

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

Session 3 - The Long Arc of Mourning: Walking the Jewish Path Through Grief

"What I needed most of all was to tell my stories, over and over again so that their truth could emerge as in each telling I dug deeper into them; I needed willing listeners who understood the sacredness of this time and their important role as comforters, who didn't mind a little repetition, who could kindly check my revisions and remind me to stay away from making myth of story. I needed, through these stories, to keep David alive; I needed to preserve my memories of our life together by entering them into the collective memory of the people he held dear".

---EVA M. HAGENHOFER

When we are present for the bereaved, we become God-like, in much the same way that God was present when He confirmed the covenant with Isaac after his father Abraham's death. That is why visiting mourners during shiva are considered a mitzvah, and a good deed. And a large part of this is about good listening. Above all else, we must hear the mourners; we must let them talk. If they are angry, the compassionate thing is to let the anger flow. If they are full of sorrow, the compassionate thing is to let the sorrow spill out. And if they are full of joy, the compassionate thing is to let the joy float free. Whatever the mourner's emotion, the shiva visitor must always focus on the bereaved, because shiva gives the mourner structure after death has ripped the structure of life away.

– Rabbi Joseph S Ozarowski

"The Kaddish means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had...the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link."
 --Henrietta Szold

The first aspect of supporting grief is providing freedom to express feelings. There are no right or wrong feelings, no correct order in which to feel them, and no stages to climb toward an endpoint.

Theressa Rando Six Rs	Williajm Warden Four TASKS	Jewish Tradition
Recognize React Recollect Relinquish Readjust Reinvest	I: To accept the reality of the loss II: To process the pain of grief III: To adjust to a world without the deceased IV: To find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.	SHIVA - 7 days to Cry – confined to house, sit low, no Torah, no relations SHELOSHIM - 30 days to Mourn – leave house, regular work/chairs/Torah/relations, -still no haircuts/shaving, parties, music YUD-BET CHODESH – 12 (or 11) months to Honor our Parents <i>Timeline offers us structure, time for grieving and windows to enter back into life.</i>

Shloshim (Hebrew for thirty) is a less intense period of mourning following *shiva*. It lasts for thirty days after interment and is the final mourning period for all relatives except one’s parents, who are mourned for a full twelve months. During *shloshim*, mourners resume many of their social and professional obligations, but refrain from attending festivities or parties. In this way, they are “eased” back into their normal routines.

Today is the end of shloshim for my beloved husband— the first 30 days. Judaism calls for a period of intense mourning known as shiva that lasts seven days after a loved one is buried. After shiva, most normal activities can be resumed, but it is the end of shloshim that marks the completion of religious mourning for a spouse. A childhood friend of mine, who is now a rabbi, recently told me that the most powerful one-line prayer he has ever read is: “Let me not die while I am still alive.” I would have never understood that prayer before losing Dave. Now I do. ---SHERYL SANDBERG

Psalms 13:3 - How long will I have cares on my mind, **grief** in my heart all day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

TORAH: “The children of Israel wept for Moses... **thirty days**” (Deut. 34:8) “They mourned for Aaron **thirty days**” (Num. 20:29)

Shloshim can be less than thirty days when a Jewish holiday occurs during Shiva and thus annuls the remaining days of Shiva mourning. One then calculates the Shloshim day as follows:

Passover and Shavuot: Fifteen days after the holiday ends. *Rosh*

Hashana: Between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur one observes those days as one does between Shiva and Shloshim, then Yom

Kippur annuls the remaining part of Shloshim. *Yom Kippur*: Between Yom Kippur and Sukkot one observes those days as one does between Shiva and Shloshim, then Sukkot annuls the remaining part of Shloshim.

Rambam - Hilchot Avel 13:11

A person should not become excessively broken hearted because of a person's death, as Jeremiah 22:10 states: "Do not weep for a dead man and do not shake your head because of him." That means not to weep excessively. For death is the pattern of the world. And a person who causes himself grief because of the pattern of the world is a fool. What should one do? Weep for three days, eulogize for seven, and observe the restrictions on cutting one's hair and the other five matters for 30 days.

YIDDISH TALE: Napoleon was riding past a Paris synagogue on Tisha B'Av, and noticed how the Jews were sitting on the floor and weeping. He sent in his assistant to inquire as to what the Jews were crying about. His smirking assistant returned and informed Napoleon in a condescending voice that the Jews were mourning the destruction of the Temple that had occurred centuries earlier. Napoleon thought for a moment and remarked: "A people that has mourned the loss of their Temple for so long will survive to see it rebuilt."
(*Napoleon in Jewish Folklore*, 1942)

Unveiling/Memorial - The unveiling is a formal ceremony following the placement of the *matzevah*, the gravestone, at the cemetery. Customs differ, but the unveiling is generally held any time after *shloshim* and up to a year after burial.

Yahrzeit is the yearly anniversary of a loved one's death. It is traditional to light a 24hr candle in one's home and to say kaddish in Synagogue, both home and communal tethers to memory.

My mom's Yahrzeit is August 14^t, and that date is seared into my memory. As the season changes and the anniversary approaches, the ritual becomes a gathering point for her family. It's a chance for me to gather my children, to call my siblings and my dad, and to tell stories about my mom. In my house, we usually move the pictures of my mom that we have all around our house onto the table.”

-- Rabbi Jocee Hudson

“I noticed that Yahrzeit communities start to form. People who share a week come to know one another, and check in on one another, and remember together.” -- Rabbi Jocee Hudson

KABBALAH - Isaac Luria taught: The yahrzeit is a time when the soul **returns to be present in some way**. Learning Torah in their name creates **spiritual light** that attaches to the soul. Visiting the grave can be a moment of connection between worlds.

RAMBAM taught – the yartzzeit has nothing to do with the soul returning. It is a time to honor and revere our loved one's memory.

Yizkor - As part of the synagogue service on the final day of Passover, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*, and on *Yom Kippur*, special *yizkor* (memorial) prayers for deceased relatives are recited. Many Jews attend synagogue services at these times to recite the *yizkor* prayers. A special 24-hour candle is also customarily lit on these days, without a blessing. Some families light one candle for each beloved deceased family member, while others light one candle for all those they are remembering.

ETHICAL WILLS

What shall I write, dear children, of all our bitter grief? I had always stood so high in his eyes, and now I was abandoned with eight of my twelve forlorn children-and one of them, my daughter esther, betrothed! May God have mercy on us and be the Father of my children, for He is the Father of the fatherless! I truly believe I shall never cease from mourning my dear friend.

Sunday, the 24th of Tebet, 5449 [January 16, 1689], he was buried with all honour. The entire community was struck with horror and grief at the sudden blow of it.

With my children gathered around me, I sat upon the ground for the seven days of mourning, and a sad sight it must have been to see me sitting thus with my twelve fatherless children by my side.

We immediately secured our ten men for the daily prayers in the house of mourning, and we engaged scholars to "learn" torah day and night through the whole year-be it not to my reproach! And the children diligently said kaddish for their departed father. And there was not a man or woman who did not come, daily, to comfort the bereaved among us.

And, alas, there was no dearth of tears. We passed the seven days of mourning as you may only too well imagine. "I fed on the bread of tears and drank tears in great measure" . . . "What thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?"[Ps 80:5]

I was "cast down from heaven unto the earth." [Lam 2:1] Thirty years I had enjoyed my beloved husband and he had bestowed on me all that a true wife could want. And he had, as I might say, thought of me after his death, so I could lift my head in honour. But what does this all avail me? The decrees of Heaven cannot be changed.

Still, dear children, our good friend died the death of the righteous. He lay but four days on his bed and kept his mind undimmed until he breathed his soul away. "Let my last end be like his," [Num 23:10] and may his merits stand us in our need! He had the good fortune to leave

this sinful world in honours and riches, and lived to see no unhappiness in his children. For "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." [Is 57:1]

But when his soul took wing, there flew with it all my glory, wealth and honor. And I remained behind with my single and married children, steeped in care and woe which every day grew greater. "My friends and my kinsmen stand aloof from my sore." [based on Ps. 38:11] Aye, my sins had brought me to this pass; and I shall never forget him as long as I live, for he lies buried in my heart.

My dear mother and her children sought to comfort me, but it was as oil poured upon fire, and my grief grew only the worse for it. Visits of consolation kept on for two or three weeks; and then everyone forgot all about me and the very people we had helped most began to repay us with evil, as it the way of the world. At least I fancied so-for a widow, God forgive me! Who has of a sudden lost her all is quick to see and take offence and often unjustly.

The days, my beloved children, that the dear friend of my heart lay dead before me were not as bad as those that followed. Then it was my grief deepened hourly. But in His mercy the great and good God at length brought me patience so that I have taken care of my fatherless children as far as a weak woman can, bowed with affliction and woe.

Glückel. The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln. Marvin Lowenthal, trans. Copyright © 1977 by Schocken Books (New York), pp. 152-154. Reprinted by permission of Schocken Books

TALMUD - Avot de Rabbi Natan 14

When the son of Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai died, his disciples came in to console him. R. Eliezer came and sat before him and said, 'My master, is it your wish that I say a word in your presence?' He replied to him, 'Speak'. Thereupon he said, 'Adam, the first man, had a son who died, and he allowed himself to be comforted in his loss. And whence do we know that he accepted condolence? For it is stated, *And Adam knew his wife again.*

Therefore do you also accept condolence'. He retorted, 'Is it not sufficient for me to bear my own grief that you have to mention Adam's grief?'

Then R. Joshua entered and said, 'My master, is it your wish that I say a word in your presence?' He replied to him 'Speak'. Thereupon he said, 'Job had sons and daughters who all died in one day and he allowed himself to be comforted; you too accept condolence. And whence do we know that Job accepted condolences? For it is stated, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*. He retorted, 'Is it not sufficient for me to bear my own grief that you have to mention Job's grief?'

Next R. Jose entered, sat before him and said, 'My master, is it your wish that I say a word in your presence?' He replied, 'Speak'. Thereupon he said, 'Aaron had two grown sons and both died in one day, yet he allowed himself to be comforted, as it is stated, *And Aaron held his peace*, the phrase *held his peace* implying that he accepted condolence. Therefore do you also accept condolence'. He retorted, 'Is it not sufficient for me to bear my own grief that you have to mention Aaron's grief?'

Then R. Simeon entered and said, 'My master, is it your wish that I say a word in your presence?' He replied, 'Speak'. Thereupon he said, 'King David had a son who died, and he allowed himself to be comforted; do you also accept condolence. And whence do we know that David accepted condolence? For it is stated, *And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her; and she bore a son, and called his name Solomon*. Therefore do you also accept condolence'. He retorted, 'Is it not sufficient for me to bear my own grief that you have to mention King David's grief?'

...Finally R. Eleazar came in and sat before him and said. 'Let me tell you a parable. To what is the matter like? To a man with whom a king had deposited an article of value. Daily the man wept and exclaimed, "Woe is me! when will I be free from the responsibility of this trust?" You, too, my master, had a son versed in the Torah, who had studied the Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa, Mishnah, *halakoth* and *'aggadoth*. He has departed sinless from this world. Surely you should derive comfort from having returned your trust intact!' Rabban Johanan said to him, 'Eleazar my son, you have comforted me as men can comfort'.