

Judaism – Significant Practice: Death and Mourning.

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Significance of death and mourning for the community

- Death unites the community because people are taking part in the mourning process
- Nichum aveilim comforting the mourners
- Meal of condolence, even having services in the family's home, creating community so that the mourners can recite prayers, specifically Kaddish
- Demonstrates a reaffirmation of faith in God (rituals and Jewish teachings demonstrate that death is part of the larger experience of Jewish life)
- Community gathering together for ritual – specifically obligations of chevra kaddisha who prepare the body for burial, who guard the body after death (shomer), and how the community joins with mourners at their time of grief
- In some cases, death can be a blessing and offer relief and comfort to people for physical suffering has ended – in other cases death can have a tragic impact upon loved ones and a community – nevertheless, death and mourning rituals are the same, regardless of a person's wealth, stature in community, or age – because death is regarded as the ultimate equalizer

Significance for the individual – people who are mourning

- Mourner – joy is reduced, absence from festive occasions, receiving support and comfort, praying for the soul of their loved one in the context of the community
- Mourning lessens but never stops – rituals are most intense after death, and then through shiva, and begin diminishing into shloshim and throughout the first year, but after the first year, there are still memorial occasions (4 in the year) plus the anniversary of a person's death which are considered appropriate times for remembrance

How does death and mourning make Judaism a living and dynamic religion

- Relevance of Jewish rituals regardless of society – continue to be practiced to aid the healing process
- Structure – set period caring for the deceased, not participating in festivities, being present with your grief before “moving on”
- Shows that life continues, that life goes on (meal of condolence, grief considered as part of the larger community)
- Affirming faith in God even in sad circumstances
- L'chayyim – to life – we are seeking to reintegrate ourselves into life and the life of our family and community – and through these rituals saying that our loved one's life had tremendous impact upon ours
- The cycle of community – community caring for you, and you caring for community when the time comes
- Reminds us of fragility and transience of human life and instills within us a greater appreciation for our lives too
- Returns us to main principle beliefs of the faith too

Jewish belief about the soul – afterlife

- The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit (the soul) returns to Gd who gave it
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