provide a connection with your living family.

Where is there a biblical reference to burial?

The two most direct references to burial are "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19) and "Thou shalt surely bury him the same day" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Additionally, the Bible and traditional Jewish law are replete with references to the importance of providing burial for every single human being. It's a duty society has to each member of the human race.

This all sounds nice and meaningful, but I can't afford a burial. Cremation seems to be the simplest and most economical way to go.

While direct cremation is cheapest, the cost of a simple burial in an affordable cemetery may not be as prohibitive as you think. Most of the expenses people associate with burial are the unnecessary costs of a lavish funeral and elaborate caskets.

In some locations, the cost of a simple, respectful burial may be similar to a cremation, and in others, it will still be more costly. Advance planning will allow you to find affordable options and take advantage of the comfortable payment plans available in many cemeteries.

Every Jew deserves a dignified Jewish burial. In cases of true financial need, we can connect you with helpful community resources.

Burial takes up land space. Wouldn't it be better to leave the land to the living?

We won't run out of space anytime soon! Even if every American chose burial, it would still take 10,000 years to use just 1% of our land mass. Think of those endless miles of land you pass on the Interstate. Give yourself and your posterity the gift of a small corner of this earth as a tribute to the life you lived on it.

What about all the Jews who were cremated during the Holocaust?

Until recently, cremation was only something our enemies did to us, a way to literally erase us. It is only today that we see Jews inflicting this harm upon themselves. As for those who were cremated against their will, we build memorials and museums to create a physical spot marking their sacred lives, and comfort ourselves with the knowledge that God Himself is caring for their souls.

Now What?

As soon as you're ready, make your wishes known to your family, or anyone likely to be contacted in the event of your passing.

It's so much easier – and more economical – to make arrangements for after-life care when it's not an emotionally charged time.





To assist you in sharing your desires with your loved ones in a pleasant and clear manner, you can use our *Burial Wishes Documentation*, available at Lastkindness.org.

< Expression of Wishes Document

Fill in your preferences.

Print it out, email it, or download a digital copy to share it with your loved ones.

MANY PEOPLE FIND THAT PRE-NEED PURCHASING GIVES THEM THE PEACE OF MIND TO ENJOY LIVING LIFE TO ITS FULLEST WITH THE PEOPLE THEY LOVE.

"My parents did pre-need purchasing, and it was the greatest gift they could ever have given us. It allowed us to appreciate them in their last hours and then focus on our grief instead of making frantic calls."

– Susan G.

Speak with a kind counselor anytime!

HERE ARE SOME WAYS WE CAN HELP:

- Assist in arranging a Jewish burial in your preferred location
- Answer questions about mourning, Kaddish, or any aspect of Jewish law or tradition
- Help you document your wishes for burial
- Provide personal guidance for discussing after-life care with a loved one

Of course, if you have a different question or concern, we will always do our best to guide you.

YOU CAN FIND US HERE

connect@lastkindness.org

lastkindness.org

Intrigued?

> Explore the practical wisdom of Jewish burial traditions.

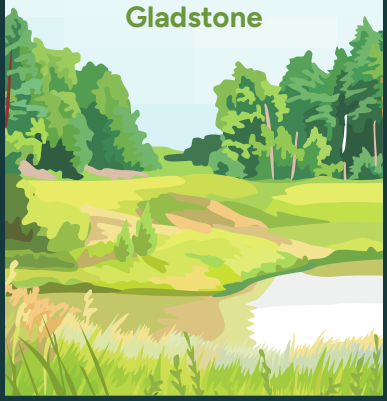
> Host an event for your community or friends

> Share your story to inspire others

"Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalty to high ideals"

—

Sir William Ewart Gladstone



Complete the circle of life.

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