

## SHIVA ETIQUETTE

We received a lot of positive feedback on the first installment of this column. We don't expect it to be weekly, but we will share with you the comments we receive.

For the coming paragraphs, the symbol @ will indicate that the content is from an email we received. We will not indicate name or even the initials of the sender. (Except in one case - see further, maybe). Ed. will indicate a comment from the editor.

Here goes...

@ Thank you very much for the very welcome column about Shiva etiquette and for handling this subject with such compassion. I am often taken aback by chit chat at Shiva calls. When I sat Shiva for my father z"l many years ago, I was comforted most by those who kept their heartfelt words relatively brief and sincere. At one point, I was surrounded by several dear friends who knew my father and spoke of him. At the side of the room there was a row of neighbours, sitting quietly, paying their respects. I was so comforted by their consideration and golden silence - and I later told them so. Sometimes there is no need for words

@ Very good. I add one comment which relates to my sitting Shiva when my wife z"l passed on some 18 years ago and my daughter was then 9½. I made sure that after the funeral she was with friends on our yishuv and her

classmates and not involved with being at the shiva all the time as I felt that with the funeral she had been through enough and knowing that at the funeral she sobbed in the arms of a friend all the time. Perhaps some comment re younger children may be helpful as well.

Ed. A child before the age of mitzvot has no obligation to sit shiva, nor do parents have an issue of Chinuch, training the child for aveilut. What we might consider to be inappropriate behavior during shiva in the case of an adult mourner, should not be of concern when a child is involved. Also keep in mind that a child over the age of mitzvot is still a child (for a few years, at least) and allowances should be made. Great sensitivity is called for.

@ We greatly appreciated the column on "Shiva Etiquette" and hope the author will continue to write about this much needed subject which many times has been overlooked!

@ I think this is a very important column. It's always important to review what we take for granted. I also feel that shiva etiquette is a two way street. There were times that I was at a Shiva and the individual sitting Shiva received an international phone call from an old friend and spoke on the phone for over a half an hour that put the visitors in an awkward position. We left because of time constraints without doing what we were supposed to do. In another occasion the mourner cornered one of his visitors and spoke only to him non-stop.

Also, today I made a Shiva call and said

"Hamakom Yenachem..." to the mourners I knew. Was it my obligation to seek out all the others sitting Shiva and repeat to them... "Hamakom Yenachem...". Your column is important to review all these facets of Shiva Etiquette.

**Ed.** We'll look into this issue and share our findings in a future column.

@ one comment about email/texting/facebook nichum aveilim. When my father passed away 5 years ago, I was truly comforted by how many of my friends said something to me via email/texting/facebook. It was great, because i didn't have to worry about hundreds of phone calls all day. it was great because I didn't have to make small talk on the phone with people who only wanted to let me know that they were around. It was great because i could go back and read them again and again... and so, even on their own, they do the job of nichum aveilim. they really do.

Now, of course, close friends and family who live nearby, better show up to the shiva! but for so many others, this is a great and easy way to be there without showing up.

**Ed.** Interesting how different this email is from the comments about facebook etc. in last week's column. It is important to always remember that we are all different from each other and how people react differently to the same or similar situations. This calls upon SENSITIVITY once again. That might be the most important word for this topic.

@ At my late husband's funeral,

someone came over to me as we were leaving the grave and said: 'Will you be selling your flat now?' Why do we not think before we speak?

**Ed.** Res ipsa loquitur

@ My name is Reesa Stone, and I live in Beer Sheva. My mother passed away 10 months ago in Canada, and I sat shiva here, away from my siblings. It was an interesting experience.

I write a blog about life in Israel, mostly funny.

And so, I wrote a piece about the shiva, with pointers about what to do and what not to do.

Here's the link.

[reesagsworld.blogspot.co.il/2016/12/may-you-be-comforted.html](http://reesagsworld.blogspot.co.il/2016/12/may-you-be-comforted.html)

**Ed.** Worthwhile. Brings up some important points.

**Ed.** In addition to emails, people have commented about the column face-to-face. Imagine that!

Just to finish this second installment of SHIVA ETIQUETTE with one comment.

**NEVER SAY: I KNOW JUST HOW YOU FEEL!**

No one knows exactly how anyone else feels. The comment is perceived as insensitive and... kind of dumb.

**Ed.** We welcome your comments and insights into SHIVA ETIQUETTE, knowing full well that no two experiences are the same.

## SHIVA ETIQUETTE

**Train of thought** (or is it Chain of Thought? Actually - looked it up on Google - both expressions exist, both are over 300 years old): National mourning, 3 Weeks, 9 Days, Shavu'a shechal bo, Tish'a b'Av... the beginning of Comfort, NACHEIM, NACHAMU NACHAMU AMI... personal mourning, sitting shiva, making shiva visits, HaMakom y'nacheim etchem...

So that is why we are introducing this column specifically this week. These words are being written Tish'a b'Av afternoon and will be read when we ease into Nechama...

Most of us have the experience of being Menachem Aveil, visiting mourners during shiva for the purpose of comforting them. And many of us have been aveilim and the comfortees.

Some shiva visits are positive from both sides of the visit; others, not necessarily so.

There are no hard and fast rules for a shiva visit, but there are guidelines. For example, it is commonly held that a visitor should let the mourner initiate conversation, rather than start a conversation. Just one example.

What this column will focus on - and this is a work-in-progress and will depend heavily on TTreader feedback - are suggestions made from personal experiences which others might find helpful.

Please feel free to email [tt@ou.org](mailto:tt@ou.org) with comments, agreeing or disagreeing, suggestions of your own, and so on.

Here are some points to start us off...

- Personal visit, phone call, email, text message, FaceBook posting... It is clear that in most normal situations, nothing matches a personal shiva visit. If that is not feasible, a phone call can work. Be sensitive to length of call and timing of call. For instance, calling during a popular visiting time does not work well. During a slack time, it can be just what the mourner needs.

On that note, NICHUM AVEILIM is about the mourners - not the visitors. Sometimes this means keeping it short; sometimes the opposite. We must be flexible and responsive to the perceived needs of the mourners. And try not to superimpose what you would want - try to figure out what the mourner wants and needs.

Email, Texting, and FaceBook does not really do the job of NICHUM AVEILIM. Certainly not on their own. Following up a personal visit or a phone call, an email (we could say letter or card, but...) or text message can be okay. But not on their own.

- During shiva the mourner is often surrounded day and night by people giving them comfort and words of chizuk. But what happens after the shiva when they go back to their home, (possibly empty home)? Do we 'give them their space' or do we continue with a phone call or visit, to help them know that they are not alone and to help them get through the coming weeks. Obviously it depends on the

person. A more introvert or private person may want to have their own space, but a generally more extrovert person may feel completely abandoned during this time. Know the person you wish to comfort. And obviously, your relationship with the mourner is a big factor.

- Sometimes a shiva house is extremely crowded. This should not mean that a few friends huddle in a corner and have a lively conversation because they cannot get near the mourner. Rather let them go outside until that time that they can get close to the mourner. The shiva house is not meant to be a social occasion.

We now turn to you, dear TTreader. Your feedback or lack thereof will determine if this column's second installment will appear.