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## ***Chapter One***

### **The Final Hours of Life**

#### **1. What should a person do in his final hours?**

If he is capable, he should do the following:

- Donate money to charity.
- Wash hands.
- Say *Viduy* and various other *tefillos*.

#### **2. May *Viduy* be said on Shabbos or Yom Tov?**

Yes.

#### **3. What if he cannot speak much?**

He should say, "May my death be an atonement for all my sins", and he should think in his mind that he regrets all his wrongdoings.

#### **4. What should be his last words?**

He should say the first three verses from *Tashlich* (*Mi Eil Kamocha* etc. - *Micha* 7:18-20), the *Bircas Cohanim*, *Shema Yisroel*, and *Baruch Sheim*. It is a great merit if he can finally say (or think) the following: *Baruch shemo chai vekayam le'olam va'ed* - *May the revelation of the living and eternal One be increased forever*. These were the last words of *Moshe Rabbeinu* before he passed away.

**5. What should the visitors around him do?**

They should speak words of Torah and recite *Tehillim*, and assist the dying person to say *Viduy*. There is a set order of *tefillos* to be recited when the end is nearing.

**6. What should they say at the moment of death?**

*Shema Yisroel.*

**7. Is it better to remain or leave during the final hours?**

- If one cannot control himself from crying, he should leave the room, since crying causes pain to the dying person.
- If he can control himself, it is a great mitzvah to remain, since it is a comfort for a person to be surrounded by family and friends when he leaves this world.

In any event, it is forbidden to leave the person to die alone, since this is painful for the departing soul.

**8. May one stand next to the bed?**

One may stand anywhere except at the foot of the bed, since the Angel of Death positions himself there. In order to allow the dying person the maximum amount of air, one should not stand or sit very close to him.

**9. May one hold the dying person's hand?**

No. It is forbidden to touch a dying person during the last minutes of his life, since this might hasten his death. To shorten a person's life by one moment is equivalent to murder, even when death is imminent.

**10. What if the person's hand is hanging outside the bed?**

If possible, the person should have his hands and feet on the bed while dying. The people attending to him should take care of this in good time, since one may not move a limb when death is approaching. If the person is lying correctly, it is advisable to place chairs next to the bed to prevent him from extending a limb outside.

**11. What should be done immediately after death?**

First and foremost, it must be established beyond a shadow of doubt that the person has indeed passed away. This is determined by the cessation of breathing and should be confirmed by a doctor. The custom is to wait 20-30 minutes after the last breath, to be absolutely certain that death has occurred. Then the following should be done:

- The windows of the room should be opened.
- If the dead person's eyes are open, they should be closed, preferably by the oldest son.
- If the dead person's mouth is open, it should be closed.
- His face should be covered with a sheet.
- A candle should be lit near the head of the bed.
- All mirrors should be covered.

**12. May one kiss the dead person?**

No. This is very harmful to the soul of the one giving the kiss. According to some opinions, it is forbidden because it is emulating the ways of the gentiles.

**13. Must someone remain with the deceased?**

Yes, it is forbidden to leave the body alone even for a short time. The person who remains with the deceased, called a *shomer*, fulfills a mitzvah by doing so.

**14. What is the reason?**

- As a sign of respect.
- To prevent forces of evil from approaching the body.

**15. What should the *shomer* do?**

He should recite *Tehillim* for the benefit of the deceased.

**16. May he learn Torah?**

No, he is forbidden to learn Torah or fulfill any mitzvah whatsoever. Therefore, he is exempt from *davening*. He is also forbidden to greet anyone or to respond to a greeting. He must also hide his *tzitzis* (see Questions 109 and 682).

**17. May he eat or drink?**

No, this is forbidden in the same room. If he wishes to eat or drink he must find another person to take his place and leave the room. If this is impossible, he should move at least four *amos* away and turn aside.

**18. What is the custom regarding throwing water away?**

The custom is to throw out any water that is in a vessel in the home where the person died, and in the two neighboring homes.

**19. What is the reason?**

There are two reasons for this custom:

- In order that people should realize that someone has died, and especially so that a *cohen* should know not to enter the building. It is better to inform the public with this signal, rather than by telling them the bad news explicitly.
- The Angel of Death puts a lethal drop into this water, making it perilous to drink.

**20. Which are the two neighboring homes in an apartment block?**

- If there are only one or two apartments on each floor, then water should be thrown away in the following homes:
  - Any apartment on the same floor.
  - The apartments directly above the affected home, going up two floors.
  - The apartments directly below the affected home, going down two floors.
- If there are three or more apartments on each floor, then water should be thrown away from the two nearest apartments on the floor of the affected home. According to some opinions, this should also be done from the apartments two floors directly above and two floors directly below.

**21. Does this include bottles of water?**

- If the bottle is sealed, the water may be kept.
- If the bottle is not sealed, the water should be thrown away.

**22. What about a water tank on the roof?**

This is not affected.