

## אבלות (Aveilut) Jewish Mourning Practices: A Guide for Beth Meyer Members

If you are reading this guide, then it is likely that you recently experienced the loss of a loved one. First and foremost, we offer you our most sincere condolences. We provide this guide to help you better understand the rituals you may encounter during your mourning process.

**Who Mourns?** Traditionally, one is obligated to mourn for one's spouse, parents, siblings, or children.

**The Four Stages:** The mourning process takes place in four stages - **אנינות** *aninut*, the time before the deceased is buried; **שבועה** *shiva*, the seven days of mourning; **שלשים** *sheloshim*, the first 30 days after burial; and the first year before the unveiling ceremony.

**קריעה** *keriyah*, **tearing clothing:** Based on a biblical expression of grief, it is customary for the mourner to wear a ripped outer garment. Today in the US, many mourners choose to tear a black ribbon and pin it to their clothing. The torn clothing or ribbon should be worn throughout the *shiva* period, though some will also wear it during *sheloshim*.

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### **אנינות *Aninut*: Before the Deceased Is Buried**

The *onen/et* (mourner, before burial) traditionally refrains from many *mitzvot*, including reciting the *Shema*, studying Torah, or wearing a *tallit* and/or *tefillin*.

On *Shabbat*, the *onen/et* may gather with the community and is permitted to eat meat and drink wine, but one should refrain from Torah study, and should not accept an *aliyah* to the Torah.

Jewish mourning is marked by a departure from physical and ritual distractions. The *onen/et* traditionally avoids wearing fancy clothing or makeup, and does not take a haircut nor shave.

During this time, the mourner primarily focuses on funeral arrangements. The *hevra kaddisha* (holy society) will perform the ritual of *taharah* (ritual purification) by ritually cleansing the body of the deceased, dressing the deceased in a shroud, and lovingly placing the deceased in an *aron* (coffin).

### **שבועה *Shiva*: The Seven Days of Mourning**

After returning from the funeral and burial, the community is obligated to provide a comforting meal (*se'udat havra'ah*) for the mourners. Some practice the tradition of eating round foods, symbolizing the cycle of life and death, such as eggs, lentils, or garbanzo beans.

The day of the burial (Day 1) and the following six days are counted as *shiva*. Mourners traditionally will relax mourning practices during *Shabbat*. Additionally, if *shiva* is interrupted by the beginning of a major holiday - *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, or *Shavuot* - it is customary to cease sitting *shiva* with the onset of the holiday.

*Shiva* is customarily observed in the house of the deceased, but can also be observed in the home of a close relative. Mirrors in the home are covered with a cloth, and a memorial candle is kept burning for the seven days, even on *Shabbat*. The community will gather daily for weekday services at one's home which will allow the mourners the opportunity to recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* with a *minyan* (ten Jewish adults). While *shiva* traditionally takes place over the course of a week, some choose to observe fewer days depending upon circumstance. Please consult with the rabbi if you have questions about the length of *shiva*.

Many practice the custom of bringing food to the house of the mourners. At Beth Meyer, this is often organized through the *Hesed* (Caring) committee. There is also the tradition of giving *tzedakah* to a charity named by the family members.

As with *aninut*, it is customary during *shiva* for mourners to refrain from beautifying practices. Mourners sit on low stools, with some choosing to sit on the floor. Regular Jewish practices are avoided as are activities that are considered joyous, including studying Torah, conjugal relations, listening to live music, or attending parties. Visitors will stop by the home to participate in the *minyan* and make a “*shiva call*.” They will customarily offer words of comfort and support including the traditional phrase, “May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Traditionally, mourners wear slippers instead of shoes, and do not leave their home for business or normal activities. The rabbinic tradition does allow for business transactions that would prevent serious financial loss; some have a tradition of putting a bit of dirt or sand in their shoes if they go out for this purpose, to remind themselves of the mourning week.

On the morning of the seventh day of *shiva*, it is customary to rise up off the ground (or low stool) and take a walk around the block with family and friends as a way of reconnecting with the outside world.

### **שלשים *Sheloshim*: The Thirty Days After the Burial**

For thirty days after the burial, mourners refrain from joyous activities such as parties, weddings, concerts, and some choose not to listen to the radio or attend movies and performances. Many mourners continue to refrain from beautifying practices.

At the same time, the mourner is discouraged from certain demonstrations of grief. In particular, visiting the loved one's grave is discouraged. One may resume normal business practices and Jewish ritual observances. It is customary to attend services with a *minyan* as often as possible to recite the *Mourner's Kaddish*.

### **The First Year:**

After thirty days, there are varying customs for the length of time mourning will continue. For most, it is customary to delay laying the headstone until the twelfth month following death, marking this first year as a special period. However, the timing for the unveiling of the headstone can take place earlier depending upon the circumstances. The “unveiling” is the name for the practice of literally unveiling the headstone that is covered by a white cloth. For information about how to purchase a headstone, please contact the Raleigh Hebrew Cemetery via Howard Margulies, 919-614-2153.

Many will continue to stand for the Mourner's *Kaddish* until the headstone is placed and unveiled. Others will mourn parents for eleven months, during which they continue the practices of *sheloshim*, such as refraining from concerts and parties.

Some choose to immerse in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) after the 11-month *Kaddish* period has concluded as a way to help the mourner transition to the new phase of life.

### **יזכור/יארצייט *Yahrzeit and Yizkor* - Memorial Practices**

*Yahrzeit*. - On the anniversary of the Hebrew date of death, it is traditional to light a 24-hour *yahrzeit* candle, available at the synagogue Judaica shop, at sundown to burn for the full night and day. Many will

attend services on the day to recite the Mourner's *Kaddish*, though others will also attend a *minyan* during the same week, or the *shabbat* following the *yahrzeit*.

*Yizkor* - Throughout the Jewish holiday calendar, there are four times when the community publicly remembers deceased loved ones. This service, led by the Rabbi, takes place on *Yom Kippur*, *Shemini Atzeret*, the last day of *Pesah*, and the second day of *Shavuot*. One begins participating in the *Yizkor* service after the 11-month mourning period has concluded.

To honor the deceased, it is customary to contribute *tzedakah* to the synagogue in their honor either by giving to specific funds or by purchasing a memorial plaque or seat-naming in the sanctuary. For more information about these options, please contact the synagogue office.

On behalf of Beth Meyer Synagogue, we offer our deepest condolences to you and your loved ones. May God comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

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