

Judaism-Mourning for the Dead

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Customs

When Jews near death, family tries to visit and as the time nears, someone stays with them to ensure they don't die alone. Just before death, an act of confession is made along with recital of the Shema.

Upon death, family members usually make a small tear in their clothes, and as a parent on the area the heart would be. They say the blessing "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, the True Judge," which shows they accept the person's death.

"Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning his son for many days" Genesis 37:34

Mourning

There are clear set periods of mourning that reduce in intensity which allows the family to grieve but also help to return to normal life. During the initial mourning stage, families are left to grieve without the need to follow religious rules.

After the burial, a meal of bread and eggs (symbolising new life) is prepared which marks the end of the immediate mourning period.

Shiva (seven days of intense mourning) begins on the day of burial. They don't wear leather shoes, not allowed to shave or unable to focus on their appearance.

Prayer services are held three times a day in the home with close relatives and family members making up the minyan (which is the minimum number of Jews required for certain prayers and services). They recite the kaddish which asks God to pray for the coming age of eternal peace. After shiva, the lesser period of mourning (30 days) takes place. During this time, mourners don't listen to music, go to parties or shave their hair. The final period of mourning lasts around 11 months. Mourners do not attend parties and children continue to say the kaddish if it is a parent who has died.

The Funeral

Some reform Jews accept cremation, but other than that they only have traditional burials. They are usually buried within 24 hours of death, with a family member staying with the body alongside lit candles. The body is prepared by being washed. It is wrapped in plain cloth and a simple coffin is used (to show all are equal in death). The body is transported straight to the cemetery and the services are around 20 minutes, Prayers are recited and the rabbi says a few words about the person. Mourners shovel earth on top of the coffin and wash their hands to show they are leaving death behind.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING