

TBH-BE Information for Mourners and Shiva

Experiencing the loss of a loved one is unique to each of us. Here are some basic guidelines from our tradition which may inform your preparation for and observance of shiva, and how Hesed helpers from TBH-BE can support you through the mourning period.

A. Preparations for Shiva

When the mourners and family return from the cemetery, there are preparations which can be made at home on behalf of the family. Our Hesed Committee is able to help in the following ways.

1. When a person enters the home after having been at the cemetery, it is customary to wash one's hands as a way of making a separation between death and mourning. It is traditional, therefore, to have a pitcher of water and towels outside the front door to accommodate those who are coming directly from the cemetery.
2. It is traditional in a house of shiva for mirrors in public areas of the house to be covered.
3. Upon their return from the cemetery, it is customary for the family to eat a meal. This meal is called Seudat Havra'a, a meal of condolence. That meal is generally a dairy meal. It is customary, as well, for the meal to include hard-boiled eggs, a symbol of renewed life.
4. Finally, each family in our community that suffers a loss receives an easy-to-follow book about customs and practices of shiva. One of our committee members will present this book to the mourners on behalf of our synagogue.

B. During Shiva

1. Traditionally, shiva begins as the family leaves the cemetery and continues for seven days. For a variety of personal reasons, many families decide to shorten shiva to three days. The decision regarding the length of shiva is a personal one. Our Committee and community will support whatever decisions the family makes.
2. Services (Minyan/Minyanim)

a. During the days of shiva, most families prefer to have services held in their home. Most often, therefore, evening services (minyan/minyanim) are orchestrated on behalf of the family. If desired, we can also help to organize morning services. Our committee, working in conjunction with those who organize minyanim for our synagogue, helps to arrange to provide leaders for each service.

b. In cases in which the funeral home does not provide prayerbooks/siddurim for services in the shiva house, our committee will deliver prayerbooks for services.

c. Also, when there is doubt regarding the requisite number of people (10) at services, our committee will try to recruit other members of our community to assure that we have 10 Jewish adults for each service.

3. Meals during Shiva

It is often difficult for families to prepare the meals necessary to sustain the mourners in the house. Our Hesed Committee can coordinate meals to be delivered from other homes in our community during the days of mourning.

4. Visiting

Finally, our committee will be there to visit and to comfort.

C. Following Shiva

1. Shortly after the conclusion of a period of mourning, a TBH-BE member will deliver some soup, which we call "Soup for the Soul." This soup, prepared in our synagogue's kitchen, is our way of extending our love and comfort beyond the days of shiva.

2. There are a number of bereavement support groups in our community. Our clergy will be able to give to the family information about these groups upon request.

For more information on TBH-BE bereavement support, please contact chesednetwork@tbhbe.org.