

Between This World and the Next:
Jewish Wisdom on Death and Mourning
Rabbi Tziona Szajman

Session 2 - Sitting Together in the Brokenness: Shiva

“I turned to tradition because that’s all I could do. And those rituals gave me safety. They were beautiful in their simplicity, in their respect for the unfathomable trauma loss is every time, and the unbearable pain this loss was this time.” — Rabbi Menachem Creditor

1. Kriah (Tearing the Garment)

Genesis 37:34 “Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days.”

II Samuel 1:11 “David took hold of his clothes and tore them.”

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah 340 “One who mourns must tear [their garment] while standing... over the heart.”

Zohar I:113b

When tearing occurs below, tearing is aroused above.

A death creates rupture in the spiritual fabric. The mourner tears clothing to embody that rupture physically. Human ritual action mirrors cosmic reality.

2. Kaddish: For parents, Kaddish is recited for eleven months, and for other relatives for thirty days. After burial.

Theology of the Kaddish

Blessing of God in Time of Pain	Or Intercession of Soul?
<p>Job 1:17-21 “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother when suddenly a mighty wind came from the wilderness. It struck the four corners of the house so that it collapsed upon the young people and they died...”</p> <p>Then Job arose, tore his robe, cut off his hair, and threw himself on the ground and worshiped.</p> <p>יְהוָה נָמוּן אֵי יְהוָה לָקַח יְהוָה אֶת שְׁמֵי יְהוָה מִבְּרָד:</p> <p>He said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; GOD has given, and GOD has taken away; blessed be GOD’s name.”</p>	<p><i>Mahzor Vitri</i>, the liturgical guide composed in the twelfth century by R. Simcha of Vitri, a student of Rabbi Solomon b. Isaac (Rashi),</p> <p>Recitation of the <i>Kaddish</i> was framed as a means by which the living could help redeem the souls of their deceased relatives from suffering in Hell (<i>Gehinom</i>).</p> <p>Note: Gehenna, is often understood as a place of purification for the souls of the wicked, is said to have been created before the world.</p> <p>Midrash: Seven things were created before the world was created. They are: The Torah, Gehinnom, the Garden of Eden, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, Repentance, and the Name of the Messiah.</p> <p><u>Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 3:3</u></p>
<p>Yerushalmi Talmud <i>(Berachot 9:1,13b)</i></p> <p>.. All one’s life there is surety, for so long as a person is alive he has hope, but, once he has died, his hope is lost.</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud <i>(Sanhedrin 104a)</i></p> <p>The son makes the father meritorious; the father does not make the son meritorious.</p>
<p><u>Sotah 49a</u></p> <p>The Gemara poses a question: But if everything is deteriorating, why does the world continue to exist?</p>	<p>Leon Wieseltier, <i>Kaddish</i> (1998), 174-175</p> <p>My father was a troublesome man... there comes a moment</p>

<p>The Gemara answers: By the Kaddish that is said in the order of prayers, after the passage that begins: And a redeemer shall come to Israel, which includes the recitation and translation of the sanctification said by the angels, and by the response: Let His great name be blessed, etc., which is recited after the study of aggada. As it is stated: "A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself; a land of the shadow of death, without any order" (Job 10:22). Therefore, it can be inferred from this verse that if there are orders of prayer and study, the land shall appear from amidst the darkness.</p>	<p>when the parent becomes the child and the child becomes the parent..</p> <p>I think that <i>kaddish</i> is the perfect symbol of such a reversal. Suddenly the chain of transmission turns around. <i>He</i> needs <i>me</i>. The pathos of kaddish lies in the magnitude of the helplessness of the dead, in the magnitude of their dependence upon the living....</p> <p>Jacob Horowitz comments: "As the parent has mercy on his children, so must the son have mercy on the forlorn soul of his father and his mother." There is the reversal.</p>
--	---

Question: Is Taharah to entrance to heaven or to show respect to the dead? Is Kaddish to honor our loved ones and praise God even in pain and loss, or to control God's judgement?

Mourner's Kaddish in English Translation

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen. May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

Question: Why did our ancestors say kaddish in a minyan?

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 393:3

During the seven days, the mourner does not leave the doorway of their house. Therefore, community members come to pray with them.

Talmud Bavli Megillah 23b

Matters of sanctity are not recited with fewer than ten.

How else do we honor the memory of loved ones?

Kitzur Shulhan Aruch 26:22

Even though saying Kaddish and the prayers are beneficial for the (deceased) parents, nevertheless they are not the essence. Rather, the essence is that the children should act in a righteous manner, for in that way they benefit their ancestors...and a person should command his children to perform a certain mitzvah, and if they fulfil that mitzvah, it is considered more worthy than the Kaddish.

In Reform Judaism, religious decisions are arrived at by individuals or communities who take into account all the factors that seem relevant to them and then choose accordingly. Decisions are not imposed upon individuals or communities “from the outside,” whether by rabbis or lay leaders. We seek guidance from the Jewish legal tradition, without a belief in its binding nature. – Rabbi Mark Washofsky

3. Washing Hands נטילת ידיים

Upon leaving the cemetery, many Jews wash their hands, a symbol of turning from death back to life. Reform Judaism explains possible historical reasons including hygiene, demons, and tahara (ritual impurity).

4. Lighting Shiva Candle

Some say this ritual originated in the 13th century and others with the kabbalists of the 17th century. The kabbalistic teach that the candle symbolizes the soul and the *shechinah* (God's presence and light), giving us comfort during the our pain of mourning as we look at it.

Proverbs 20:27 - The human soul is the lamp of God.

Thousands of years of Jewish traditions, scaffolded one generation upon the next, all adding layers to comfort the mourner. How does this make you feel? Do you lean into these generations that came before in time of need?

5. Meal of Condolence

Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 27b

The first meal is not from the mourner's own food... They serve the mourner eggs and lentils... because they are round.

The shiva observances are geared to bringing the community into the home of the mourner... why?

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 378:1 - The mourner should be fed by neighbors and community members.

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 393:3 - During the seven days, the mourner does not leave the doorway of their house.

6. SHIVA - Seven Days

Genesis 50:10 “And he observed a mourning period for his father seven days.” (Joseph mourns Jacob.)

Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 27b - Three days for weeping, seven for mourning, thirty for refraining from grooming.

For 7 days, and if that is too much economic hardship, the rabbis say for 3 days, the mourner traditionally avoids: Leaving the house, Work, Grooming and haircuts, Entertainment and music, Sexual intimacy.

What are your thoughts and feelings? Does shiva need to be seven days?

7. Sitting Low

Job 2:13 “They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”

Lamentations 2:10 “They sit on the ground in silence, the elders of Daughter Zion; they have thrown dust upon their heads and girded themselves with sackcloth.”

Talmud Bavli Moed Katan 27a “A mourner sits on a low stool.”

Kabbalah understands mourning posture as spiritual reality: When a person is grieving, their inner world collapses. Sitting low expresses humility and brokenness. The mourner descends — and the Divine Presence descends to meet them.

Zohar III:71b "The Shechinah dwells in a place of brokenness... and is found with one whose heart is crushed and humbled. As we learn in Psalms 34:19 God is close to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit.”

9. Sitting with the Mourner

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 6b - The reward for attending a house of mourning is for the silence.

It is the custom not to say "hello" to the mourner which would require him to say "hello" back. We do not require the mourner to speak. We follow their lead. We are simply present.

9. Leaving the House After Shiva

At the end of the week, mourners take a short walk outside, often accompanied. A gentle transition back into the world. You do not step back into life alone.

Online Resources:

Reform Judaism's relationship with Jewish law and texts:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/reform-judaism-halakhah/>

Reform Movement - Medically Assisted Suicide:

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/tfn-no-5754-14-337-364/>

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/5783-1/>

Conservative Movement – Medically Assisted Suicide:

https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/dorff_suicide.pdf

Reform Movement - Cremation:

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/corr-169-172/>

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/corr-228-231/>

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/5784-4-splitting-cremated-ashes-for-burial-in-two-places/>

Conservative Movement – Cremation:

https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19861990/shapiro_cremation.pdf

https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/alternative-burial_kalmanofksy_newversion.pdf

Parking Lot - Questions to address in future lessons:

1. Shemira – explore more potential meaning it could carry for our community.
2. The Modei Ani Prayer thanks God for returning our soul to our body. Do our souls leave our body during sleep? How is the soul connected to the body? How does the soul leave the body?

Rabbi Toba Spitzer: https://www.dorsheitzedek.org/divrei-torah/rabbi-toba-spitzer?post_id=934460

<https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/lifecycle-rituals/death-mourning/do-jews-believe-afterlife>

Berachot 57b13 - The numbers **five, six, and ten** are **mnemonics** for the categories to follow. The Gemara says: There are **five** matters in our world which are **one-sixtieth** of their most extreme manifestations. **They are: Fire, honey, Shabbat, sleep, and a dream.** The Gemara elaborates: Our **fire** is **one-sixtieth** of the fire of **Gehenna**; **honey** is **one-sixtieth** of **manna**; **Shabbat** is **one-sixtieth** of the **World-to-Come**; **sleep** is **one-sixtieth** of **death**; and **a dream** is **one-sixtieth** of **prophecy**.

Moed Katan 28a:19 -

Rava said to Rav Nahman: Master, appear to me in a dream after your **death**. And he appeared to him. Rava said to him: Master, did you have pain in **death**?...Rav Nahman said to him: Like the removal of **hair** from **milk**, which is a most gentle process....But nevertheless, were the Holy One, Blessed be He, to say to me: Go back to that world, the physical world, as you were, I would not want to go, for the fear of the Angel of **Death** is great.

Shemot Rabbah 5 - God thunders marvelously with His voice” – The soul, at the moment that it leaves the body [also makes a very loud sound], and the people sitting with him do not hear. That is: “God thunders marvelously with His voice.”

Zohar, Mishpatim 3:79

And as at man’s birth the Holy One provides him with a **soul**, so also does He provide him with this “other” **soul** specially for the Sabbath: at the same time not “diminishing” the food, raiment, etc., from...his week-day **soul**.