

Mourners leave home to attend services in the synagogue on *Shabbat*. On Friday evening, the community greets mourners at the conclusion of the *L'kha Dodi* hymn.

*Shivah* ends on the morning of the seventh day, just after the morning service. Mourners take a short walk together symbolizing the beginning of their return to everyday life.

### After Shivah: *Shloshim*

The month following a death is known as *shloshim* (thirty). The most important act associated with *shloshim* and the yearlong period of mourning for a parent (*shanah*) is saying *Qaddish*. Although the official period of mourning for a parent extends a full year, children recite it only for eleven months. Tradition teaches that divine judgment takes a full year, but because we are confident that our parents will be judged worthy of God's reward before the end of this period, children stop short of a full year of saying *Qaddish*. Mourners of other relatives say *Qaddish* for thirty days. Those who recite *Qaddish* at the daily *minyan* often find themselves warmly reconnected to Jewish life and the supportive community of other mourners

### Visiting the Grave

Many mourners visit the grave at the conclusion of *shivah*, the conclusion of *shloshim*, at the unveiling service of the memorial gravestone, approximately a year after the death, and on the yearly *yahrtzeit*, the anniversary of the death. In addition,

special community-wide *qever avot* services take place in Jewish cemeteries just before *Rosh HaShanah* or between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. We do not visit graves on *Shabbat* or holidays.

### **Yahrtzeit and Yizkor**

*Yahrtzeit*—a German word meaning “the time (*tzeit*) of year (*yahr*)”—is the anniversary of a death (Sephardim call it *Nahalah meldado or Annos*). We observe it on the anniversary of the death, not the funeral. Most people observe it according to the Jewish calendar, others follow the secular calendar.

We light a 24-hour memorial candle at sundown which burns throughout the next day. If the *yahrtzeit* falls on *Shabbat* or a holiday, light the memorial candle first, then the holiday candles. There is no blessing recited when lighting the *yahrtzeit* candle. Those observing *yahrtzeit* attend synagogue services and recite the Mourner's *Qaddish*. It is also a custom to visit the grave on the *yahrtzeit* day if possible. Giving *tzedaqah* (charity) is another way to mark the occasion.

*Yizkor* means “memorial” and is the memorial service recited four times a year in the synagogue on *Yom Kippur*, *Shemini Atzeret*, the last day of *Passover* and *Shavuot*.

May God comfort all who are among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. Amen.

# The First Year of Mourning: From Shivah to Yahrtzeit

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## Healing from Grief

Judaism places loss and grief in the context of family and community. Every law and custom has at its core the imperative to surround those who grieve with a supportive community. Judaism shows us the way to mourn, the way to grieve, the way to recover, the way to remember.

## Shivah

After death and burial, the next phase of mourning comes during *shivah* (seven), the seven-day period beginning immediately after the funeral. Since Jewish law counts a fraction of a day as a full day, both the funeral day and morning of the seventh day count as full days. Thus, one normally “sits *shivah*” from the moment one returns home from the funeral until after the morning service six days later.

However, we reduce the days of *shivah* if the major holidays of *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Passover*, *Shavuot*, or *Sukkot* come during the seven days. While seemingly counter to the purpose of the seven-day grief cycle, these holidays and *Shabbat* are so important for communal solidarity that their observance supersedes the requirements of *shivah*.

## The Meal of Condolence

The last thing we may want to do when we return home from the funeral is eat. But, eat we must, says the wise tradition. The *seudat ha-havra'ah* (meal of condolence) usually consists of very basic foods: a roll or muffin to remind us that death is a part of the cycle of life and a hard-boiled egg to remind us, like the shell, that life is fragile, and like the inside, that when placed in hot water, i.e. difficult times, we, like the egg, become steadfast and strong. Sephardi Jews prepare round lentils, similarity evoking the sense of circularity and cycle. The meal of condolence is not the Jewish version of a wake. There is no obligation to feed visitors at the *shivah* home, although it has become the custom in many communities. In fact, comforters are to serve mourners, not the other way around.

## Comforting Mourners



Traditionally, mourners are not to rise to greet or “entertain” visitors; instead, visitors take their cues about when and what to talk about from the mourner. *Shivah* is a time to remember the life of the person. The role of comforters is to ask about the deceased and to share memories, sometimes through tears and laughter.

## Religious Services

It is traditional practice to hold prayer services daily in the *shivah* home, except on *Shabbat*

when mourners join the community at synagogue. There are three services daily in traditional Jewish observance: *Shaharit* (morning), *Minhah* (afternoon), and *Ma'ariv* (evening). The *Minhah* and *Ma'ariv* services are often held together, separated by a brief break. Some mourners prefer to hold one prayer service at home, usually in the evening.

## Shivah Customs

Over the centuries, customs developed to help mourners do their grief work:

- *Washing hands.* Jewish law stipulates washing hands before entering a *shivah* house upon returning from the funeral. This relates to the idea that contact with the dead makes a person ritually impure.
- *Lighting a shivah candle.* Mourners light a special candle immediately upon returning from the cemetery to the *shivah* house. It burns for the entire *shivah* period. There is no blessing for lighting this candle.
- *Covering mirrors.* The most common reason cited is that mourners should not be concerned with issues of vanity.
- *Mourners stay home, except for attending synagogue services.* This enables the bereaved to focus exclusively on the grief work they must do to return to normal life.
- *Removing shoes.* Often mourners do not wear shoes at home.
- *Refraining from pleasurable activities.* We limit these activities when one is in mourning, although customs vary as to which restrictions – attending a party, listening to band music – apply after *shivah*.
- *Sitting on a low stool.* The very term “sitting *shivah*” probably refers to the practice of mourners sitting on low stools or couches without cushions during the week.