

Helping mourners mourn during *shiv'a*

To encourage a more comforting and sensitive *shiv'a* visit, the Rabbinical Assembly prepared a guide of time-honored and effective practices for consolation. This summary is edited from the work of Rabbis Pamela Barmash and Elliot N. Dorff.

It is a mitzvah to comfort family, friends, community members, neighbors who have suffered a personal loss by visiting with them during the period they are sitting *shiv'a*.

1. If you attended the interment and did not ritually wash your hands before departing the cemetery, please wash (without a blessing) at the entrance of the mourners' home; a pitcher of water, a basin, and towels may be placed at the entrance.
2. Just walk in; do not ring the doorbell.
3. If you bring food for the mourners, please take it directly to the kitchen. Be sure to label the food as dairy, meat, or parve, and whether it contains gluten, peanuts, nuts, or other allergens. Visitors to the house of mourning should not expect to eat there, though the mourners may invite you to do so.
4. Our custom is that mourners may open a conversation. If silence feels uncomfortable to you, gently ask the mourner to share a memory of the deceased. Tears are expected. (It is generally not helpful to offer mourners platitudes like "Be strong" or "He/she is in a better place.")
5. If mourners have specified hours for visiting, please respect their privacy.
6. At services, try to participate as much as you can; follow the service in Hebrew or English, stand or sit as you are able with the others in the space.
7. Even if you encounter people you know at the *shiv'a* house, please remember that you are not there for a social visit.
8. A mourner may be from out-of-town, or others may be unfamiliar to you. If it feels appropriate, offer your condolences and introduce yourself.
9. Younger children who are mourners need to be comforted by their friends. If deemed appropriate by their parents, you and a friend might supervise play outdoors or in another room.
10. Aside from prayer times, it is best to keep the visit brief, no more than 30 to 45 minutes. Upon departing, a tradition is to offer a formula of consolation. One option is

מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּנְחַמוּ *min hashamayim tenuchamu*. May you be comforted from heaven.

הַמָּקוֹם יִנְחֶם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר אַבְיֵלֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלַיִם

hamakom yenachem etchem b'toch aveilei tziyon viyrushalayim.

May God console you among the other mourners in Zion and Jerusalem.

— Rabbi Jonathan Kremer