

SAMS Mourning Guide

This guide is meant to help those who, sadly, find themselves mourners– to explain the process and its symbols from the funeral through to the future years of remembrance. This is not a substitute for asking questions, and you are encouraged to call R. Adam to discuss anything here or ask any further questions. You can reach him on his mobile: 07462 579 760.

What Makes a Mourner?

In Judaism, a mourner (*avel/ah*) is someone who is grieving for a deceased relative. One becomes a mourner upon losing one of seven types of relative: father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, or spouse. From the moment of the deceased's death until a year later, the life of the mourner is marked by their loss. The goal of *all* of what you will find below is to help provide structure, distraction, closure, and ultimately, comfort to the mourner.

In the eyes of our tradition, mourners are seen as a particular category of people with whom interpersonal relations may be different. The mourner is exempt from many halakhic obligations (all obligations during Shivah), and they are freed from the burden of socialisation both during the short and long term of their grieving period. Our tradition scaffolds the year of mourning into three distinct periods: Shivah (the seven days following the funeral), Sh'loshim (the first thirty days), and Sh'neim Asar Chodesh (the first twelve months/year). The idea is to move from an intense period of grief, to one slightly more diffuse, and then ultimately to allow grief to dilute over the course of the year that follows a death.

It is one of the chief obligations with which we concern ourselves to comfort mourners (*nichum avelim*). Thus, we aim for the minimal amount of work and responsibility to be borne by the mourner, instead relying on the community to help provide for basic needs. The first and chief obligation of the mourner is to ask for help. Please let us know what we can do to help you– you are allowing us to perform a sacred *mitzvah* by doing so.

How to Prepare for Shivah

Shivah begins upon returning to your home from the funeral. Your family may involve SAMS, in addition to, or as well as, other communities or rabbis. Shivah means 'seven' and it marks out seven days from that moment until you 'get up' from Shivah. Below are some things to do and consider before Shivah begins:

–Decide what times you will 'sit.' What times during the day are you open to receiving visitors paying their respects? The default is all times of every day, but that can be as overwhelming as much as it can be incredibly powerful. You may choose to establish one time each day (ie. 2–5pm) or several, but it is worth considering what will be best for you and your family, acknowledging that you'll also likely want time alone or with your immediate household. Once you've decided, this information should be sent to info@e-sams.org and will go out in community messaging.

–Decide how many evenings you would like evening prayer service (Ma'ariv) to be held in your home. Traditionally we hold the daily evening service in the home of a mourner (so they don't have to leave



to pray with others). Normally this would be each evening – but some may choose to do it for fewer days, depending on the circumstances. We can also do morning services (Shacharit) or afternoon services (Minchah) if those better suit your family.

–*Consider food.* Many people who visit will want to bring you food. If there is anyone in the household with dietary restrictions, strong preferences, or allergies– please communicate this to us (info@sams.org) so that we can tell the community on your behalf.

–*Prepare your home for Shivah.* There are many customs related to how to prepare a Shivah home. If someone dies at home, it is customary to immediately open all the windows, cover mirrors and spill out any standing water. This is due to a fear that the spirit, while leaving the body, could become trapped inside the house or within reflective surfaces. Regarding food– while people will likely be bringing more food than you could possibly eat, you may want to arrange a small meal for immediate family upon returning from the cemetery (*se'udat havra'ah*). There are a variety of symbolic or traditional foods for this meal, which vary by community. You will also likely need plates, a hot water urn, low-sitting chairs (see below), and siddurim (for prayer services). These can be provided by SAMS, thanks to our Chevra Kadisha.

Shivah – The First Seven Days

During Shivah, a variety of restrictions on behaviour are imposed on you, as a mourner. These are meant to *relieve* you of obligations and allow you to simply sit with grief rather than care for yourself or others. For some, these are helpful, for some they are a distraction. As the purpose of all our rituals is to help the mourner, you should do what will help you– and if you have any questions about any of it, do contact R. Adam.

–*Not working.* You should try, as much as possible, to refrain from working and other regular daily activities. The idea is that our grief transforms us– and it is important, spiritually and psychologically, to sit with that and not try to avoid it through 'normal' life.

–*Sitting low.* The mourner often will sit on low chairs (special Shivah chairs can be provided by SAMS), or on the floor.. This is to mark and symbolise that they have been 'brought low' by grief. Obviously this should only be done if you are able-bodied and if doing so won't cause more pain or suffering. Some may choose to only utilise low chairs during times when people are visiting, others may choose not to use them at all.

–*Personal care.* Traditionally men do not shave during the period of Shivah (7 days) and Sh'loshim (30 days). Some choose to extend this to Sh'neim Asar Chodesh (12 months) as well. This falls into a broader category which includes a variety of practices which are meant to free you from worrying about your appearance. For some this may mean not wearing makeup, not wearing new clothing, jewellery, etc. Many also do not wear leather, especially leather shoes during this week.

–*Tearing clothing.* Before the funeral you will have been offered the chance to do a ritual known as *k'riyah* (tearing). This is the ripping of a garment which you will then wear throughout Shivah. This is



not only a powerful symbol of grief, but also a useful marker to others that you are in mourning, without you having to explain.

– *Receiving visitors.* Many people may visit during the Shivah times you have set, whether for prayers or otherwise. You are not obligated to greet them, indulge in small talk, try and feed them, or in any way act as the host. Traditionally, a visitor to a Shivah home, would sit quietly and would only speak if the mourner engaged them. While this isn't often done in such a ritual manner, the idea behind it is important– you are liberated from the normal conventions of social interaction. You can be morose and taciturn, quiet or loud, silly or sad– all can be expressions of grief. For these seven days, at least, everyone else is meant to give you the space to *choose* how you want to interact, which is a rare privilege indeed. Various people may call from SAMS, representing the Care Committee as well as the Chevra Kadisha, especially if they cannot visit; if you do not wish to talk, do not feel obliged to.

– *Prayer Services.* The evening prayer service (Ma'ariv) will be held in your home during Shivah. You as the mourner may wish to offer words of eulogy as part of the service. During the service two additions are made to the normal weekday prayers: 1) a memorial prayer in honour of the deceased, and 2) Mourner's Kaddish (see below), which you along with any other mourners in your home, will recite. You may wish to arrange for some or all of these prayer services to be livestreamed so that family and friends who aren't able to be with you physically can join. This is perfectly acceptable, and you are encouraged to do whatever is feasible to seek comfort from as many people as possible. If this is something you wish to do, you should ask for someone to arrange this for you – it can be a family member or friend – rather than be the organiser yourself.

Getting Up from Shivah

Shivah ends on the evening following the sixth day after the funeral. This is marked by actually physically getting up and walking around outside. For many, they will have been sitting inside their home for a week, and Shivah is ended by re-engaging with the outside world. You once more stand, put on normal shoes, and go outside, together with family and friends or alone, to walk. Upon returning home from this walk, you are no longer in Shivah, but instead have transitioned to the period of Sh'loshim. You should not do this alone, but ask for people to join you if you would like.

Sh'loshim – The First Thirty Days

Sh'loshim is the remainder of the first month following the funeral (ie. the three weeks following Shivah's completion). This is a transitional period, during which the mourner returns to work and to many aspects of regular life, but may choose to retain many of the restrictions as well. In particular, most who are in the period of Sh'loshim will not attend festive occasions (weddings, parties) or listen to live music. This is to recognise that you should not be forced to 'get over' your grief– rather you allow a titrated dilution of it over time. Mourners continue to recite Kaddish daily with a minyan (if possible) for all deceased (except for parents, see below).

Sh'nem Asar Chodesh – The First Year

The first twelve months (ie. year) after the funeral is the third designated time. Here the restrictions are even more diffuse. Some may refuse invitations to weddings or other festive occasions – or will attend but



refrain from dancing, or leave when the 'party' part begins, but by-and-large most life returns to its normal course. For those who are mourning a parent, Kaddish is still said daily (ideally with a minyan) for the full course of the year. This is due to the fact that our tradition believes it takes a full year for the soul of one deceased to completely transition out of the physical world. During that time, it is the responsibility of the deceased's children to say Kaddish in their memory, helping to ease their transition into the next world.

From the conclusion of the first year onwards, it is customary to return to the cemetery for the ritual of a Stonesetting (also called an Unveiling). This is when the headstone is laid (or revealed). Typically a small group of family and friends will gather at the grave, recite memorial prayers, and for children of deceased parents to recite the Mourner's Kaddish. Thus the Stonesetting, assuming it's done roughly to coincide with the conclusion of Sh'neim Asar Chodesh marks the conclusion of the formal grieving process, having come full circle through grief and mourning and leaving behind the status of 'mourner' at the graveside, exactly where it began a year prior.

How to Mark a Yahrzeit

Following the first year of mourning's completion, the mourner then marks the anniversary of the death of their beloved. This is often called by the Yiddish word *yahrzeit* (a year's time), or in some communities an *año* (year) or *nahalah* (inheritance) or *yom hillula* (day of praise). There are varying customs for this observance, but a few are described below.

- *Lighting a candle.* Most will light a 24-hour candle on the Hebrew-day (sunset-sunset) which marks the day of the person's death who they have grieved for. These can be purchased in any Judaica shop or kosher grocery store or often in supermarkets with a Kosher section. The candle is an apt symbol, as Proverbs says 'the soul of a person is God's candle.'

- *Aliyot on Shabbat.* During the week prior to the day, you will be invited to come to synagogue on Shabbat and to receive an Aliyah to the Torah. After your Aliyah, the memorial prayer (El Malei Rachamim) will be recited and will include the name of the person whose *yahrzeit* you are observing. If you have any questions about how to take an Aliyah, don't hesitate to ask. You will receive a letter at the beginning of the Hebrew month during which the *yahrzeit* occurs to remind you.

- *Visiting the cemetery.* Many will make a point of visiting the cemetery on or around the anniversary of a loved one's death. When visiting a grave, we typically place stones on the headstone or grave. This originally had a practical application; headstones are rather a new innovation and so prior to them, those visiting a grave would add a stone to construct a cairn over the grave, marking where it was. We've continued the custom and it is particularly powerful because of the symbolism of stone- which, while not alive, persists for ages and ages unchanged.

About Kaddish

The Kaddish is not a prayer that has anything to do with death, really. It began as a simple prayer which would be said following lessons in the Beit Midrash (Study House), and then was used as a way to divide up parts of the prayer service. During the Crusades, many communities started to use the Kaddish as a prayer of mourning. This is because of its language: 'May God's name be praised and sanctified.' The phrase, 'the



sanctification of the Name' has long been a euphemism for martyrdom and closely connected with the praise for righteous people who have died. That connection grew over time and the result is that today, although the Kaddish does not reference death at all, it is the prayer most associated with the practice of mourning and grief. You will recite it at the funeral, in the Shivah home, with a minyan for the first thirty days (or twelve months) and every year thereafter on the anniversary of a death. Therefore we've included the text, translated and transliterated below.

Note: We typically insist on a minyan for the recitation of Kaddish, but this isn't strictly necessary. We want there to be a minyan because we want you, the mourner, to be around others in a time of grief. Therefore it became customary that we would only say Kaddish if at least ten were present. There can be many exceptions to this, and if you have any questions, do ask R. Adam (mobile: 07462 579 760).

Text of Kaddish:

<p>אבל: יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. [קהל: אמן]</p>	<p>Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba</p>	<p>Glorified and sanctified be God's great name</p>
<p>בעלמא די ברא כרעותה וימליך מלכותה בסיכון וביומיכון ובסני דכל בית ישראל בעגלא ובזמן קריב, ואמרו אמן: [קהל: אמן]</p>	<p>b'alma di-v'ra chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba'agala uvizman kariv, v'im'ru: "amen."</p>	<p>throughout the world which God has created according to God's will. May God establish God's kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.</p>
<p>קהל ואבל: יהא שמה רבא מברוך לעלם ולעלמי לעלמיא:</p>	<p>Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almaya.</p>	<p>May God's great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.</p>
<p>אבל: יתברך וישתבח ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתבשא ויתהדר ויתעלה ויתהלל שמה דקדשא. בריך הוא. [קהל: בריך הוא:]</p>	<p>Yitbarach v'yishtabach, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam v'yitnaseh, v'yithadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,</p>	<p>Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be God, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.</p>
<p>לעלא מן כל ברבא בעשי"ת: לעלא לעלא מפל ושירתא תשבחתא ונחמתא דאמירן בעלמא. ואמרו אמן: [קהל: אמן]</p>	<p>l'eila min-kol-birchata v'shirata, tushb'chata v'nechemata da'amiran b'alma, v'im'ru: "amen."</p>	<p>May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. God who creates peace in God's celestial heights, may God create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.</p>
<p>יהא שלמא רבא מן שמיא וחייו עלינו ועל כל ישראל. ואמרו אמן: [קהל: אמן]</p>	<p>Y'hei shlama raba min-sh'maya v'chayim aleinu v'al-kol-yisrael, v'im'ru: "amen."</p>	<p>May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. God who creates peace in God's celestial heights, may God create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.</p>
<p>עושה שלום בעשי"ת: השלום במרומיו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל ואמרו אמן: [קהל: אמן]</p>	<p>Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol-yisrael, v'imru: "amen."</p>	<p>May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. God who creates peace in God's celestial heights, may God create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.</p>