

## A GUIDE TO THE OBSERVANCE OF MOURNING

*(This is a general guide only. For details, consult your rabbi.)*

### **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. Males from the age of thirteen years and females the age of twelve years should observe the laws of mourning. While one is permitted to observe mourning rites for others, those who wish to do so should consult their rabbi.

### **Between death and burial**

During the period between death and burial the mourner known as an *onen*. The *onen* is obligated to arrange for the funeral and burial of the dead. In recognition of this obligation and of the mourner's fragile state of mind at this time, the *onen* is exempt from fulfilling certain other religious duties such as reciting prayers or putting on tefillin, and is not called to the Torah. On Shabbat or a Festival, however, an *onen* may attend services.

### **Mourner's Kaddish**

The Kaddish is generally thought of as a prayer for the dead, but it does not mention death or the dead. Reciting Mourner's Kaddish is an act of faith, expressing hope in presence of grief. We praise God with the words of Kaddish, accepting God's sovereignty and affirming life in world. In Jewish tradition, this takes place in public assembly. Thus the Kaddish is recited only in the presence of a minyan.

The Mourner's Kaddish is recited for one's parents for eleven months (in some communities for twelve months), counting First and Second Adar, in a leap year, as two separate months. Some count these eleven months from the date of death; others from the date of the funeral. It is recited for thirty from the funeral of other relatives. In many communities it is customary to extend the period of saying Kaddish for other relatives, as well, to eleven months.

The Mourner's Kaddish is also recited on each anniversary, the death (*yahrzeit*), and, commonly, at *Yizkor* services on Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesah, and Shavuot.

### **Shivah**

*Shivah* means seven, the number of days in the stage of mourning which begins after the burial. Mourners remain at the home of the deceased or of a mourner, away from their normal routine which death has interrupted. They abstain from business and professional activities, sexual intimacy, bathing, using cosmetics, shaving, and cutting their hair.



**B'nai Shalom**

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A candle which burns continuously for seven days is lit upon returning home from the cemetery. Its light symbolizes the soul; as it says (Proverbs 20:27): "The soul of man is the light of Adonai." Mourners wear a torn garment, do not wear leather footwear, and sit on low stools or benches. Exceptions may be made for those for whom these restrictions might cause difficulty. There is a widespread custom that mirrors, symbols of vanity, are either covered or turned to the wall in a house of mourning.

The day of burial counts as the first day of *shivah*, with the first three days constituting the period of most intense mourning. During this initial period a mourner should not greet people, but may initiate a conversation. *Shivah* ends on the morning of the seventh day, one hour after awakening. Shabbat is included when counting the seven days, though on Shabbat one practices no public signs of mourning; one may dress normally and sit on regular chairs. On Friday or the day before a Festival, *shivah* is observed until mid afternoon. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or a Festival cancels the remainder of *shivah*, provided that the mourner has observed at least one hour of *shivah* before the holiday. If one is unable to observe *shivah* before the Festival, or if burial took place during the intermediate days of the Festival, observance of *shivah* does not begin until the conclusion of the Festival.

The mitzvah of comforting mourners (*nihum avelimim*) is fulfilled by a personal visit to the house of mourning. When visiting a house of *shivah*, it is appropriate to offer the mourners these formal words of consolation: "Ha-makom y'nahem etkhem b'tokh sh'ar avelei Tziyon virushalayim" - "May God comfort you among those who have mourned Zion and Jerusalem." Customarily, the mourner is seated when people offer condolences, and does not act as a host or hostess.

A mourner may attend synagogue services on Shabbat during *shivah*, and to hear the *Megilot* on Purim and Tishah B'Av. Indeed, it is customary for mourners to attend synagogue services on Shabbat where they are greeted by congregation with the formal words of consolation after *L'khah Dodi* on Friday evening.

At the end of *shivah* the mourners should take a short walk, symbolizing their return to life's normal routine.



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### Services in a house of mourning

It is customary to hold services in the home where *shivah* is observed. This is considered an honor to the deceased and to the mourners, who are thus enabled to pray with a minyan and recite the Kaddish. However, certain changes are made in a service held in a house of mourning.

During daily morning services, certain prayers are omitted: the priestly blessing (*page 43*), *Tahanun* (*page 59*), *El erekh apayim* (*page 64*), *la-m'natze-ah* (*page 79*), and the sentence "*va-an izot b'riti*" in *u-va l'Tziyon* (*page 80*). Tefillin are worn, as usual. Hallel is not recited aloud in the presence of a mourner; it may be recited privately, or the mourners may be asked to step out for a moment. The mourner should be encouraged to lead services, but may not receive an *aliyah* to the Torah. (A Torah is not required in a house of mourning unless it will be read on at least three occasions.) If a mourner leads the services, it is a common custom for the sentence beginning "*titkabal tz'lot'hon*" in *Kaddish Shalem* at the end of the service to be omitted. At both morning and evening services, an additional psalm for a house of mourning (*pages 93-99*) is added to conclude the service.

If Shabbat services are held in the house of mourning, public prayer begins after *L'khah Dodi*. On Shabbat morning, during the week, the mourner should not receive an *aliyah*. If *Minhah* for Shabbat and *Ma'ariv* for the conclusion of Shabbat are held in the house of mourning, "*va-ani zot b'riti*" (*page 171*) and "*va-ani t'filati*" (*page 173*) are not recited. *Minhah*, and "*vi-y'hi noam*" (*page 158*) is omitted at *Ma'ariv*. If the mourner leads *Havdalah* (*page 165*), "*hineh El y'shu-ati*" is omitted and one begins with the *b'rakhot*.

### Sh'loshim

*Sh'loshim* (thirty) ends on the morning of the thirtieth day after the funeral. As with *shivah*, the start of a Festival cancels the remainder of *sh'loshim*. (Consult a rabbi regarding the proper count of *sh'loshim* if *shivah*, itself, had ended early due to the advent of a Festival.) The period from the end of *shivah* to the end of *sh'loshim* is one of transition from bereavement toward a resumption of life's normal routine. During this period, mourners do not wear new clothes or cut their hair, nor do they participate in festive public gatherings. At the end of *sh'loshim* it is appropriate for family and friends to gather together to read or study sacred texts and to recall the deceased. When mourning a parent, mourners continue to avoid public festivities for twelve months.



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## **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 the *yahrzeit* each year.

A *yahrzeit* candle should burn in the home during the twenty-four hour period of the *yahrzeit*, sunset to sunset. When the *yahrzeit* coincides with Shabbat or Yom Kippur, the *yahrzeit* candle should be lit before the Shabbat or Yom Kippur candles. When a *yahrzeit* begins on Saturday night or after Yom Kippur, the *yahrzeit* candle should not be lit until after Havdalah.

Mourner's Kaddish is recited by the immediate relatives at all services on the *yahrzeit*. If one is unable to recite Kaddish on the day of the *yahrzeit*, some consider it acceptable to do so at the Shabbat services proximate to that date.

## **Yizkor**

*Yizkor* ("may God remember"), a prayer in memory of the dead, is recited on Yom Kippur, Sh'mini Atzeret (the eighth day of Sukkot), the last day of Pesah, and the second day of Shavuot. Contrary to widespread opinion, a person with living parents may be present while *Yizkor* is recited.

*Please call Rabbi Tobin, at 913-731-0160 if we can be of any service in your time of need.*



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