



## Alternate Kevurah Methods (Teacher's Guide)

*Produced as a project of the CJLS Fellows in Prophetic Halakhah*

*Based on Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky, "[Alternate Kevurah Methods](#)" CJLS YD 362.1 2017a*

*Teacher's Guide by Rabbi Talia Kaplan*

### Duration: 90 Minutes

*Note: It is highly recommended that the facilitator read the full teshuvah prior to teaching the source sheet.*

### Goal:

Participants will learn about Conservative / Masorti halakhic approaches to contemporary methods for alternative burial.

### Objectives:

- Participants will study rabbinic texts about burial in small groups
- Participants will be able to begin to analyze contemporary burial methods in dialogue with rabbinic concepts about burial

*There is certainly the opportunity for facilitators to create space for participants to reflect on their own relationships to these methods, but this would take time and framing beyond the scope of this lesson plan. Whether or not the facilitator chooses to incorporate this additional reflection to the learning, they should be prepared for people to have emotional reactions to the source material and be pastorally sensitive when facilitating.*

### Procedure:

#### Set Induction

1. Facilitator and participants introduce themselves to one another.
2. Facilitator solicits responses to the questions: "What do you know about Jewish burial? What questions do you have about Jewish burial?"
3. Facilitator frames context for the lesson:
  - a. Over time, different sociological concerns have informed burial. Today, questions often arise around space considerations, family member preference, and environmental impact, among other things.
  - b. The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS, the law committee for the Conservative / Masorti Movement) produced a paper by Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky addressing some of these considerations.

#### Activity



1. Facilitator gives a brief lecture on (1) the question of whether the positive *mitzvah* of burial is biblical or rabbinic (2) *nivul ha-met* (mistreating the dead) (3) *hana'ah* (benefiting from the dead), drawing from sources #1-17 as desired. While the heart of the *teshuvah* gets into methodologies of alternative burial, and time should be allotted to focus on these methods, it can be helpful to give the context of the halakhic considerations that inform evaluation of these approaches.
  - a. To make this more participatory, invite volunteers to read sources aloud and leave time for clarifying questions.
2. Facilitator splits participants into groups (either two, or more groups with multiple groups covering the same topic), having groups look at alkaline hydrolysis (source #18) and promession (source #19). Make sure at least one group is assigned to each topic.
3. In breakout groups, participants should:
  - a. Study aforementioned source related to their topic
  - b. Discuss the following questions:
    - i. Does this method fulfill the custom and possible positive commandment of in-ground burial?
    - ii. Would the method violate the prohibition against *nivul ha-met*?
    - iii. Would the method lead to *hana'ah*?
4. Back together with the full group, breakout groups should share:
  - a. A brief explanation of the way their alternative burial method works.
  - b. Their answers to the aforementioned questions.
5. Facilitator explains where CJLS *teshuvah* lands on each of the three methods (source #20)

### Optional Questions for Discussion

- Kalmanofsky primarily considers the question of alternative burials through the halakhic considerations of *nivul ha-met* and *hana'ah*. What do you think of approaching this topic using these halakhic considerations? Are there other Jewish legal considerations you might take into consideration?
- How might you approach questions about alternative burial if someone asked you to offer halakhic guidance on this issue?

### Wrapping it Up

- Facilitator solicits responses to the questions: “What have you learned about Jewish burial? What questions do you still have?”

### Assessment:

Based on participants' responses to the questions asked, facilitators can gauge extent to which participants have successfully comprehended halakhic considerations regarding alternative burial and their applications to the methods of alkaline hydrolysis and promession.