

Sitting *Shmira* (Guard/Watch)

One of the valuable services provided by the *Chevra* is to provide *shomrim* (guards/watchers) to sit with the deceased until the time of burial (“sit *shmira*”).

Shmira demonstrates respect, honor and dignity for the deceased and gives comfort to family members in knowing their loved one is not alone. Out of our busy lives, the small amount of time that a volunteer sits *shmira* can mean the world to the family at a time when they are emotionally distraught and vulnerable.

Shomrim perform the highest level of *Chesed Shel Emet* – a selfless act of loving-kindness for which the deceased cannot thank them. The family is not given the names of those who sit *shmira*, thus they cannot thank the *shomrim*, either. Traditionally, volunteers sit *shmira* regardless of whether they know the deceased or the family.

There are a couple of beliefs supporting the Jewish tradition that a deceased not be left alone prior to burial.

There is a strong belief that the *neshama* (soul) leaves the body after death and hovers over the body from death until burial, and is aware of all that happens to and around the *met/metah* (male/female deceased). The practice of sitting *shmira* gives comfort to the *neshama* while in transition. At burial, the *neshama* returns to God. “[When dust returns to dust] the spirit shall return to God, who gave it” (*Ecclesiastes 12:7*).

Just as the Torah Ark retains its holiness after the scroll is removed, the body which contained the sacred soul before death is considered sacred after the *neshama* departs. To leave a body alone after death would suggest it is now useless and no longer of value. Guarding/watching the body continuously until burial demonstrates respect, honor, and dignity for the deceased.



View of the scene while sitting *shmira*.

The *shomrim* sit in view of the covered *met/metah* (male/female deceased), usually in two-hour shifts, and may sit alone or with another person.

The *shomrim* focus on *shmira* and read or recite from the Book of Job, Psalms, or contemporary texts on spirituality or Jewish traditions on end-of-life and mourning, or engage in reflection, meditation, or prayer. Appropriate reading material is provided in the *shmira* room or *shomrim* may

bring their own reading material in character and content with the purpose of sitting *shmira*.

We ask *shomrim* to not eat; drink; chew gum; take a nap; use cell phones, computers, or other electronic devices (no phone calls, texts, emails, social media, etc.); take pictures or videos; read newspapers, magazines, or novels; do homework or projects



for work; and to not engage in small talk if they are sitting with another person. We avoid these activities out of respect for the dead, who can no longer do these things, and it contributes to keeping the room a sacred space while sitting *shmira*.

When burial is arranged through the *Chevra Kavod Hamet*, the *Chevra* phones and emails volunteers to sit *shmira*. Volunteers contact the designated *Shmira* Arranger to schedule their shift. **An individual who has not sat *shmira* before can arrange with the *Shmira* Arranger to sit with an experienced *shomer/shomeret* (male/female guard/watcher).**

Family, friends and congregants not on the *Chevra* volunteer list may arrange to sit *shmira* for a particular deceased, if they wish. *Shomrim* do not have to be members of Adath.

Non-Jewish family members or friends may sit *shmira*. They are expected to wear a *kippah* and to follow the same protocols as for Jewish *shomrim*, except they do not recite the *Sh'ma* or the prayer at the end of the shift, and they do not wash hands or recite the blessing over washing hands when they leave.

The *Chevra* does the best it can to provide *shomrim* from the time the *met/metah* (male/female deceased) arrives at the funeral home until transported to the funeral service. We appreciate any participation in *shmira* by family and friends of the deceased in addition to other volunteers. We may not be able to provide coverage through the night if *shomrim* are not available. The timing of *Shabbat* and holidays may limit our ability to recruit *shomrim*.

We welcome you to participate in this meaningful *mitzvah*. To learn more, please call the Adath office at 952.545.2424 or email the *Chevra* at adathchevra@gmail.com to add your name to the *shmira* phone and/or email list or to obtain contact information for the *Shmira* Arranger.