

shiva customs

A guide for the family and visitors.



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“Do what is meaningful to you.

Judaism has many different traditions. Some follow the letter of the law, while others are guided by the spirit of the law. The important thing is to do what is meaningful. The following are traditional guidelines, although, actual observance varies in our Jewish community.

After the burial, mourners return home to sit shiva for seven days. Shiva is a Hebrew word for seven. During the shiva week mourners are expected to remain at home.

There are seven relatives for whom a Jew is required to observe shiva: father, mother, brother or sister, son, daughter, or spouse. During the shiva week prayer services are usually conducted at the shiva house.

I hope this information is helpful.”

***–David I. Jacobson
Founder
Chicago Jewish Funerals***

Shiva etiquette

- ☆ Remember the most important reason why you are visiting—to comfort the mourner(s).
- ☆ No need to ring the doorbell, just walk right in.
- ☆ 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.
- ☆ It is very common to contribute to charitable causes in memory of the departed.
- ☆ If you cannot go to the shiva home, a phone call expressing one's 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 other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."



Shiva Customs

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 of the home.

Covering of the mirrors

Mirrors in the house of mourning may be covered to disassociate ourselves from our general concern with our physical appearance. The covering of mirrors emphasizes a period of time set aside for spiritual reflection.

Doors are left unlocked

Doors are left unlocked so that visitors can enter without knocking or ringing the doorbell, which would distract the mourners from their grief and cause them to act as hosts.

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."

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, creating an atmosphere of support. It is a Jewish custom to include hard-boiled eggs, symbolizing eternal life.

The shiva chairs

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 wearing of shoes

During the shiva period mourners may choose not to wear shoes made of leather. Slippers and canvas gym shoes provide appropriate footwear for the mourners.

Removal of items from the shiva house

It is a custom not to remove anything from the shiva house during the week of shiva. The return of food should be done after the shiva period is completed.

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 then a year of mourning. Jewish law mandates a full year of mourning for one's parents, the mourning period for all others terminates at the end of shloshim.

On the anniversary of the Hebrew date (some use the English date) of death, mourners light a 24-hour candle and recite the mourners' kaddish. This is called the Yahrzeit date.

Four times a year, (Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Passover and-Shavuoth) individuals in the Jewish community remember their deceased loved ones in communal prayer called Yizkor. Again a 24-hour candle is lit.



Mourner's Kaddish

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא (אָמֵן)

Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'mei rabbaw (Cong. Amen).
May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified (Cong. Amen.)

בְּעֵלְמָא דֵּי בְּרָא כְּרַעוּתָהּ

B'allmaw dee v'raw chir'usei
in the world that He created as He willed.

וּמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן

v'yamlich malchusei, b'chayeichon, uv'yomeichon,
May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days,

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

uv'chayei d'chol beis yisroel,
and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel,

בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְנָא קָרִיב וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

ba'agawlaw u'vizman kawriv, v'imru: Amen.
swiftly and soon. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן) (יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמַיָּא)

(Cong: Amen. Y'hei sh'mei rabbaw m'vawrach l'allam u'tallmei allmayaw)
(Cong Amen. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.)

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמַיָּא

Y'hei sh'mei rabbaw m'vawrach l'allam u'tallmei allmayaw.
May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.

וְתִבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא

Yis'bawrach, v'yishtabach, v'yispaw'ar, v'yisromam, v'yis'nasei,
Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled,

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא

v'yis'hadar, v'yis'aleh, v'yis'halawl sh'mei d'kudshaw b'rich hu
mighty, upraised, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He

(בְּרִיךְ הוּא)

(Cong. b'rich hu).
(Cong. Blessed is He)

לְעֵלְמָא מִן כּוֹל בִּרְחָוָא וְשִׁירָוָא

L'aylaw min kol birchawsaw v'shirawsaw,
beyond any blessing and song,

תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנִחְמָתָא דְאָמְרֵינוּ בְּעֵלְמָא וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

tush'b'chawsaw v'nechemawsaw, da'amirawn b'all'maw, v'imru: Amen
praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(Cong. Amen).
(Cong. Amen.)

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים

Y'hei shlawmaw rabbaw min sh'mayaw, v'chayim
May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כּוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

awleinu v'al kol yisroel, v'imru: Amen
upon us and upon all Israel. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(Cong. Amen).
(Cong. Amen.)

לְעֵשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֵמֵי הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם

Oseh shawlom bim'ro'mawv, hu ya'aseh shawlom,
He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace,

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כּוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

awleinu v'al kol yisroel v'imru: Amen
upon us and upon all Israel. Now respond: Amen.

(אָמֵן)

(Cong. Amen).
(Cong. Amen.)

A MODERN TRANSLATION OF THE MOURNER'S KADDISH

Let the glory of God be extolled, let God's great name be hallowed in the world whose creation God willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be praised for ever and ever.

Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom yet we glorify, honor, and exalt. And let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen:

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens, cause peace to descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world, and let us say: Amen.

May the source of peace send peace to all who mourn, and comfort to all who are bereaved. Amen.





The way it should be.

Buffalo Grove ▪ Highland Park ▪ Skokie
tel **847.229.8822** ▪ fax **847.229.1188** ▪ toll free **888.509.5011**
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