

THE PERIODS OF MOURNING

Shiva

Shiva is the seven day period of intensive mourning observed by the immediate family of the deceased. It begins on the day of burial, not the day of death. "Official" mourners include a spouse, parent, sibling, and/or child. Those who have married into a relationship with the deceased are affected by the loss but are not obligated to perform the rituals of mourning.

The mirrors in the Shiva house are traditionally covered, and a seven-day memorial candle is kindled. Mourners sit on lower seats, where possible. It is customary to arrange for a meal of condolence (which traditionally includes round foods such as eggs) to be served to the mourners and those who have returned home with them from the cemetery. If hand washing was not done before leaving the cemetery, a pitcher of water and hand towels should be placed outside the door.

Mourners are encouraged to participate in morning prayer services at synagogue and hold evening prayers in the Shiva house, except on Shabbat. Reciting Kaddish is one of the key parts of these services. Mourners, other family members, or friends may lead the prayer service in the home. Or, you may request Beth El to provide a leader.

While people will be coming to the Shiva home, the mourners are not hosting the event. It is the obligation of the community to support the mourners and thus it is customary to provide the mourners with food and assistance. Friends and relatives should help supervise the preparation and/or ordering of the necessary food and supplies. Beth El provides a platter either for the meal of condolence or for those who will join minyan during the Shiva period. Many who come to the Shiva house will bring food with them.

During the Shiva period, mourners are urged to stay away from work or school to have time to contemplate the meaning of the cycle of life and the adjustments that will be required of them.

Public mourning observances are suspended on Shabbat as the sanctity and serenity of this day supersedes one's personal grief. Mourners are encouraged to attend Shabbat services but are not given an Aliyah. Kria (the torn garment) is not displayed publicly. A major holiday festival terminates Shiva (the clergy can advise you of the specific date).

Shloshim

During the 30 days following burial, except during Shiva, mourners may return to work and normal activities but should refrain from public entertainment or social activities. They are encouraged to attend services on a daily basis and recite Kaddish. Kria is worn by some throughout shloshim, while others cease doing so at the conclusion of Shiva.

Shanah

For the first eleven months following burial, mourners for deceased parents continue to attend daily services to recite Kaddish and continue to refrain from celebratory activities for a full year.

Yahrzeit

Kaddish is recited by mourners each year on the anniversary of the Hebrew date of death.

Yizkor

Mourners recite memorial prayers during services on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Pesach, and Shavuot.