

In Time of Sorrow

A Time to Mourn

Since Judaism is a way of life, Jewish Tradition teaches specific ways of confronting all aspects of life, including death. Our Tradition's practices in this area are governed by respect for the dead and concern for the mourner. Dignity and taste are further basic assumptions of Jewish Law in mourning. The procedures of mourning initiate a process of healing that exercises its therapy through recognition of the reality of grief and the healing process which only time can bring.

Only an outline of observance can be presented in these pages. A rabbi should be consulted for further information, interpretation and guidance.

Who is a Mourner?

We are obliged to mourn for a father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, (including half-brother and half-sister), husband or wife, but not for an infant less than thirty days old. Thus, in-laws and grandchildren are not designated as mourners. Males from the age of thirteen years and one day and females from the age of twelve years and one day should observe the laws of mourning.

We are *permitted* to observe the mourning rites for anyone, not only for the relatives listed above. The Hebrew term for mourner is *Avel*, the plural, *Avelim*.

Between death and burial

During this period the mourner is known as an *onen*. The most important duty of this time is arranging for the funeral and the burial of the dead. In recognition of this and of the mourner's state of mind at this time, the *onen* is exempted from fulfilling other religious duties, such as reciting prayers or putting on *tefillin*, and is not called to the Torah in the synagogue. An *onen* should not indulge in luxuries or pleasures, or conduct business and professional activities. On Shabbat or on a Festival, an *onen* follows the appropriate public observances of the day, which include eating meat, drinking wine, and reciting benedictions.

While one may want to offer an *onen* assistance in making the funeral arrangements, it is not customary to visit the *onen* during this time.

Care of the Deceased

During the last moments of life, family members should not leave, for their presence is an expression of great respect. After death has occurred, the eyes and mouth of the deceased should be closed, and a sheet drawn over his/her face. The funeral director should be called. He will arrange for the removal of the body and for the many other matters that must be attended to.

Respect for the Dead

Human life is sacred. The human body deserves respect, even after the breath of life has left it. Respect for the dead (*k'vod hamet*) is a fundamental principle governing Jewish practice. One expression of this respect is the ritual washing (*taharah*) of the dead body (mait) which is then dressed in shrouds (*takhrikhim*). This is done or supervised by members of the *Chevre Kadisha*, a group traditionally devoted to the proper burial of the dead.

A mait is not to be left alone before the funeral, a demonstration of respect to the deceased. In order to maintain a constant watch, however, arrangements are made for other individuals (*shomrim*, watchers) to be with the mait day and night. Those who are with the mait should spend their time chanting and reading from the Book of Psalms.

Since ancient times, it has been considered degrading to leave the mait unburied. Jewish tradition teaches us that the dead must be buried as soon as possible. A delay is permitted when it is needed to obtain shrouds or a proper coffin, or for the sake of honoring the dead by waiting for relatives and friends who must travel great distances.

The dead are not to be put on display. In Traditional practice, the casket is not opened to the public at the funeral. It is preferable that the casket not be opened to any but the intimate family circle. Should this be done, it is to take place prior to the funeral service.

People who want to express their respect and their sympathy in a tangible way should contribute to a favorite cause of the deceased. Mourners generally prefer being notified of charitable contributions made in memory of the dead rather than receiving flowers or specially prepared baskets of food or sweets. Jewish tradition has always emphasized concern for the living, helping the needy in this world. This is also a way of extending the influence of the deceased after he or she is no longer walking this earth.

Embalming

Embalming is prohibited by the Jewish Tradition and should be practiced only when it is required by State or Federal Law.

Cremation

Cremation is prohibited by the Jewish Tradition. The Committee on Law & Standards of the Conservative Movement disapproves of cremation. Rabbi Morris Shapiro in a 1986 teshuvah (the entire teshuvah can be found in the Customs and Practices tab of the website) states the cremation is not the Jewish way and should be discouraged. However, if a person is cremated his ashes should be buried in a separate section of a Jewish Cemetery.

Shrouds and Coffin

Our tradition teaches that all Jews are to be buried in the same type of inexpensive garments, plain white linen or cotton shrouds (*takrikhim*). This practice also emphasizes the fact that all people, rich and poor alike, are equal before God. The same principle is reflected in the requirement of a plain, wooden coffin. It is customary for a dead man to be buried in a tallit which he used during his life, after one of the fringes has been cut to make it ritually unfit. Objects of value for the living are not buried with the dead.

Kriah

Kriah, a tear made in the mourner's clothing or on a ribbon attached to the clothing, is an external symbol of inner grief and mourning. It has been so considered since ancient times. In the Bible, Jacob, David, and Job, for example, reacted to reports of death by rending their garments.

Kriah is usually made immediately preceding the start of the funeral service. It must be done for the *Avel* while the mourner is standing, to signify that we should confront sorrow directly.

For a parent, *Kriah* is on the left side, close to the heart. For all others, *Kriah* is on the right side. A benediction is recited by the mourner just before Kriah: Baruch attah Adenai eloheinu melech ha'olam, dayan hamet. "Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, the righteous judge". Like the mourner's kaddish, this benediction is a reaffirmation of faith, and of the value of life, made at a time of intense sorrow and pain. Kriah should be visible throughout the period of shivah, but not on Shabbat.

If one learns of a relative's death within thirty days after the fact, Kriah is required. Kriah is always required whenever one learns of a parent's death, regardless of the length of time that has elapsed since the day of death.

The Funeral: Levayah

The literal translation of *levayah*, "accompanying," teaches us that the nature of a Jewish funeral implies involvement. It is a mitzvah and an act of respect not only to attend the funeral service, but especially to accompany the dead, walking behind the coffin for at least a few feet immediately after the funeral or at the cemetery. Despite Jewish folk lore, pregnant women are allowed to attend a funeral at the Chapel or the graveside. The funeral service consists of suitable prayers of consolation and a eulogy memorializing the deceased, which is delivered by the Rabbi. The Cantor chants appropriate selections from the Book of Psalms and the traditional memorial prayer "El Mole Rachamim" (the Lord of Compassion).

Both the funeral and the burial services are brief. The Biblical and other texts read generally emphasize human mortality, resignation to God's inscrutable will, affirmation of life, acknowledgement of God as the true judge, and immortality of the soul.

Pall Bearers

It is customary to name 6 to 8 persons who are **not** the immediate mourners but who were close to the decedent to serve as pallbearers to help carry the coffin from the chapel to the gravesite. Honorary pallbearers may also be designated.

At the Cemetery

The dead are buried in the earth. "For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:10).

We show our respect and love for the dead through personal involvement in the funeral and burial. Some follow the practice that the procession pause several times on its way to the grave.

It is appropriate for relatives and friends to drop several spadefuls of earth on the lowered casket, a final act of loving-kindness, reflecting their constant concern for one whom they loved.

After reciting Kaddish, the mourners walk between two lines formed by the others present, who say *Hamakom yunakhem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar aveilei tzion virusshalayim*. "May the Almighty comfort you with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem".

It is customary to rinse the hands as an act of symbolic purification before entering the home upon returning from the cemetery.

Concrete Vaults

Clover Hill Park Cemetery requires a bottomless concrete liner with interment for maintenance purposes. Many families secure a concrete vault in which the casket is placed. This is not contrary to Jewish Law. However, a metal vault is in violation of Traditional standards.

Mourner's Kaddish

A mourner first recites kaddish at the cemetery after burial. The kaddish is generally thought of as a prayer for the dead. But while the mourner's kaddish certainly is recited in that context, it does not mention death and the dead. Essentially, it is an affirmation of life and faith, confronting death with life. Reciting the mourner's kaddish is an act of looking to the future and all of life with faith and hope, in the presence of grief and despair.

The Kaddish emphasizes hallowing and praising God's Name through redemption of life in this world and through the universal acceptance of His sovereignty. In addition to the form of kaddish known as mourner's kaddish, there are several variations recited at the conclusion of various sections of the prayer service.

Kaddish is an Aramaic word meaning holy. Recitation of kaddish is an act of hallowing and praising God and His name. In Jewish tradition, such an act must take place in public assembly, which is defined as at least a quorum of ten adults (minyan). Thus the kaddish, in any variation, is recited only in the presence of a minyan.

Mourner's Kaddish is recited for eleven months, less one day, counting from the day of the death. In a leap year, First Adar and Second Adar are counted as two separate months. Mourner's Kaddish is also recited on each anniversary of the death (yahrzeit), and at the Memorial Service of Yizkor on Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot.

Meal of Consolation

An Avel's first meal after returning from the cemetery (se'udat havra'ah) is provided by friends and neighbors, who thus express their concern in a practical way. The meal generally includes hard boiled eggs, lentils or other round objects symbolizing fate and the wheel of life, for some symbolizing life and resurrection. Neither wine nor meat is served at this meal.

Religious Services

Generally, Religious Services are held at the house of mourning, usually in the evenings, enabling the mourners to recite Kaddish. In this circumstance, it is proper for mourners to attend the synagogue minyan for the morning service. If religious services are not held at the home, or if Shivah is not observed for the entire week, it is correct that mourners attend the Synagogue Minyan for morning and evening services, at which they will recite Kaddish. Services are not held at the home of the mourner on Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night.

In the home, two candles should be placed on the table used as the lectern for the services and lit before the daily services begin.

A candle, which burns continuously for seven days, is lit upon returning home from the cemetery. The light of the candle symbolizes the soul. "The soul of man is the light of the Lord". (Proverbs 20:27).

Visiting a House of Mourning

The mitzvah of comforting mourners (nikhum aveilim) is fulfilled by a personal visit to the house of mourning. Fulfilling this mitzvah, in Rabbinic tradition, is "one of the things which bring good to the world" The very fact that you have come to the house of mourning is an act of respect and comfort. One need not be mute, but neither should one feel compelled to maintain a constant flow of conversation. The most appropriate topic of conversation is the person who died, and his or her life. A visit should not be unduly long, and certainly is not the time for general socializing.

People visiting a house of mourning should not expect to be served or even offered food by any of the mourners, who thus would be acting in the inappropriate role of hosts at a social gathering. It is proper for relatives and friends to attend to the needs of the mourner and the household.

Upon leaving, one may offer a sentence of the Tradition to the mourners: Hamakom yekhem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar aveilei tzion virushalayim. "May the Almighty comfort you with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem".

Shivah

Shivah means seven, the number of days in the stage of mourning which begins with the day of burial. This observance is traced to ancient times, for the Bible states that Joseph mourned seven days after his father, Jacob's death.

Mourners stay together at the home of the deceased or at the home of a mourner, cut off from the normal routine of their lives which death has interrupted. They abstain from business and professional activities, sexual intercourse, bathing, except for hygienic purposes, or anointing the body, using cosmetics, and cutting hair. For hygienic purposes, they may change clothes and garments that touch the body.

If severe financial loss would result from not working, the Rabbi should be consulted.

As an outward symbol of mourning, the mourner divests himself of some of the comforts of life. For that reason, mourners who follow Traditional practices sit on low stools or benches and do not wear leather footwear. Cushions are removed from couches and non-leather slippers are worn. (Exceptions are made for pregnant women and others for whom this might cause difficulties.) Many follow the custom that mirrors (symbols of vanity) are either covered in a house of mourning or turned to the wall.

The day of the burial, not the day of death, counts as the first day of shivah.

Sabbath & Festivals & Shivah

Shabbat is included in counting the seven days, though on Shabbat no outward signs of mourning apply. The mourners should wear regular shoes, sit on regular chairs, and change into clothing that bears no sign of mourning. The torn garment or ribbon is not worn. They also attend synagogue services.

On Friday (unless it is the seventh day of shivah) or on the day before a Festival, shivah is observed until two and one half hours before sunset. On Pesach eve it ends at noon. Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, annul the remainder of shivah, provided that the mourner has first observed at least one hour of shivah before the holiday began.

If burial takes place on the intermediate days (Chol Hamoed) of the holiday of Pesach or Sukkot, then shivah is not observed until after the end of the holiday.

Tisha B'av and Purim

It is customary for mourners to attend synagogue services to hear the Book of Lamentations (Eikhah) and to recite prayers and lamentations (kinot). They should attend Purim services to hear the reading of the Book of Esther (The Megillah), though they should not of course participate in the joyous celebration of that day.

The End of Shivah

Shivah ends on the morning of the seventh day. Thus, if the funeral was held on Monday, shivah will conclude on the following Sunday morning. Mourners are required to sit for only a brief period. When the funeral is held on Sunday, shivah is observed through Friday afternoon, and concludes on Sabbath morning.

To mark the end of shivah, the mourners should take a short walk outside of the home together, symbolizing their return to life's normal routine.

It is not proper to visit the grave of the deceased until 30 days have passed since the funeral.

When speaking of the deceased, a Hebrew phrase is generally added: *alav hashalom* (may he rest in peace) or *aleha hashalom* (may she rest in peace). *Zikhrone livrakhah* (for a male) and *Zikronah livrakhah* (for a female) are also used, meaning "of blessed memory".

Shloshim

Shloshim ("thirty") ends on the morning of the thirtieth day after the funeral. The period from the end of shivah to the end of shloshim is one of transition from deep bereavement to resuming life's normal routine. A mourner during this period does not wear new clothes or cut the hair, does not participate in general festivities, and avoids public places of entertainment. A mourner does not attend parties celebrating a brit milah, pidyon haben, or a wedding, though he or she may attend the ceremonies. When mourning a parent's death, restrictions continue until twelve months after the day of death.

As noted before, if mourning has been observed for at least one hour before a Festival, shivah is ended by that Festival. In that event, shloshim ends fifteen days after the last day of Pesach or Shavuot, and eight days after the last day of Sukkot.

When shivah is completed before a Festival, shloshim ends when the Festival begins. When shivah ends before Yom Kippur, shloshim ends with Sukkot.

If burial took place during chol hamo'ed the intermediate days of a Festival, shivah begins after the last day of a Festival, which counts as one of the days of shivah and shloshim.

If one does not learn of a relative's death immediately, one should consult a rabbi.

Tombstone

It is customary to place a tombstone (matzeivah) on a grave, dedicating it in a brief ceremony, known as unveiling, which usually takes place within a year after the death. However, it may take place at any time after the thirty-day period.

There is a variety of practices concerning inscriptions, though the tendency emphasizes simplicity. The Hebrew and English names of the dead, dates of birth and death, and certain Hebrew letters are generally included. These letters are the initials of the words in the phrase *tehei nishmato/nishmatah tzereurah bitzror ha-yahim*. “May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life.”

While the formal unveiling of a tombstone is of significance to the family and friends, Jewish tradition has not emphasized it as a basic ceremony. Care should be taken to avoid the extremes of either another funeral or a festive reunion, at the cemetery or at home. Often, a Rabbi or Cantor conducts a brief service at the gravesite. Families can offer their own service and recite appropriate prayers and psalms. These are available from the Rabbi’s office.

Respect paid to the memory of the dead is not confined to the site where the earthly remains are interred. But as the grave does symbolize a memorial for the dead, it is an appropriate place for family and friends to gather in respect.

The formal unveiling itself is a symbol, signifying that we open our hearts to the memory of the dead, to the meaning of their lives, to their influence upon us, and to appropriate ways of perpetuating their devotion.

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit is observed on each anniversary of the day of death according to the Hebrew Calendar.

One who is not certain of the day when a relative died should select an appropriate date on which to observe yahrzeit each year.

A candle should burn in the home during the twenty-four hour period of yahrzeit, sunset to sunset, starting on the evening preceding the day. When the yahrzeit coincides with Shabbat or a Festival, the yahrzeit candle should be lit before the candle-lighting for the day.

It is appropriate to fulfill some mitzvah in honor of the dead on this day. This could consist of study, leading services in the synagogue, or contributing to some worthy cause in memory of the deceased. It is also appropriate for family and friends to gather on the

yahrzeit for the purpose of recalling various aspects of and events in the life of the dead, perpetuating his or her memory in a warm and intimate atmosphere.

Mourner's kaddish is recited at all services on the yahrzeit, from evening services on the night before through afternoon services on the day itself. The names of the departed of each week are read at the end of the Sabbath Morning Service.

In addition to the Daily Minyan when the Yahrzeit is observed, one should be present on Shabbat to recite Kaddish. This is not intended as a substitute for one's weekday recitation, but is in addition to it.

One who is unable to recite Mourner's kaddish on the day of yahrzeit may do so at the evening service following the day of yahrzeit.

Yizkor

Yizkor ("May God remember") services in memory of the dead are held on Yom Kippur, the eighth day of Sukkot, the last day of Pesach and on the second day of Shavuot. Contrary to popular opinion, a person with a living parent may attend Yizkor services.

During the first year of bereavement, one may attend Yizkor Services, although this is not an obligation.

It is a beautiful custom that a memorial candle is lit before the Yizkor day, particularly Yom Kippur, as a sign of memory.

Visiting the Cemetery

Many people visit the cemetery on the occasion of Yahrzeit, others also visit from time-to-time. Individuals can offer prayers and recite psalms in Hebrew or English. These are available from the Cemetery office.

Jewish custom indicates that stones, picked up at the gravesite, may be placed as a memorial sign on the tombstone. After the visit, one washes the hands as a symbol of purification

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