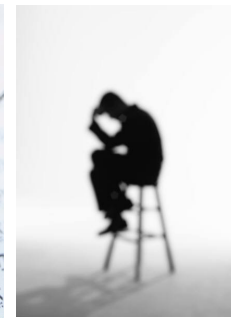




JEWISH CUSTOMS

Honoring our traditions



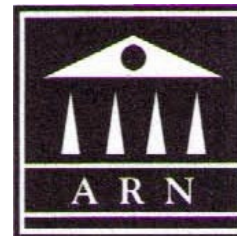
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Created exclusively for
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A Message from the Owner

What is the shiva period? Shiva (the Hebrew word for seven) is the first seven days of mourning following the burial. Families will often hold a daily service, a minyan, in their homes and friends attend to show their support.

-Jennifer Williams

President

Aaron Ruben Nelson



THE MEAL OF CONDOLENCE

The first meal eaten by the mourner upon return from the cemetery is called the meal of condolence. Prepared and served by friends, this meal creates an atmosphere of support. It is a Jewish custom to include hard-boiled eggs, symbolizing eternal life.

THE SHIVA BENCHES

Seating for the mourners should be arranged. The mourners may be lower to the floor than the general seating. This custom is to reinforce the mourners' inner emotions. Feeling "low" is a symbol of depression, in Jewish law depression is acted out literally. When individuals visit to offer comfort, it is appropriate for the mourner to be seated.

THE SEVENTH DAY AND BEYOND

On the seventh and last day of shiva, the mourners are required to sit for only a small part of the day followed by a walk around the block, symbolizing the return to the regular world.

Shiva is followed by a longer and less intense stage of mourning. First is shloshim (thirty), a thirty-day period and next is a year of mourning. Jewish law mandates a full year of mourning for *K'riah* mourners.

On the anniversary of the Hebrew date (some use the English date) of death, mourners light a t 24-hour candle and recite the mourners' kad-dish. This is called the *Yahrzeit* date.

Four times a year, (Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Passover and Sha-vuoth) individuals in the Jewish community remember the deceased loved ones in communal prayer called Yizkor.

Again, a 24-hour candle is lit.



Shiva Rituals

WASHING OF THE HANDS

Upon returning from the cemetery, each individual pours water upon their hands before entering the shiva home. Washing of the hands symbolically represents separating ourselves from the spiritual impurity Judaism attributes to death. Containers of water and paper towels should be placed near the entrance to the home.

COVERING OF MIRRORS/

WEARING OF SHOES

Mirrors in the house of mourning may be covered to disassociate ourselves from our general concern with our physical appearance. Along the same lines, mourners may choose not to wear shoes of leather. Slippers and canvas gym shoes provide appropriate footwear for the mourners. These rituals emphasize a period of time set aside for spiritual reflection.

LIGHTING OF THE SHIVA CANDLE

A shiva (seven day) candle should be kindled upon return from the cemetery and placed in the room where shiva will be observed. It symbolizes the soul of the human being, as the psalmist states:
“The Candle of the L-rd is the soul of man.”

Etiquette for the house of Shiva

- ✧ Remember the most important reason why you are visiting-to comfort the mourner (s).
- ✧ Unless an announcement is made to the contrary, all friends and acquaintances are welcome to visit during shiva.
- ✧ There is no need to ring the doorbell.
- ✧ If you are bringing food, take it directly to the kitchen.
- ✧ Keep conversation to a minimum. Take your lead from the mourners and wait until a mourner addresses you first.
- ✧ When there are more visitors than there are available seats in the house, it is not a good idea to linger.
- ✧ Pay your respects and try not to congregate with others who want to pay their respects.
- ✧ Arriving at regular meal times may not be the best time to visit. If you do arrive during a meal, wait patiently and if invited to eat, make sure the mourners eat first.
- ✧ While there may be much food at the shiva home, do not arrive expecting to be fed.
- ✧ Volunteer to be present for the daily minyan (prayer service) at the shiva home.
- ✧ If you cannot go to the shiva home, a phone call expressing sympathy is also acceptable.
- ✧ If you do not know the time honored declaration which is traditionally recited as you are about to leave, then simply say, “May G-d soon comfort you upon your loss together with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem”.



Jewish Funeral Practices

WHEN DOES THE SERVICE TAKE PLACE?

The funeral takes place without any unnecessary delay. Naturally, if people are coming from out of town, or other issues arise, the service may have to be delayed.

WHAT ARE THE PREPARATIONS?

If the family wishes, there may be the *Taharah*, the ritual washing and purification. The body can be dressed in the *Tachrichim*, the traditional burial garments and a small amount of *eretz Yisroael* (Israel earth) is placed under the head. The simple white garment is meant to signify that we are all equal in death and we are judged on our merits and deeds, not material possessions. Many men and women are buried in their tallit (prayer shawl). When wearing a *tallit*, one of the *tzitzit* (long corner fringe) is cut off, so that is no longer fit for ritual use. This also signifies that the deceased is no longer responsible for doing the *mitzvot*. A casket that is aesthetically acceptable and affordable should be selected. Traditionally, the casket is made entirely of wood. Another option for the family is to have a *Shomer*, a Hebrew word meaning “guard”, sit with the deceased from the time of death until the time of the funeral.

WHAT IS THE *K'RIAH* CEREMONY?

K'riah is the Hebrew word for “tear”. At some point during the funeral, a piece of clothing or a black ribbon is torn and worn as an expression of one’s grief. If the person is mourning the death of a parent, the ribbon/cloth is worn on their left side, over the person’s heart. All other relatives in mourning, which includes siblings, spouse and parents, wear the ribbon/cloth on their right side.

WHAT TAKES PLACE DURING A FUNERAL SERVICE?

The service may consist of Psalms, Scripture readings and a eulogy. Today, there may be more personalization of the service. Several family members, in addition to the clergy, may be asked to speak. This can be discussed with the officiating clergy.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CEMETERY?

Pallbearers may carry the casket to the grave. Some people follow the Jewish tradition that calls for the casket to stop seven times on the way to the grave. This is generally determined by the clergy. After final prayers are said, the burial takes place. Here family and friends are invited to shovel earth into the grave. The actual burial in the ground, *K'vurah*, is a *mitzvah* or good deed. This final act helps mourners with acceptance and closure. *El Maleh Rachamim* is then recited by the clergy. Mourners recite the *Mourner’s Kaddish*. The *Kaddish* is not a prayer of death, but a reaffirmation of life. This prayer is traditionally recited daily for 11 months less one day from the date of death by *K'riah* mourners.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CEMETERY?

The family and friends return home to “sit *Shiva*”. The tradition calls for a bowl of water to be placed outside the home for visitors to cleanse themselves as they return from a place of death (cemetery) to a place of life.

IS IT APPROPRIATE TO SEND FLOWERS?

Traditionally a memorial contribution to a charitable cause will be listed as an alternative to sending flowers. This is a way to honor the deceased that is a preferred and lasting remembrance.