

God is nearest the brokenhearted.

~Psalm 34:19

Guidelines for Shemirah

Thank you for volunteering to do this holy work. Thank you for supporting your community with love- love for each person as they leave this physical world, and love for each person as they learn to live in the world without the physical presence of their beloved. Thank you for accompanying the souls of the dead as they make their way on their journey, and thank you for accompanying the souls of the living as they make their way into grief.

Our IKAR guidelines for shemirah are simple and profound. You who have been called to do this holy work already know what to do. It's inside you, as it is inside all of us. While for some of us this work is new and unknown, for others this is work we have done before. In both cases, we know what we are to do while we sit. We are, in simple terms, to offer love.

We are to be present with the members of our community who have died so that their souls know nothing but love and compassion as they transition. And sometimes, though certainly not always, we are to be present with those who are mourning great loss as they visit their beloved for one last time. In this case again, our job is simply to show love and compassion.

How do we show love and compassion? There is no right way. There are rituals that our ancestors have performed for years that we can choose to participate in. Or there is our own, new way. Below you will find some suggestions. But please always remember that the only thing you must do is love.

Please feel free to:

- 1) Read Psalms (especially Psalm 23, 90 and 91)
- 2) Read poetry
- 3) Sing or hum a niggun
- 4) Meditate (focusing on love, compassion, the soul of the deceased)
- 5) Sit in silence

- 6) Read about and think about the met/ah if you knew them, or even if you didn't
- 7) Direct your thoughts on helping the met/ah's soul transition peacefully
- 8) Whisper or speak directly to the met/metah (their soul is there with you)

We encourage you to try and stay away from:

- 1) Eating or drinking during your shift (if you require water or coffee, you may step out to another room)
- 2) Reading Torah, wrapping tefillin or wearing a tallit during your shift (we are encouraged not to do mitzvot in front of the met/metah so that they won't be upset by their inability to perform these mitzvot)
- 3) Talking about matters that don't focus on the met/metah, love, or compassion
- 4) Sleeping (it can be hard at times, but remember that we are there to accompany the soul as it transitions throughout this time period)

Guarding our community's beloved dead is an honor, a privilege and one of the deepest acts of love one can offer. We are so grateful to have a community that walks with its members throughout the cycle of life, and that supports one another through all of our transitions. Thank you for offering your love- there is nothing greater.

With deep appreciation to Jesse Zilberstein for this draft.