



Traditional Jewish Autopsy Procedure

Introduction

To be sensitive and responsive to the needs of the traditional Jewish family and community, it is important to understand the origin and the source of those special needs. Biblical law is clear about the requirement for immediate burial: "You must bury it (the body) on the same day" (Deut. 21.23). Jewish law therefore requires immediate burial. From this also derives the requirement for the entire body to be brought to burial, including all internal organs, even the blood, which is associated with the soul as it carries the life force through the body (See: Deut. 12.23).

There are many sources for the belief that while the soul or spirit leaves the body upon death, it is nevertheless aware and conscious of its surroundings, particularly the body, until after its return to the earth. The dignity and the respect accorded the remains is therefore significant. Any invasive procedure is seen as a desecration. Any delay in the burial and anything other than the burial of the entire body is seen as painful to the spirit and is contrary to Jewish law.

1. A member of the Sacred Society, or designate thereof, or a Rabbi, should be permitted to attend the autopsy upon request.
2. In all instances, every effort should be made to expedite the release of the body as quickly as possible.
3. The entire autopsy should be performed in a body pouch.
4. When possible, the entire body and especially the genitalia should be kept covered at all times.
5. The autopsy procedure should be as minimal as possible:
 - A. Avoid incision whenever and wherever possible.
 - B. Samples for pathology should be as small as possible.
6. Replace all organs in their proper place: e.g. brain in suitable small plastic bag in the skull.
7. All instruments should be wiped clean with a cloth and the cloth should be placed in the body pouch.
8. Suture all incisions as tightly and leak proof as possible.
9. All blood or articles of clothing containing blood that are not needed for pathological or evidence purposes should be sent along with the remains to the funeral home. Those articles that need to be retained for evidence should be returned for burial after they are no longer needed.

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