

LOVE AND LOSS IN JEWISH TRADITION

by Cantor Perman

According to [Genesis 23:1–20](#), Abraham's wife Sarah dies in [Kiryat Arba](#) near Hebron in the land of Canaan at the age of 127. Abraham comes to mourn for her and buries her near Hebron (18.3 miles south of Jerusalem).

Abraham did not say Kaddish for Sarah. It wasn't written until the first century B.C.E. However, over time, the Jewish stages of mourning evolved to provide a structured release from grief as a process of returning to normal life.

Traditional Jewish Stages of Mourning

1. **Death, funeral and burial.** Psalms, prayers, and Kaddish are said at the gravesite.
2. **Shiva.** Seven days following burial, the mourner receives community support to express their sympathy for their loss. Prayers and Kaddish are said at home, supported by a minyan.
3. **Shloshim (30).** Thirty days following the burial, a gathering to celebrate or memorialize, the life and memory of the departed. Sometimes at an oneg or luncheon, family and friends gather.
4. **11 Months of Kaddish.** In the year following, the kaddish is recited. Although Kaddish is a prayer said for the departed, it does not mention death. Kaddish affirms the greatness of the Holy One and concludes with a universal prayer for peace. It is written in Aramaic.

Mourning during Social Distancing

Today, our lives are not normal. The traditional Jewish minyan of 10 people is the absolute limit for attendance at a funeral. Recently, I officiated at a graveside funeral in a mask and gloves. Many funerals and shivas are attended virtually on Zoom video conferencing. A minyan is now also virtual, with people counted on a screen. Some members of our community have lost family out of town, beyond the scope of traditional community support. When they return home, how can they share their loss, an insight into their personal reality, during this time of isolation?

SHLOSHIM, the thirty day gathering, might be a possibility. Shloshim is a traditional ritual in which the bereaved can share about their loss. Words of love and memory can be offered at a Friday Kabbalat Shabbat oneg. This can be shared with the CBS community, family and friends of the bereaved during this virtual service.

The stages of Jewish mourning provide psychological support, as the pain of grief lessens. The sequence of Jewish love and loss from death, funeral, shiva, shloshim, and 11 months of Kaddish, provide a sanctuary for memory. Yearly yahrzeits (Yiddish, literally, year time) acknowledge loss. No one is forgotten.

May their memory be for a blessing.

If you would like to observe a Zoom SHLOSHIM please contact Rabbi Rudolph or Cantor Perman.