ONEN: Between The Passing And The Burial

The direct relatives of the deceased are considered to be in a state of Onen from the moment they receive the news of a loved one’s passing until the burial takes place, regardless of how much time elapses between the two. The Onen is often immersed in profound sadness and, in many cases, may experience a serious emotional crisis. The initial emotional response may include denial of the loved one’s death. Understandably, the Onen may feel disoriented and not always in full control of their emotions. During this emotional state, the Onen is typically in charge of arranging funeral details, cemetery paperwork, and other practical matters. For this reason, the Onen is exempt from all regular religious obligations until the burial is completed.

1. The direct relatives considered Onenim are seven: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and spouse.

2. Since it is their immediate responsibility to care for all burial-related matters, the Onen is exempt from all positive commandments of the Tora, such as Tefila, the Berakha of Hamotsi, Birkat Hamazon, all daily Berakhot, and the donning of Tefilin. The Onen is not counted in a Minyan. It is also customary that the Onen does not recite Kaddish until after the burial.

3. The Onen should not wear Tefilin if the burial takes place on the same day as the passing. However, if the burial does not occur during the Hebrew day of the passing, the mourner should wear Tefilin on that day, after the burial, discreetly and without reciting a Berakha.

4. The Onen should not take a shower, nor eat meat or drink wine.

5. If the death occurs on Shabbat or close to Shabbat such that there is not enough time to arrange the burial beforehand, Shabbat must be observed in its entirety by the Onen. In such cases, the deceased’s body is respectfully covered with a sheet until Shabbat is over. During Shabbat, the Onen may eat meat, drink wine, and participate in the Tefilot with the Kehila. In some communities, it is customary to allow the Onen to recite Kaddish on Shabbat. The Arbit prayer on Motsaé Shabbat should be recited earlier, and Habdala is recited without Besamim or Me’ore haEsh.

6. In cases where the death occurs during a Yom Tob or on its eve, and there is not enough time to bury the deceased on the same day, a competent rabbinic authority must be consulted regarding the proper observance of religious obligations.