



DESCRIPTION OF FUNERAL AND MOURNING CEREMONIES OF BUKHARA JEWS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the funeral and mourning ceremonies of Bukhara Jews, their distinctive characteristics, traditions, and the changes these ceremonies have undergone in modern conditions. It also analyzes the harmony of Jewish and Islamic teachings in the burial rituals of Bukhara Jews and the socio-cultural manifestations of Zoroastrian influence

Central Asia has been a region where Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Islam, various cultures and lifestyles have intersected and coexisted peacefully for millennia. Bukhara Jews are one of the oldest religious communities still existing in this territory today. The funeral and mourning ceremonies of Bukhara Jews, like their other customs, have their own distinctive characteristics.

Just as all events and phenomena on earth have a time for their emergence, development and conclusion, death also has an appointed time. The sacred sources of Judaism provide information that death applies to all of humanity and that every person will return to dust.

Elements reflecting the teachings of Judaism and Islam have been preserved in the funeral ceremonies of Central Asian Jews. The deceased is laid with their feet facing the exit direction so they can cool down. According to the beliefs of Bukhara Jews, if the deceased does not cool down, they may harm the living and cause new deaths. To prevent misfortune, there are also cases where willow branches and boiled eggs are buried with the deceased.

Those who wash the deceased are called "murdashoy." Men wash men, women wash women. The deceased is washed on a board covered with white metal. In the same place, they are wrapped in a shroud sewn from white fabric, then the deceased is placed in a coffin and covered with a decorated cover.

Female relatives remove their gold jewelry as a sign of mourning. With their hair simply combed, wearing blue dresses with open collars, they walk around the coffin crying together with special mourners, or stand to the side crying while speaking about the good qualities of the deceased. Bukhara Jews have mourning songs called "alvido" (farewell) and "voyicha" (condolence).

If the deceased is a young man or girl, a chuppah is carried around their coffin. In some cases, a chuppah may not be carried. If an engaged girl has died, her veil and headscarves are hung in the room where the deceased lies.

The deceased is buried on the same day. Among Bukhara Jews, there is also a view that if the deceased committed a great sin during their lifetime, the earth will not "accept" them. The grave is dug approximately 1 meter deep, in the form of a rectangular niche. Representatives of wealthy households build bricks around the grave and place marble slabs or solid juniper or mulberry wood on top. The poor simply cover the grave walls with ordinary wood. The wood is covered with reeds, and earth is sprinkled on top. When placing the deceased in the grave, the face part of the shroud is opened and soil brought from Eretz-Israel is poured on them. A paper giving the right to use 4 arshins of land belonging to Eretz-Israel is placed in the deceased's hand.

If a newborn infant who has not yet been circumcised or a boy born prematurely dies, he is circumcised before burial. Women and the deceased's sons cannot go to the cemetery following the deceased.

No food is cooked in the house where the deceased has departed for 7 days. The deceased's relatives and neighbors prepare food for the deceased's family. On the 8th day, the head of the house holds the first ceremony called "yushvo." Then this ceremony is held every month for one year. "Yorsayt" – the deceased's "anniversary" is marked every year. The mourning period is determined according to the mourner's degree of kinship to the deceased. The closest relatives mourn for 1 year, distant relatives for up to 3 months. Mourners wear dark-colored clothes, women do not wear jewelry. All family celebrations are suspended until the mourning period ends. The ceremony held on the occasion of the end of mourning is called "a'zo baroron."

In recent years, some changes have occurred in funeral and memorial ceremonies in the countries where Bukhara Jews have emigrated. Usually, the farewell to the deceased takes place in synagogues or in special houses designated for funeral ceremonies. The deceased are buried in wooden coffins. The grave is covered with bricks or a concrete "box" is installed, the coffin is placed inside, and the top is covered with a concrete slab. Within one year, the deceased's relatives erect a memorial dedicated to them on the grave.

The first memorial is held on the day the deceased is buried, the next on the 7th day. Close relatives gather on the 1st Shabbat of the deceased. The next memorial is held on the 30th day, the next one after 1 year. Starting from the deceased's "anniversary," the "yushvo" ceremony is held according to the Jewish calendar. The monthly ceremonies that were previously held until the "anniversary" ceremony have become a thing of the past.

Ethnographer Amnun Davidov proved that Bukhara Jews adopted this custom from Zoroastrians during the time when their ancestors lived in Central Asia and Iran before the Arab invasion.

Also, among Bukhara Jews, a ceremony called "Askara," dedicated to the memory of grandfathers, grandmothers, and parents, has become a tradition. Some of them hold this ceremony every year regardless of how many years have passed since their parents' death, even if half a century has passed. In general, there are various opinions on holding memorial ceremonies. According to rabbis, it is not necessary to set a table at memorials. The main thing is that "Kadish" and "Ashkava" should be read on the commemoration day, candles should be lit, prayers should be read in the synagogue, and on that very day, the deceased's grave should be visited if it is not far away.

Bukhara Jews have developed their own specific customs in this regard. According to the rule, a memorial ceremony with all relatives and close friends is held during the first 7 evenings (including Friday and Saturday), and subsequent ones after one month and one year.

This tradition that emerged in Central Asia continues in countries where Bukhara Jews are densely located, such as Israel and the USA, and in cities such as Vienna and Moscow. Supporters of preserving this tradition believe, firstly, that this ceremony provides an opportunity for the deceased's close ones, relatives, and acquaintances to share misfortune and provide each other with moral support. Secondly, such a ceremony to some extent contributes to strengthening and developing friendly ties. Most importantly, in such ceremonies, in most cases, respected persons – rabbis, scholars, writers, people who knew the deceased well – share their memories about the deceased with those gathered, speak about their human virtues, and express their condolences, which has great educational significance.

Studying the customs and ceremonies of nations and peoples living in our country, representatives of various religious confessions, is also important from the point of view of forming an atmosphere of religious tolerance in our country.

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