

Chapter 12: Prohibitions during the (shib'a) seven days of mourning.

The Abelim -the seven direct relatives who keep the mourning: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister and spouse are subject to certain limitations in what they should or should not do. These prohibitions decrease in intensity as times passes.

The first period is constituted by the shib'a that is, the seven days of mourning counting from the moment that the burial has concluded. During those days the Abelim mainly remain in the house where the mourning takes place, preferably in the house that belonged to the deceased, seating on the floor or on a low bench, receiving the sympathies and condolences of relatives and friends who come to bring them comfort.

The other two periods of mourning are the thirty days and the years, which will be explained afterwards.

1. During the seven days of mourning the Abelim cannot cut their hair or shave. It is also forbidden during this period to cut the nails (*Bekeli*).

The shoes one should wear during these seven days should not be made of leather. The mourners should use cloth-made shoes, like sneakers, even when going out of the house.

In the house of mourning the Abelim should seat on low chairs or in a low sofa or bench.

2. The Abelim should not work during the seven days of mourning, whether they are employed by others or self-employed. If they own a business, the businesses must stay closed, even when they themselves will not be in charge of the day-to-day operations. In a case of a partnership, the business or office should be closed, however, the other partner or partners can make economic transactions for the partnership, as long as the actual office or shop is not open to customers.

If a person lives in extreme poverty or in circumstances where there are big economic losses or if there is a public need for the services and profession of the Abel, a competent rabbinic authority must be consulted to determine if it is

considered an exception on the prohibition of working during the initial period of mourning.

Technically speaking, if the spouse of the Abel has a job by him/herself, for example, if the Abel's spouse is employed in a bank or office, he/she can continue to work as normally would. But the custom in our community is that normally the spouse joins the mourning with the family of the deceased.

3. During the seven days of mourning the Abelim cannot bathe as they normally would. The Abel can only clean his/her face, hands, feet and armpits with cold water. Neither he/she can wash clothes, or use clothes already washed and ironed. In principle one should use the same clothes during the seven day mourning period (with the exception of Shabbat, see below) and especially the shirt where the cut (qeri'a) was performed. If the Abel needs to change his shirt, he should wear another shirt that has not been washed since the last time it was used, and should perform the qeri'a in this shirt as well (no berakha). Underwear can be changed as needed.

4. During the seven days the Abelim cannot have marital relations.

5. During the shib'a, the Abelim should not be greeted normally. If someone greets the Abel, during the first three days the Abel must remind the greeter that he is in mourning. After the first three days, if someone greets the Abel, he can answer as a token of courtesy. After the seven days and until the 30th day, the Abel can greet, but the rule of not greeting people is still in place. When everyone express their condolences the Abelim remain in silence. If someone greets them when it is not proper to do so, the Abelim can express words of gratitude so not to offend those who do not know these customs and could get a wrong impression about the attitude of the Abel.

In some communities it is customary to shake the hand to the Abel, and also the Abel can reciprocate, because shaking hands is considered under the circumstances only an expression of comfort, more than a formal greeting. The tradition of most members of our community, however, is not to shake hands to the Abelim during shib'a.

6. During the seven days of mourning the Abelim cannot study Tora, with the exception of the sections of the Tanakh (the Scriptures) where themes of pain and affliction is developed (for example, the book of Job). One can also study the laws concerning Abelut. The custom in many communities is that during the seven days the Abelim to not go up to read the Tora, even during Shabbat.

7. The seven days begin when the burial has ended. Therefore, the day of burial is considered as the first of the seven days, provided the burial was completed before sunset, even though a whole day of 24 hours did not occurred. Likewise, the seventh day will concluded during the morning of the seventh day, after the Tefila of Shacharit. Thus for example, if a person died on a Monday night or Tuesday in the morning and was buried during Tuesday, as long as the burial finished Tuesday before sunset, Tuesday counts as the first day and the coming Monday will be the seventh day, concluding the seventh-day mourning period. And as we said, in this example, the mourning will be concluded Monday morning, after the Tefila of Shacharit. From that moment the Abel can work, bathe, wear leather shoes, change his clothes, study Tora, etc.

8. Shabbat is counted as one of the seven days. On this day, the rules for mourning prevail only in regards to the personal and intimate prohibitions (*Debarim Shebesiná*), and those prohibitions that are public and visible are cancelled. Therefore, in honor of Shabbat the Abel will change his/her clothes and shall wear leather shoes to go to the Synagogue. However, the prohibitions about marital relations and studying privately Tora are still in place. It is also forbidden to shave, cut one's hair or shower for Shabbat. At the end of Shabbat, when the three stars can be visible in the sky, the Abel returns to wear his torn clothes and his fabric shoes and mourning continues as normal.

9. These rules of shib'a are the same for men and women.