

CHAPTER SIX

SHIVA: THE WEEKLONG MOURNING PERIOD

Checklist: Who Sits Shiva?

Jewish law requires sitting shiva for seven immediate relatives:

- Father
- Mother
- Son
- Daughter
- Brother (including half-brother)
- Sister (including half-sister)
- Spouse

Checklist: Preparing the Shiva House

- Light the seven-day memorial candle.
- Cover the mirrors in rooms used by the mourner. (Some have the custom to cover photographs, as well.)
- Bring in and set up shiva chairs for the mourners and regular chairs for other visitors. Consider bringing in a coat rack, if necessary.

- Make sure that the mourners have appropriate non-leather footwear available.
- Bring the necessary religious articles, typically kippot (yarmulkas), prayer books, talleisim, and copies of commonly recited psalms.
- Prominently display the text of the traditional blessing of consolation.

Checklist: The Meal of Consolation (Seudat Hahavrah)

- Mourners should not eat or drink from the time of interment until the meal of consolation.
- The meal consists of bread, a cooked food and a beverage. Customarily, a round food is included—traditionally lentils or hard-boiled eggs—symbolizing the ever-turning cycle of life. Many people arrange for (round) bagels with lox or tuna fish to be delivered.
- Each mourner eats separately, sitting on mourner’s chairs or on the floor.
- Neither the mourner, nor family who reside with the mourner, may prepare the meal.
- The meal of condolence should be prepared by neighbors, friends, or other family members.
- Non-mourners should not partake of the meal of consolation.

- *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) is not recited with a *zimun*, even if three mourners happened to have eaten together.
- The meal of consolation is omitted on fast days, late in the day on Fridays (i.e. from three-quarters of the day and on), or late in the afternoon on the eve of major Jewish festivals.

Checklist: The Primary Shiva Restrictions

A mourner may not:

- Leave the shiva house without a very compelling reason. However, getting a little fresh air in the yard is permitted.
- Sit on a regular-height chair (except when eating a meal at a table).
- Greet people in the usual manner.
- Bathe or shower.
- Shave or get a haircut.
- Cut their nails.
- Wear leather footwear.
- Wear cosmetics or perfume, or apply lotions.
- Wear jewelry.
- Change outer layers of clothing. Changing socks and undergarments is permitted.

- Work or engage in business activities.
- Engage in marital relations.
- Listen to music or engage in other inherently pleasurable activities. (Many include in this holding their young child or grandchild.)
- Study Torah.
- Engage in activities that will distract them from mourning, like watching movies or reading novels.

Checklist: Activities That Are Allowed during Shiva

A mourner may:

- Brush their teeth and use mouthwash.
- Use deodorant.
- Sleep in their own bed. (Some have the custom of sleeping with one less pillow—such as one instead of two—or other act to reduce their level of comfort.)
- Drink alcohol moderately.
- Eat meat.

Checklist: Shabbat in a Shiva House

Shabbat suspends shiva for the duration of the day. Major festivals that begin during the week of shiva terminate shiva altogether.

- A mourner pauses his or her shiva observance on Friday afternoon, or the afternoon preceding major festivals, so that they have enough time to prepare for Shabbat.
- The mourner may not get a haircut, shave, or trim nails before Shabbat.
- Overt demonstrations of mourning are suspended on Shabbat.
- Mourners may sit on chairs that are regular height.
- Mirrors are uncovered (with the exception of a room in which Shabbat services are conducted, if a mourner prays at home, as one may not pray in front of an uncovered mirror).
- The mourner may shower close to Shabbat. Mourners may change out of their mourning clothes and wear Shabbat clothing and leather shoes.
- The mourner may attend the synagogue on Shabbat, but may not lead the services (unless there is no one else who knows how to do so). Nor may a mourner be called to the Torah.
- A mourner should sit in a different seat in the synagogue, at least six feet away from his usual seat.

- During Friday night services, mourners stand outside until the end of the Kabbalat Shabbat service and enter when greeted by the entire congregation, who offer the traditional blessing of consolation,

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים
“Hamakom yenachem etchem b’toch shar aveilei Tzion v’Yerushalayim.”
- Mourners may exchange greetings on Shabbat.
- The most common custom is for mourners to refrain from singing, “Shalom Aleichem”, upon returning home from synagogue.
- Mourners do not bestow blessings on their children Friday night, even if it is their usual custom to do so.
- A mourner may otherwise participate fully in the Shabbat meal, including singing *zmirot*.
- More private methods of mourning remain in place on Shabbat.
- Marital relations are prohibited.
- Torah study is prohibited. However, the mourner may follow the Torah portion being read in synagogue, but without reading any commentary.
- Once Shabbat ends, all the shiva restrictions resume.

Checklist: Prayer in the Shiva House

- Ideally, the mourner should lead the service.
- If the mourner cannot lead the service, he should still recite Kaddish.
- There are two versions of Kaddish recited during services: the Mourner's Kaddish and the Rabbis' Kaddish. Be sure to have the right text.
- Birkat Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing) is omitted from the repetition of the Amidah.
- תחנון (Tachannun) is omitted.
- אל ארך אפים ("O God, slow to anger"), the paragraph that proceeds taking out the Torah, is omitted.
- The mourner is not called up to the Torah. If he is the only Kohen in the synagogue, and there are ten men not including the mourner, he should temporarily step out of the room.
- יהי רצון ("May it be Your will") paragraph recited before returning the Sefer Torah is omitted.
- Psalm 20, למנצח ("For the Conductor"), which is typically recited between אשרי (*ashrei*) and וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן (*u'va-l'Tzion*), is omitted.
- The second sentence of וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן, which starts with "וַאֲנִי וְזֹאת בְּרִיתִי אִוְתָם" (*Va-ani zot briti*) is omitted.
- Psalm 49 is added to the end of the service to allow the addition of another Kaddish. (On days in which

Tachanun is not recited, Psalm 16 is inserted instead of Psalm 49.)

- On Rosh Chodesh, the common practice is to omit Hallel in a shiva house. Some have the custom of reciting Hallel after the mourner temporarily steps out of the room. On Chanukah, the mourner should step out of the room temporarily and everyone else should recite Hallel.
- The mourner should not participate in the study of Mishnah for the merit of the deceased, as he is prohibited from studying Torah, but he should recite the Rabbis' Kaddish that follows it.
- אבנו מלכנו (Our Father, Our King) is recited during fast days and the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* (the Ten Days of Repentance).
- At the conclusion of Shabbat, ויהיה נעם (*vayhi noam*) is omitted from the evening prayer, and Havdalah should be recited by someone other than the mourner. If Havdalah is recited by the mourner, it should commence with the blessing recited over wine, omitting the more joyous introductory paragraph.
- A mourner should not recite Kiddush Levanah (the monthly prayer sanctifying the new moon) during shiva, provided that there will be sufficient time in the month to recite it after shiva concludes.

Checklist: The Shiva Visit from the Mourner's Perspective

- Don't stand up for a visitor (as a sign of respect), regardless of how important the person may be.
- Don't greet visitors verbally in the ordinary fashion (e.g., by saying "Hello"). Nodding your head to acknowledge visitors is appropriate.
- You should be the one to initiate the conversation, if you feel up to it.
- An example of appropriate conversation would be to talk about the life of the deceased, sharing meaningful stories.
- Don't feel like you must entertain your visitors. They are here for you, not the other way around.
- At the end of the visit, don't say "Goodbye"; but you may thank people for coming.
- When the visitors end the visit by reciting the Traditional Blessing of Consolation, you may respond "Amen."

**TABLE 1: PERMITTED OR PROHIBITED?
ACTIVITIES DURING EACH STAGE OF
MOURNING**

Activities	Onain	Shiva	Shloshim	Twelve Month
Pray	X	√	√	√
Wear Tefillin	X	√	√	√
Recite Blessings, Answer “Amen”	X	√	√	√
Bathe/Shower	X	X	√ a	√
Shave	X	X	X	√ b
Cut Hair	X	X	X	√ c
Cut Nails	X	X	X	√
Apply Lotions	X	X	√	√
Wear Fresh Clothing	X	X	X	√
Have Marital Relations	X	X	√	√
Exchange Greetings	X	X	√	√
Attend Social Events	X	X	X	X
Work	X	X	√	√
Drink Wine	X	√ d	√	√
Eat Meat	X	√	√	√
Perform Mitzvot	X	√	√	√
Study Torah	X	X	√	√
Wash Hands or Face (Cold Water)	√	√	√	√
Wear Leather Shoes	√	X	√	√
Wear Tzitzit	√ e	√	√	√
Leave Home	√	X	√	√
Sit in Chair of Regular Height	√	X	√	√

Wear Cosmetics/Perfume/ Cologne	√	X	X f	√
Jewelry	√	X	X f	√
Have Child on Lap and other Pleasurable Activities	√	X	√	√
Change Outer Layer of Clothing	√ g	X	√	√
Activities that Distract from Mourning	√	X	√	√
Brush Teeth	√	√	√	√
Wear Deodorant	√	√	√	√
Sleep in Own Bed	√	√	√	√
Listen to Music	X	X	X	X
Make Major Purchases (e.g., New House, Car)	X	X	X h	X h
Make Minor Purchases	√ i	√ i	√ i	√ i
Marry	X	X	X j	√
Sit in Customary Seat in Shul	X	X	X	X
Wear New Clothing	X	X	X	X

Notes

- a. Bathing for pleasure is still prohibited; showers for reasons of hygiene are permitted.
- b. Shaving is allowed after thirty days, but at less frequent intervals.
- c. Hair cutting is permitted after thirty days, but only after someone tells the mourner that his hair is too long. After that, haircuts should be taken at less frequent intervals than normal.

- d. A person may drink wine, but only in moderation and not with others.
- e. Tzitzit are worn, but without reciting a blessing.
- f. Married women, and women dating for marriage, may apply cosmetics and wear jewelry.
- g. Clothing may be worn, as long as they are not freshly laundered. Underwear may be worn freshly laundered.
- h. Major purchases are prohibited, unless there is a great necessity.
- i. Purchases for functional needs are permitted, whereas purchases for purely aesthetic reasons are not, unless it is to beautify or enhance Shabbat or festivals. (Dayan Fuerst recommends delaying these purchases, as well.)
- j. If changing the wedding date will cause financial loss and hardship, a rabbi familiar with these laws should be consulted.

Ending Shiva

Shiva lasts for seven days, with both the first and last days being only partially observed. For instance, if shiva starts on a Monday afternoon before sunset, it will end the following Sunday morning (unless one of the situations we discussed earlier shorten it).

Morning services on the final day of shiva are conducted as they have been throughout the previous week. At the end of the service, the mourners sit in their low chairs one last time. The visitors offer the traditional blessing of consolation, at which point the mourners are told to rise from their mourning. It is customary for the mourners to step out of the shiva house and walk down the block together, demonstrating the end of shiva. If the last day of shiva is Shabbat, shiva ends at the end of services. The recitation of the traditional blessing of consolation and walk down the block are omitted.