

Comportment in the House of a Mourner

1. Shiva really means the number “seven.”
2. Source for Shiva: Jerusalem Talmud says that it was instituted by Moshe.
3. Amos 8:10 predicts the punishment for society’s immorality and injustice, and says that G-d “shall turn your feasts into mourning...” So Shiva parallels the feasts of Pesach and Sukkot which last 7 days.
4. Rabbi S.R. Hirsch explains: We consecrate seven days during which we remove ourselves from our everyday life, in order to tap into the spiritual energies that the holiday offers.
5. In the process, we revitalize ourselves and return to our daily routine on a higher spiritual level.
6. Similarly, when a loved one has left the world, we take an equal amount of time to fully experience our grief without distraction, in order that we may reorient ourselves toward our true purpose in living and return to our day-to-day existence with a deeper awareness of life.
7. Explanations for the observance of the seven day Shiva period:
8. A) Death makes man question the immortality of the soul. “Whoever comes in contact with a dead person (i.e. man’s mortality) shall be defiled.” The mourner must purify himself and his perspective, reconciling the limitations of the physical with the eternality of the spirit. This purification process is the essence of mourning.
9. B) Shiva promotes introspection and Teshuva. The mourner has time to contemplate the meaning of life and death, and man’s duties toward G-d and fellow men. The observance of Shiva in the proper spirit should move him to reassess his goals and values and resume his everyday life on a higher spiritual plane.
10. C) Respect for the deceased by demonstrating that his death has left them unable to resume normal life without first observing a period of mourning and adjustment.
11. D) We affirm the intrinsic and immeasurable value of human life. We mourn the loss of the image of G-d inherent in every man, as well as the virtuous deeds performed by the deceased. We mourn for the spiritual elevation the deceased could have

achieved if he were still alive. Death should remind the mourner to seek spiritual growth in accordance with his ability.

- 12.E) Therapeutic device designed to help the mourner overcome his depression and despair. The mourner is in dire need to work out his grief.
- 13.With these ideas in mind, we can understand all the customs involving the behavior of the mourner, and specifically the behavior of those who come to visit the mourners.
- 14.We all want to do what is proper. Sometimes we just don't know what to do, and therefore take our leads from what other people do. People are well intentioned, but you have to know what the Torah says about the subject in order to do it right. Unfortunately, visitors may do things, out of ignorance, which are counter productive to the goals of a Shiva visit.
- 15.Nichum Aveilim is a Mitzva. So like all Mitzvos, you have to learn how to do it properly.
- 16.This visit is called "Nichum Aveilim" - Consoling the mourners.
- 17.Rabbi Hirsch stresses two aspects of offering comfort to mourners;
- 18.Nichum has a dual meaning: "to comfort" and "to alter one's thinking."
- 19.For example, the word "Nichamti" – "I regret having made man." Meaning that G-d changed his mind.
- 20.**The act of Nichum Aveilim is therefore a way of changing the mourner's emotional state from depression to renewed hope – which is truly the ultimate comfort a person can have.**
- 21.In the context of "Hamokom," [the customary words of condolence which we give when leaving the house of a mourner] the entire Jewish community reaches out to the mourners to show that they are not alone in their grief. Everyone has a unique role.
- 22.The mourner needs to be reminded that all precious things in life (including our loved ones) are only lent to us by the Creator, and we must give thanks to Him even when he takes these treasures back.

23. Rambam says that comforting the mourners is an act of genuine loving kindness not only for the survivors but to the deceased, as even the soul is in need of consolation.
24. The soul of the deceased, which hovers over the home during the Shiva, derives a lot of spiritual satisfaction when it hears good things said about it.
25. Rabbi Aryeh Levine: "When a person loses a close relative, apart from his anguish and suffering, his faith in G-d may have been shaken. Thus, when comforting a mourner, not only does the visitor console him by sharing in his sorrow, but he encourages him to strengthen his faith and trust in G-d."
26. **The various laws regarding this Mitzvah are designed to not distract the mourner from his bereavement. It is a time for the mourner to get in touch with his soul, and that needs a serious and quiet atmosphere.** [see attached piece from the Rebbe of Piecetzno]
27. **Idle and frivolous chatter are counterproductive to the Shiva experience.**
28. We should never say to the mourner, "What can you do - we can not change the judgement." This has blasphemous tone since it implies that if we could change G-d's decree, we would; and if it were up to us we would run the world differently. Rather, we should strengthen the mourner to accept the decree with love.
29. The mourner may not greet anyone.
30. Rather than initiating the conversation, visitors should wait for the mourners to speak first. So don't worry about "what should I say?"
31. However, if you see that it is difficult for the mourner to begin, you should take the initiative and start speaking as necessary.
32. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelvitz once entered a house of mourning, sat down, and wept uncontrollably. Although he left without uttering a word, the mourners knew that this Torah giant truly empathized with their pain.
33. When entering the home or leaving the home, the visitor should not extend greetings to him.
34. It is preferable to make condolence calls after the third day.

35. It is preferable to have no condolence visits on the Shabbat. The mourner may say "Good Shabbos to others, who may then respond to him. Don't do anything that will cause the mourner to get emotional!
36. A mourner should not rise from his place, even for the Rabbi.
37. Don't bring little children to the Shiva house.
38. A Shiva house has open doors. So just walk in – don't knock or ring bell. Look for a sign on the door which may give instructions.
39. **There is no obligation for the mourner to feed the guests.** If anything, it can lead to a prohibited atmosphere of happiness and joy, which is forbidden.
40. Visit at reasonable hours and don't overextend your welcome.
41. Just coming to attend prayer services does not necessarily bring comfort to the mourner. Certainly, all efforts should be made to ensure that there is a minyan for services. However, too many visitors for services can cause a burden for the mourner, if his home has been turned into a synagogue. You may spend your time more effectively with a well placed Shiva call during the middle of the day instead of being one among many attending the service.
42. End off your visit with the customary words of comfort: "Hamokom Yenachem Osicha (chem) Besoch Sha'ar Aveili Tzion Ve'Yerushalayim," [May the Almighty comfort you among those who are mourning for Zion and Jerusalem.] and the mourner says Amen.
43. On Shabbos, we can console the mourner with the words "Shabbos Hi Milenachem Unechamah Kerovah Lavo" - "On Shabbos we do not console, but a consolation should soon be on the way." Some opinions are more lenient and even allow one to say, "Hamokom Menachem..."
44. Support may need to continue after the Shiva. Once the Shiva is over, people could tend to forget the mourners. Truthful, the mourners need a lot of support after the Shiva as well.
45. If one is unable to personally visit the mourner, he may call him. However, it will lack the aspect of giving honor to the mourner and is lacking the giving of comfort to the departed soul.

46. Lastly, as with all acts of Kindness – make sure that it indeed is an act of kindness, where **what you do is in the best interest of the mourner**, and not what is convenient for you. Do your kindness with “Sechel” - intelligence. E.g. do car pools during the week instead of visiting for hours and sending food that will never get eaten.

Excerpt from “The Conscious Community” written by the Rebbe of Piezetsno:

1. We have many feelings that, if we expand on them, can be like rivers of rushing water coming out of a faucet. However, if we don't expand on them, they get lost.
2. Sometimes a person will have, for example, a feeling of unpleasantness inside himself, which he doesn't know how to respond to. He may eat, sleep, or drink thereby transforming that feeling into it's opposite.
3. Truthfully, the person was experiencing **“a part of the Neshama trying to express itself.”** He felt a tentative probing of the soul wishing to find expression with a pure thought.
4. This can also happen when a person feels joy or any other similar emotion.
5. Since this expression of the soul is not garbed in physical attire, the person does not know what he is really experiencing. **It is a type of fluttering of the soul, which he physically responds to in the form of eating, drinking, etc.**
6. This physical response does not suppress the throws of the soul. Rather it amplifies the senses of the body to the point where it is blaring so loudly that it drowns out the noise of the soul.
7. This is similar to the loud drum beats which drowned out the sounds of a crying child that his parents are having burned alive at the “Molech” [type of idol worship.]
8. We amplify our physical senses to such an extent until the trembling of the soul passes in vein. **The result is: “a spiritual miscarriage of the soul.”** A great opportunity

presented itself and we let it expire without being developed. The spiritual emotions were there, but you took your physical life and made it louder.

9. This explains why we overeat or keep very physically busy in response to certain moods we experience. This is a big mistake.

10. This is why music is getting louder and louder in our times. It is man's greater effort not to think about anything. All you have to do is to make the world louder than your emotions, so that you won't have to face your emotions. This also explains why some people act as if they are "the life of the party."

11. Obviously any attempt to connect to our souls via meditation will require a quieting down of all the physical noise that constantly surrounds us.

12. Therefore, the Rebbe exhorts us to **know how to observe** everything that happens inside you and outside of you. Observation is not merely seeing something's existence. It is a type of birth-process that brings out aspects worthy of observing. If you have a certain feeling, you need to observe it to the point where you bring out a developed image in a way you can sense.

13. Unfortunately, people do not stop and look at the most important things in life. The beginning of our service to Hashem requires a person to contemplate – to know how to look at something. We have to learn how to stop the film and consider the event that is taking place. We have to learn to see it with holy eyes, and see the presence of Hashem.