

The Concept of Shmira

Many of the traditions and laws that pertain to the care and preparation of the Jewish dead are founded on two basic principles:

1. The body as the container of the soul is to be treated with the utmost dignity and respect.
2. Although at death the soul departs the body, it still remains present near the body and is fully aware of all that transpires in its vicinity.

Thus the Shmira serves two purposes:

1. To guard the body from becoming prey for rodents and insects.
2. To give respect to the remains and consolation to the soul by not leaving the body unattended like something useless and no longer worthy.

In addition, the reciting of Psalms (T'hillim) is comforting and soothing to the soul at a time in which it is distressed and confused. (See Aryeh Kaplan's [Immortality & The Soul](#)).

Of course the best way to perform Shmira is to be with the body at all times, while reciting T'hillim. Some local Shul Chevros or family members can perform such Shmira. The response of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt'l, states that when the body is in no danger of becoming prey to rodents and insects, such as when under refrigeration or casketed, it is sufficient to maintain a presence of Shmira in the building, having a Shomer who will visit the area where the body is located from time to time and recite T'hillim.