



# GUIDE *for* Mourners



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# A GUIDE FOR MOURNERS



## Who Are Mourners?

While traditionally, the laws of mourning apply to one who encounters the death of a parent, sibling, child or spouse, we know we mourn the loss of anyone we've loved and lost. If you are experiencing grief and mourning the death of a loved one, our community is here for you and we hope you find meaning and comfort in our traditions.

## Shiva (Mourning Week)

Shiva is the first stage of the mourning period, observed by the family of the deceased, beginning on the day of burial and continuing for six additional days with a break for Shabbat. Although historically shiva is observed for a full week, some members of our community choose to observe a shorter shiva period. It is the mourning family's decision what shiva and mourning customs they wish to observe and for how long.

The purpose of shiva is to give mourners a chance to separate themselves from their usual activities and to spend time with people who share memories of the deceased, to gain comfort from loved ones and friends, and to leave time and space to allow the grieving process to unfold. It is usually observed in the home of the deceased or of a mourner.

- Traditionally, Shiva commences immediately upon returning from the cemetery with the partaking of the se'udat havra-ah (the meal of consolation), which is often prepared by friends, extended family and/or the community. The meal often consists of round foods (such as eggs or bagels) to symbolize the continuity of life.
- It is also traditional for mourners to remain in the home, to sit on low stools, and to wear non-leather footwear. Mourners may also follow the traditional practice of refraining from the routine of daily life which includes washing themselves, changing clothes, combing hair, shaving and applying makeup. Mirrors may be covered in the house of mourning to take the focus away from outer appearances.



While it is a mitzvah to visit the mourners and bring food, it is essential that the condolence visit not become a social occasion. Visitors extending their condolences are encouraged to allow the mourners to set the tone. It is customary to extend condolences, but to wait for the mourners to initiate further conversation.

- In lieu of flowers, it is appropriate to give tzedakah to an organization that has meaning for the mourners and/or the deceased.
- During shiva, mourners recite the Mourner's Kaddish at Erev Shabbat services.

## **Shabbat during the Week of Shiva**

Public shiva observance is suspended for Shabbat, from sundown on Friday until havdalah on Saturday evening. On Shabbat, mourners are encouraged to attend services at Temple Sinai and recite the Kaddish with the community. The mourners are greeted by the congregation with the following words of consolation:

Hamakom yenahem etkhem betokh she-ar avelei tziyon  
virushalayim.

May God comfort you  
together with  
all the other mourners of Zion and  
Jerusalem.

If a holiday occurs during the shiva week, please consult the rabbi to discuss the length of the shiva. The completion of shiva is observed with a walk around the block, the resumption of work and other regular activities following the minyan on the morning of the seventh day. For Jews, remembrance of the dead is a great obligation. This commitment is observed in several ways.



## **Shloshim**

Mourning is not completed with shiva, but continues for a total of thirty days from the day of burial during which time mourners recite the Kaddish daily. Although mourners are obligated to continue reciting the Kaddish for a total of eleven months from date of death only in the case of a parent, one may choose to do so for other relatives. The recitation of the Kaddish helps mourners to reconnect with the Jewish community, giving continuity to our lives during this difficult period.

During shloshim, mourners return to work. Traditionally, they do not attend parties with music and dancing, other forms of public entertainment, shave or buy new clothes. When mourning a parent, there are some restrictions that continue for eleven months.

## **Yahrzeit and the Unveiling**

Yahrzeit (the anniversary of the death) is observed by lighting a special candle that burns for 24 hours on the eve of the actual date by the Hebrew calendar. The funeral home will give you a perpetual calendar and you will also be reminded of the date by Temple Sinai so that you may recite the Kaddish.

It is customary, if at all possible, to visit the gravesite on the yahrzeit.

The unveiling, when prayers and reading are recited and a headstone dedicated, is customarily performed prior to the first anniversary of the death although it can be done at any time after the conclusion of shiva.

## **Yizkor (Memorial Service)**

The Yizkor Service is held four times each year on Yom Kippur, the last day of Pesach, the second day of Shavuot, and on Shemini Atzeret. It is customary to light a yahrzeit candle at home on the evening prior to these holy days and to visit the cemetery prior to the High Holy Days. It is traditional to give charity at this time in memory of all the dead, not only one's own family and friends, but of the larger Jewish community as well.



## Living Will and Health Care Proxy

Jewish tradition teaches that life is a blessing and a gift from God. We must therefore value life and respect our bodies. Although we have the responsibility to care for ourselves and seek necessary medical treatment, modern advances in medicine and its practice have raised many new questions. In addition, they allow each of us to participate in the decisions regarding our own health care. Should we lose the ability to make those decisions, it is important for us to make our wishes known in advance. This can be done through a health care proxy, or durable power of attorney for health care, which allows you to designate a healthcare agent to make decisions on your behalf. An instruction directive, or “living will,” asks that you state your preferences regarding types of treatment decisions that may arise. Since decisions of this sort should not be made in haste, you may wish to discuss the matter with the rabbi.

### Reading List

- *The Jewish Way In Death and Mourning* by Rabbi Maurice Lamm, Jonathan David, New York 1969
- *Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing* by Anne Brener, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont 1993
- *Consolation, The Spiritual Journey Beyond Grief* by Rabbi Maurice Lamm, The Jewish Publication Society, New York 2004
- *The Jewish Mourner's Book of Why* by Arthur Kolatch, Jonathan David, New York 1993
- *On Death and Dying* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York 1969
- *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker, The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York 1973

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