LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

Rend Your Heart and Mend the Pieces: A Halakhically Inspired Ritual Guide for the Teenage Mourner in a Classroom Community

JULIA WHITING BERG

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Rabbinical Program
Los Angeles, California

Date: 1 March 2024

Adviser: Rabbi Candice Levy, Ph.D.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

It is with so much gratitude that I present this capstone project as I conclude my rabbinic studies. I could not have completed this project without the ongoing help of my incredible adviser, Rabbi Dr. Candice Levy. I approached her almost two years ago, not knowing what project I would start. I only knew that I wanted to work with her, having taken her rabbinic codes class on Jewish mourning rituals. Over the course of our discussions, it became clear that creating rituals for adolescents in a school community was the project to which I could bring the most passion and care. Her constant support has helped me vision the scope, sequence, and style of this ritual guide.

Rabbi Levy's compassion and expertise have been critical to creating the ritual guide you will find below. I hope that this project will propel me down a path of finding new ways to make old traditions relevant and meaningful to people living in the modern world so that they might find comfort and reflection during periods of mourning.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, peers, teachers, and mentors who have guided and encouraged me as I worked on this project and throughout my rabbinic studies. I am so excited to bring this project into the world. I could not have done it without my support system guiding me along the way.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my grandfather, Richard Berg, of blessed memory. He died when I was thirteen years old and did not know how to mourn in community. I cannot be sure of how I would have responded to these rituals at that time, but I believe that I would have benefited greatly from having access to them. I hope they will be helpful to others who mourn.

Introduction

When it comes to the process of grieving, adolescents find themselves in a particularly challenging position to focus on these feelings given their stage of development. Adolescence spans a period of time that, while debated by scholars, begins around the onset of puberty (around the age of twelve) and extends, according to some, into the early twenties of a person's life. If it were not enough to simply exist in the world as a teenager in today's world, carrying the feelings that accompany grief after the death of a loved one or community member, is all the more difficult for them. The increasing recognition of the developmental changes that occur in adolescence is not reflected in the classical rabbinic and medieval literature, which does not distinguish this stage of life from adulthood. Either someone was considered too young to be obligated to Jewish law or old enough to be liable to know and keep it. While there were rabbinic debates as to when some of these shifts happened, there was little nuance in thinking about the developmental needs of people of this age group. Thus, the rituals and laws that come from these texts do not necessarily acknowledge how a person within the adolescent development stage might approach the process of grief and in turn, Jewish mourning rituals.

With all of this in consideration, through this ritual guide I hope to provide rituals that might be meaningful specifically to an adolescent population as they navigate their grief over the death of a loved one or community member. For the purpose of this ritual guide, I will be focusing on adolescents who are over the age of b'nei mitzvah, which for many is 12 or 13, and under the age of 18. Although many of these rituals have the potential to be helpful to people of many ages, this range

will serve as my target as this is a group that is viewed as children in their communities and can be found in schools where it might be most effective to present these rituals as additions to the Jewish mourning process. Furthermore, throughout this guide, I will refer to grief and mourning, which sometimes are used interchangeably. However, I will use grief to refer to the natural process that takes place within humans as they experience loss. Often grief is thought to move through many different stages, though often it is not a linear process. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross developed the model known as the 5 stages of grief, which she outlines in her book *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own.* This model is commonly understood today by many as an acceptable way to consider the process of grief.

Meanwhile, I will use the term mourning to refer to specific ways of coping with grief. While this is also a process, I am specifically referring to Jewish mourning process, which traditionally follows a more linear pattern than what I am suggesting grief does. Mourning contains stages that are rooted in a linear timeline (i.e. *shiva*, *shloshim*, *shanah*). I hope that through differentiating between these terms I can help the reader understand both the process of the individual who has experienced a loss and takes on the status of mourner and the mourning rituals themselves that provide a framework for coping with grief.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Jewish Mourning Laws

The Jewish legal tradition has developed over thousands of years, beginning with biblical texts that form the basis of Jewish practices today, extending into early rabbinic texts attempting to establish proper practice, to medieval codes of Jewish law that prescriptively outline their opinion of proper practices, to modern day *teshuvot* (responsa) that inform our ritual decision making in light of modern-day situations that arise. As long as our written tradition has existed, people have been attempting to outline proper guidelines for mourning after a death and supporting those mourners. While there is a natural grieving process that takes place within every individual, the Jewish textual tradition has taken great care to outline the ways that Jewish mourning should take place. According to the ideals of these texts, Jewish mourning should take place in one's community and according to a specific timeline.

The natural grieving process does not always reflect this timeline though, and while it is important to honor tradition, it can become irresponsible to abandon one's natural, individual feelings in service of rituals. Furthermore, not all rituals will feel as meaningful or appropriate in their original forms for adolescents. Many of the mourning rituals that rabbinic codes discuss apply only to immediate relatives. Today there is a need to acknowledge and ritualize the grieving process for those far beyond immediate family. Thus, this ritual guide will attempt to walk a person through the steps of Jewish mourning while acknowledging that a person may find themselves elsewhere on the path of grief in any given moment. In order to understand the impetus behind the rituals that this ritual guide will offer, it is first

important to understand what the Jewish mourning process has looked like over time and from where it stems.

The Hebrew root א.ב.ל means “to mourn” or “to lament.” *Aveilut* (אבלות) is the word that represents the process through which a Jewish person is expected to move in order to show honor to the individual who has died. Over the course of this process from time of death to a year after the burial for parents and thirty days later for all other relatives and on that same day for years to come, mourning rituals often serve a dual purpose, functioning for the mourner (*avel*) and for the deceased. Jewish tradition, in considering the perspective of the person who has died, often refers to the “elevation of the soul” of the dead, whereas rituals for the mourner often are either intended to help the mourner move through their grief or signal to others something about their mourner status to others so that they can support them through their grief. Thus, the mourner is also accountable to the laws/rituals associated with that stage of grief. The extent to which outward symbols and expressions of grief exist in *aveilut* tell us about the importance of grieving in community. If people avoid their grief, they cannot properly work through it and thus are left to suffer the consequences later. *Aveilut*, when done properly, can act as an accountability system for the whole community.

A few of the most significant moments of the traditional Jewish mourning process include shiva (the first seven days after burial), *shloshim* (the first 30 days after burial), and yahrzeit (the anniversary since one’s death). Shiva, or “seven” in Hebrew, is considered the most intense period of mourning and contains the most stringent restrictions. This tends to align with the natural grieving process, as it is the

closest time to the death and burial. Meanwhile, *shloshim*, or "thirty" is the first month of mourning and during this time a mourner's world begins to open up with some restrictions remaining in place. *Shanah* (or as it is often referred to "yahrzeit" in Yiddish), or "year" represents the first year of mourning and an anniversary is commemorated on that day every year after. Over the course of this ritual guide, I will engage in discussion and creation of rituals during these time periods, as they are some of the primary defining periods of the Jewish mourning process.

One mourning ritual that has evolved from biblical times to modern day is the mourning ritual of *kri'ah* or rending garments. *Kri'ah* can serve as one case study for the change that has taken place in Jewish mourning rituals over the ages. These shifts demonstrate that there is still room to adapt these rituals to make sense for different types of people in different types of communities that exist today. *Kri'ah* serves to demonstrate one's emotional distress and grief outwardly. Texts like Genesis 37:34, II Samuel 1:11, and Job 1:20 all refer to a tradition of rending garments as an outward expression of one's grief. In Genesis 37:34, Jacob rends his garments upon thinking that his son, Joseph, has been devoured by a beast. In II Samuel 1:11 and Job 1:20, both David and Job also immediately rend their garments upon learning of a death or deaths of people dear to them. While some of their grieving actions vary, all three characters, in an act of distress, make their grief outwardly apparent by rending their garments. It seems that within their biblical context, there is already an assumed practice of rending garments such that it is their immediate reaction.

Rabbinic codes have prescribed specific timelines for performing the ritual of *kri'ah* for people depending on a level of closeness, as assumed by the rabbis. It is also not always agreed upon how to perform a certain ritual. For example, according to the section of the Shulhan Arukh[1] known as *Yoreh De'ah,* in order to do *kri'ah* properly "another person rends the garment, for then the mourner endures more grief."[2] However, there are also cases in which a person rends the garment themselves. In the codes, *kri'ah* is performed by a wider circle of people than today including anyone present at the moment of a death[3], a student whose teacher died[4], or anyone who hears that their relative died and when they attend that funeral[5]. Meanwhile, today actual *kri'ah* is done by relatives (if at all), and generally only at graveside. What is clear from the act of *kri'ah* is that the act of tearing serves as an act of grief and the act of outwardly showing one's grief on one's clothing is representative of someone's ritual status in the community at that time.

Because of how Jewish values have shifted since acculturating into the American context, it is common for some rituals to shift or be completely omitted from common practice. In recent decades within the American Jewish context, the tearing of ribbons attached to one's outer clothing has become tradition, possibly one that is rooted in non-Jewish practice to wear a black armband as a sign of

[1] The Shulhan Arukh is a rabbinic code written by Rabbi Joseph Karo, a 16th century rabbi in the land of Israel, and includes explanations and other opinions alongside Karo's opinions. He modeled his code as a synopsis of the Arba'ah Turim, a code written by Yaakov Ben Asher in 14th century Spain. Karo also wrote a more extensive commentary on the Tur.
[2] Shulhan Arukh Yoreh De'ah 340:1 (henceforth, SA YD)
[3] SA YD 340:5
[4] SA YD 340:8
[5] Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Avel 2:4 (henceforth, MT)

mourning.[6] This shift demonstrates an acculturation of Jewish people into non-Jewish cultures and a departure from the traditional Jewish mourning rituals, which are sometimes seen as "barbaric" in that they call upon raw, emotional expression of one's grief.

While *kri'ah* is one specific example of a transformed ritual over the course of Jewish history, there are others that people will completely omit from their personal Jewish mourning process, one of the prominent ones being the burial of a deceased person. People have cited both cost and travel concerns as some of the reasons for choosing cremation over burial.[7] According to The Forward, around 20% of Jewish families are choosing cremation over burial for their loved ones or themselves. Whether it is the way a person chooses to tend to the body of the deceased or how they outwardly display their grief, there is a clear shift in the way Jewish dying and mourning rituals take place today.

While many of these rituals have shifted over the course of Jewish history, they have largely remained within the canon of Jewish mourning rituals. In a moment when people flounder for what to do next in the depths of their grief, Jewish tradition provides them with a path to follow. Even when Jewish people have not necessarily led a strict halakhic lifestyle on a regular basis, it has been common for people to turn towards strict mourning rituals in order to feel a sense of purpose and stability in their grief. Often people have found that when they are in a time of grief, they need

[6]Joseph Ozarowski, "Kriah: A Tangible and Obligatory Expression of Grief," My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kriah-a-tangible-and-obligatory-expression-of-grief/.
[7]"Judaism & Cremation - No Longer so Taboo. Why They Choose Cremation," Neptune Society, 2015, https://www.neptunesociety.com/cremation-information-articles/judaism-and-cremation-no-longer-so-taboo.

other people to help them move through the grief. The Jewish model for mourning intends for mourners to be surrounded by people to move through grief and rituals.

This ritual guide will attempt to continue in the tradition of adapting the rituals of our past to serve the needs of adolescent mourners mourning in a school community. While there have always been adolescents and school communities, we now know more about the needs of these populations and thus can use and update ancient rituals to serve those needs we now understand better.

Chapter 2: An Introduction to Adolescent Experiences of Grief

This ritual guide will focus specifically on adolescents and will consider their specific developmental stage, though the rituals can also be used for people in other life stages. In order to understand the need for these particular rituals, it will be helpful to understand the particular experiences of grief that an adolescent might go through that are unique from experiences of younger children or adults.

Before understanding adolescent grief, one should understand how the adolescent brain operates at a baseline. Adolescence is a frenetic time in any person's life, even in the absence of grieving over another's death. In many ways, adolescence is its own form of grieving as a person leaves childhood but has not quite yet entered adulthood. The loss of childhood is not often recognized explicitly and there is not much space to drive that, especially when the moment of transition into adolescence is marked by b'nei mitzvah celebrations instead. With hormones raging, bodies changing, and relying more heavily on peers who are facing similar challenges comes with a great deal of stress that may not have existed earlier on in childhood. As a person enters adolescence around the age of twelve, it is natural for them to want to differentiate from their primary caretakers and rely more heavily on their peers for support.

Not only will they want to differentiate, but they also will push away from those caretakers. According to Dr. Daniel Siegel, this is a natural behavior. However, "shutting others out totally is not helpful (nor is it natural) for anyone. An important take-home message is that it is vital to keep the lines of connection and communications open and to remember that we all–adolescents and adults–need to

be members of a connected community."[8] In order to help adolescents effectively cope during this life-stage, it is important to find a community with which to surround oneself. Because of the natural tendency to push away from their primary caretakers, it becomes more important to have a robust community full of adults who they can deem safe. In an ideal "village," that is the larger community within which a person grows up, there would be many safe people towards whom an adolescent could turn for support. However, Siegel points out that "when the only close adult is your parent, the natural way to go in adolescence is entirely toward other adolescents."[9] From this research, we can understand the importance of relying on community in times of grief and how important this is, in particular, for adolescents.

When an adolescent experiences grief as a result of death, research has found that it is common for adolescents to deny their grief out of "self-protection."[10] During a time when peer support is so vital, adolescents may feel the need to protect their reputation, something that expressions of grief might disrupt. Researchers have often thought that adolescents were not capable of exhibiting grief. However, in wanting to conform to the behavior of their peers, they tend to repress feelings of grief. Reactions that might be viewed as childish like tears and yearning for someone who has died might be perceived "regressing" to an earlier stage of development, which is likely one of the contributors to the lack of outward expression

[8]Siegel, Daniel J.. Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain. United Kingdom: Scribe Publications Pty Limited, 2014, 27.
[9] Ibid., 35
[10] Lenhardt, Ann Marie C., and Bernadette McCourt. "Adolescent Unresolved Grief in Response to the Death of a Mother." *Professional School Counseling* 3, no. 3 (2000): 189–96. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732115, 190.

of grief amongst many adolescents. Researchers have pointed out that “affective denial”[11] is common in adolescents because they feel estranged from their peers amidst their grief.

However, the more composed a person appears during a time of grief, the more likely they are struggling to express their grief, which often leads to “unresolved grief.”[12] This type of grief takes place when “the grief process is prolonged, obstructed, intensified, or delayed.”[13] Because it is so common amongst adolescents to avoid expressions of grief, this becomes even more of a concern for this demographic. They often become the “forgotten ones”[14] because of their reluctance to express their grief. Because they appear to not feel it, there is an assumption that they do not. Grief groups are one option for fostering normalization around grief and groups can be tailored specifically to the adolescent experience. With the fear of being different posing such a threat to adolescents, normalization of grief becomes key to allowing them to express it. While this holds true for people of all ages, it becomes especially salient for adolescents.

Other factors that might contribute to the repression of grief expression amongst adolescents include “ (a) resistance and difficulty in communicating with adults, (b) overconcern with the acceptance of peers, (c) alienation from adults and sometimes friends, (d) lack of knowledge of how persons are "supposed" to act when they grieve, (e) problems with coming to terms with independence and

[11] Ibid, 190
[12] Ibid., 189
[13] Meshot, C. M., & Leitner, L. M. (1993). Adolescent mourning and parental death. Omega Journal of Death and Dying, 26, 287-29.
[14] Lenhardt and McCourt, 189.

dependence, (f) identity, and (g) sexual conflicts."[15] As adolescents attempt to make sense of their new reality, having left childhood but not having yet entered independent adulthood, it becomes particularly difficult to know how one is "supposed" to express their grief and thus they often find themselves not expressing it at all. However, it seems that they "may find it easier to express anger. Anger can give the adolescent a sense of power to counteract their helplessness."[16] Because this is an emotion that is not only normal within the grief process but also easier to express within it, this kind of emotion should be encouraged so as to foster environments in which it is safe for adolescents to feel their grief in ways that might make more sense to them than other emotions.

To combat some of the struggle to express grief, communities that support adolescents can empower adolescents to support each other in their grief, particularly because they are the people to whom adolescents would normally gravitate for community. Additionally, adults in the community can serve as caregivers other than primary caretakers from whom adolescents are trying to differentiate at this time naturally. This ritual guide will offer rituals that allow for outlets not only at the individual level but also at the communal level so that community members can serve as supportive comforters for a mourner. This ritual guide will encourage the expression of emotions associated with grief to allow for the grief to progress more naturally to prevent cases of unresolved grief from arising.

---

[15] Van Dexter, J.D. (1986). Anticipatory grief: Strategies for the classroom. In T.A. Rando (Ed.), Loss and anticipatory grief. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.
[16] Glass, J. Conrad. "Death, Loss, and Grief: Real Concerns to Young Adolescents." *Middle School Journal* 22, no. 5 (1991): 15–17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23023630, 16.

Chapter 3: The Importance of Creating New Jewish Rituals

As a tradition, Judaism is not lacking in rituals, specifically when it comes to mourning rituals. Part of what makes Jewish mourning tradition so powerful is its strong presence and ability to hold a mourner during a time of great chaos by providing rigid structures to guide mourners down the path of grief. However, sometimes our traditional rabbinic codes are very restrictive about whom one is obligated to mourn and how to do it. I believe that there is still plenty of room for creativity when it comes to finding ways for Jewish tradition to help people experiencing grief after death to mourn through Jewish practice.

While much of a mourner's mourning practices take place in their home and speak to the experience of losing a member of one's close family, there are many other devastating deaths that take place all the time. There is plenty of room for school communities to be a place where ritual can thrive, and community members can support each other's grief through mourning rituals. This is where I believe this ritual guide can be helpful in filling in some of the gaps.

Not only are rituals important for creating a sense of obligation to Jewish tradition and the deceased person who is being remembered, but there are also goals that rituals can achieve for those who are living through them. Rabbi Debra Orenstein explains, "psychologists Evan Imber-Black and Janine Roberts name five purposes of rituals: (1) To shape, express and maintain relationships; (2) to make and mark transitions; (3) to heal from betrayal, trauma, or loss; (4) to voice beliefs and create meaning; and (5) to honor and celebrate individuals and life, generally."[17]

[17] Orenstein, Debra. *Lifecycles*. 1st ed. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Pub, 1994. 359.

This ritual guide aims to meet all of these goals in some way. As a person walks through grief, it is helpful to name the relationship that they have lost in the death of a person in their community, mark the transitions from one period of mourning to the next, notice the change happening in themselves as mourning periods pass, to consider the ways in which community and mourning can bring meaning to their lives.

Further, Rabbi Orenstein points out that often in the creation of new rituals, people often err by focusing too much on the experience of the individual and not the whole community. When it comes to death, it is possible that not just an individual but rather a whole community is suffering. While it is important to acknowledge the individual experiences of grief happening in the community, it is also important to acknowledge the communal sense of loss. She warns, "if our focus on the individual takes the personal out of the communal context, we have gone too far. It is as if we have declared that our individual lives are personal and our communal lives, impersonal, and that the two are unconnected."[18] Thus, this ritual guide attempts to meet the mourning needs of both individuals and communities through private and public acts of grieving.

[18]Ibid, 369.

Chapter 4: The Case of Mourning Death by Suicide

Unfortunately, we live in a time when the rate of teenage suicide has increased to devastating heights. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, "in 2021, adolescents and young adults aged 15 to 24 had a suicide rate of 15.15."[19] Furthermore, according to Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from 2021, "10.0% of youth in grades 9-12 reported that they had made at least one suicide attempt in the past 12 months."[20] While these two statistics represent two slightly different age ranges, they do also demonstrate just how common it is among adolescents to consider or die by suicide. Even when teenagers have not experienced it themselves, they often have peers, friends, and loved ones who have attempted or died by suicide.

Because this has become such a common reality, it is important that communities are prepared for how to cope with this specific type of loss when it comes up. There are important prevention steps communities should take to keep these tragedies from taking place. While in many ways a suicide should be treated like other deaths in a community, there is also often another layer to the grief as it pertains to the issue of mental health in these cases. Furthermore, from a ritual perspective, there do not necessarily need to be any differences for mourning a suicide, though below I will outline what has traditionally been marked as different in cases of suicide. This ritual guide will focus on responding to mourning death in

[19] "Suicide Statistics," American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, January 8, 2024, https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/#:~:text=Based%20on%20the%20most%20recent,13%25%20vs.%207%25).
[20] "Suicide Statistics," American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, January 8, 2024, https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/.

school communities in general and rituals can still be done in the case of suicide. However, there will likely be a need for different framing depending on the needs of the family of the deceased and the knowledge of members of the community around the circumstances of the death.

When a suicide takes places in the community, it is important to respect the wishes of the family as to the extent to which that information is shared with the community. While some families might want to name the cause of death, there is still a great stigma surrounding suicide and families might feel averse to its mention. It is worth addressing this issue with the family before framing it to the mourning community. However, the release of this information cannot always be controlled, and educators should use their discretion in deciding how to frame the issue of suicide in helping mourners process their grief.

From a halakhic perspective, suicide has been deemed a category that prevents mourners from performing standard public mourning rituals as the codes assert a prohibition against taking one's life. However, the definition of suicide has been narrowed in such a way that the restrictions one might have once put on mourning for someone who died by suicide are no longer a barrier to mourning today. According to Maimonides' explanation in Mishneh Torah[21] Hilkhot Avel 1:11, "when a person commits suicide, we do not engage in activity on their behalf at all."[22] However, he goes on to narrow the definition of what counts as suicide,

[21] The Mishneh Torah is a rabbinic code written by Maimonides, a 12th century Spanish/Egyptian rabbi. This code outlines laws for Jewish living that offer no explanation, citations or alternative opinions. He aimed to share his viewpoint and promulgate it as the one way to live out Jewish tradition.

[22] The Shulhan Arukh states this as well, though the Siftei Kohen on Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 345:2 clarifies that this does not refer to burial, but rather just eulogizing and other public mourning rituals.

naming that presumed suicide does not fit into this category but rather a sequence of events that leave no room for wondering that makes a person liable for this type of death. Meanwhile, *Semahot*, a minor tractate of Talmud, clearly states that a person must act "consciously."[23] This leads the interpreters to conclude that a person who is still a child or a person under great stress should not be considered as though they are acting "consciously."

As time has gone on, the restriction on how suicides are treated has been severely narrowed such that people who have died by suicide according to non-halakhic standards might be able to have a rather normal Jewish funeral and their mourners would have a largely normal ritual mourning process, albeit different given the circumstances through which they lost their loved one. The issue of mental illness became part of the conversation as early as 1835 with the opinion of Rabbi Moses Schreiber (Hatam Sofer). According to a Conservative Movement responsum, "we can assume that mental illness was the cause of a suicide which seemed to have no reasonable explanation, and permitted a full burial and mourning ritual."[24] This rabbinic workaround has allowed for some peace of mind when it comes to ritually mourning in such a tragic circumstance.

However, to deny the cause of death can either feel stigmatizing to the experience of both the memory of the deceased and the grieving process of the

---

[23] Bavli Talmud Semakhot 2:4

[24] Abelson, Kassel. "Suicide, " Yoreh Deah 345:2, p.7. Committee of Jewish Law and Standards, 2005. http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/eh_66_3_2002.pdf. (accessed February 29, 2024)

mourners, it is important to acknowledge the pain that might come from this particular type of death. This is a difficult issue to navigate because on the one hand, it is helpful to redefine what the medieval ancient and medieval rabbis meant when they restricted mourning obligations for a person who died by suicide in comparison to how we understand it today. And yet, to deny that what happened was suicide might feel upsetting because it continues the stigmatization of mental health and suicide in our world. Through the responsa and other rabbinic texts that come from our tradition, we can relabel many deaths by suicide as a death that is not a suicide halakhically. It is important however to make sure that we deal honestly with the circumstances surrounding a person's death and honor their memory in that way.

Because of the prevalence of suicide in our communities, it is important to be able to provide grief care specifically around mourning someone who has died by these circumstances. In this guide, you will find rituals intended for mourners of all kinds and it is important to find ways to recognize the circumstances of a person's death when it is appropriate both for the family of the deceased and the people mourning. It is important during all moments of mourning to remember both parties involved–the deceased and the mourner–to which these rituals will respond. In these rituals, you will find footnotes that speak to some of the subtleties of handling cases of mourning after death by suicide.

Ritual 1: *Hesped* Wall (Public Wall of Memory)

Rationale

A הספד (*hesped*), often translated as "eulogy," is intended to help a person outwardly mourn the person who has died. This word comes from the Hebrew root "to wail" or "to lament." Thus, it is supposed to encourage feelings to arise outwardly, even to make mourners and loved ones cry.[25] This ritual is a tool that invites all feelings according to Rabbi Anne Brener, LCSW and "impels us to tell the truth about the person who has died and about the loss and its emotional consequences."[26]

According to Maimonides, "one does not eulogize for more than 7 days."[27] Often people hear eulogies being given at a funeral, but this is something that extends all the way through the process of *shiva*, as someone is going through the most acute time of ritual mourning. However, he specifies that this depends on the person who is being mourned. He continues in the same section: "to whom does this apply? The people at large. But for scholars, it all depends on their wisdom [stature]."[28] This instruction provides guidelines for a timeline of what Maimonides believes to be appropriate for this type of public mourning. Maimonides uses the mourning period of Moses as a model for the greatest extent to which people should mourn. He asserts, "we do not eulogize for more than twelve months, for we have no one of greater wisdom than our holy teacher Rabbeinu Hakodesh, and he was

[25] SA YD 344:1
[26] *Mourning and Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing* by Anne Brener, 25.
[27] MT Hilkhot Avel 13:10
[28] Ibid.

eulogized for only twelve months." While Maimonides has a strict schedule for mourning different types of people, we understand today that grief does not follow a strict timeline. The below ritual provides an opportunity to publicly mourn and give room to the specific community to decide how long they need this public display of eulogy[29] to properly mourn the person they lost, and it may be deployed in the immediate aftermath of a death or at another time.

This ritual has the effect of making the person who died present, physically, albeit in a different way. This ritual is intended to help with what is often the sudden nature of many losses and can help alleviate the cognitive dissonance that the adolescents may be experiencing. This ritual also helps mimic the idea that rabbinic codes suggest that the deceased person's soul hovers around for a period of time after they have died and that they are able to hear the eulogies given in their honor. This public wall is one way that allows mourners to express the feelings they are holding, share the memory of the deceased, and provide the comfort that perhaps the deceased person's soul can witness these eulogies.

Goals:

1. Explain the significance of eulogizing in Jewish mourning tradition
2. Provide space for mourners to eulogize the deceased publicly
3. Provide a place for participants to express grief through ritual

Objectives:

1. Articulate in their own words the significance of eulogizing in Jewish mourning tradition

[29]The public nature of this ritual might make this a particularly challenging one to implement properly. Such a public and potentially constantly present acknowledgement of the death might be triggering for some members of the community. If it feels appropriate for the school community, a "public-private" space could be used to house the wall. one in which a person does not have to pass it in order to traverse the community. This could be a room that community members could choose to enter or not.

2. Publicly express memories of deceased through words and pictures

Materials:
-public wall space
-tape or glue
-magazines
-scissors
-lined paper
-blank paper
-pencils/pens
-markers
-ribbon
-assorted stickers
-any other creative materials that can be affixed to wall

Procedure:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction: Explanation of Hesped
Ask: What kind of things remind you of the people you love?
Potential answers could include: songs, funny videos, recipes, specific phrases

Explain that there are many ways that we can recall the memory of our loved ones whether they are alive or not. In the tradition of Jewish mourning rituals, when a person dies you are supposed to "lament" for them through a "*hesped*" or a eulogy.

The "*hesped*" (sometimes translated as "eulogy") is supposed to invoke the memory of the deceased person. This practice of lamenting is supposed to call to mind the essence of who the person was and remind you of the life they lived. This ritual comes with the understanding that people might have complicated histories and relationships. The intention is not to make them appear perfect but to attempt to accurately capture their memory and the legacy that they leave behind. Many times, people will use words and stories to achieve this, but, as we can see from our opening question, there are many ways to convey the memory of the person.

00:10-0:45 Crafting *hesped* memories
Give students and teachers[30] the next 35 minutes to sort through magazines to look for photos and words that might remind them of the deceased, offer them lined

[30] Teachers should be encouraged to participate as well. While it will not necessarily guarantee, this helps to create a setting in which all mourners can equally mourn the deceased through public lamenting in the form of hesped.

paper to write notes, and offer blank paper with writing utensils to allow them to draw/write out their ideas to bring up the memory of the deceased. All these pieces will go on the *hesped* wall that everyone will be able to see for the next 7 days.

00:45-00:50 Silent Walk Through
Having worked on this hesped together and individually, it is now time to take a step back and engage with the entirety of the *hesped* wall. Invite students to take the next 5 minutes to silently walk through and take in the different pieces from the *hesped* wall. This will serve both as a moment of silence and a chance to continue learning about the memory of the deceased.

00:50-00:55 One Word *Hesped*
Students will gather in a circle and having just come from the *hesped* wall, a place of reflection and learning, and ask them each to go around and share one word that they are taking with them from this *hesped* wall that can serve as their one-word eulogy for the deceased.

00:55-1:00 Closing
Let students know that over the course of the next week, they will be able to return to this wall if they want to contribute to it or if they just want to learn from it. Explain that while it is custom in Jewish tradition for the greater community to eulogize for only 7 days, it also says that for a student this "depends on their wisdom." Thus, we see that the tradition acknowledges the need to consider the impact of individuals and the need to continue eulogizing/lamenting the death of someone who has impacted our lives deeply through learning.[31]

[31] This public act of mourning, while helpful in asking community members to outwardly express their feelings of grief for the deceased, might also be upsetting, as it is such a constant reminder of the loss. It will be important to provide other resources in the school to make sure that people who are struggling to cope with their grief are able to share that beyond adding to the *hesped* wall.

Ritual 2: Ceramic *Kri'ah*-Smashing the Plate (pt.1)

Rationale

According to Mishneh Torah Avel 8:3, "a mourner is obligated to rend his garments for his dead." While the code instructs that a person is only obligated to rend a garment for their closest relatives, *Mo'ed Katan* 24a, tells the story of rabbis who rent garments for their teachers. This sugya also points out that this ritual is intended to happen at the time of death, that several sages did so after the fact and at varying levels of distress in their grief. For example, we learn when "when they said to Shmuel that Rav had passed away, he rent twelve garments on account of him, and said: The man of whom I was in fear, owing to his great learning, has gone and died." Thus, in this same moment, he also expressed specific emotions which he attributed to the moment and to the relationship he had with that person.

Furthermore, Mishneh Torah Avel 9:2 instructs, "just in the way that a person tears garments for their father or mother, so too are they required to tear garments for their rabbi who taught them Torah, for the *Nasi* (prince/head of Sanhedrin), head of the *Beit Din (*and the majority of the public who were killed, upon hearing the cursing of God's name, the burning of a Torah scroll, for the cities of Judea and Jerusalem and for the Temple [being destroyed]." This suggests that the emotional distress that might come with the destruction of life and other violence creates a need for outward expressions of grief to cope.

Additionally, in Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Avel 8:3, Maimonides explains that "a tear that is not done at a time of heightened emotional intensity is not a tear [in a ritually sound way]" furthering the point that this act of tearing one's garment is supposed to serve as an opportunity to enact some outward destruction that might

reflect how someone feels internally and allows them to express some of the emotions they might be feeling through words and pictures. While this is not something that they wear as the ritual outlines in the codes, it is still a public act and allows for the varying levels of distress a person might be experiencing in their grief. This ritual also provides them with a physical brokenness that they will later be able to return to and can look at differently in order to create something new. Thus, they will have the opportunity at two different stages of the mourning period to consider their emotions and draw connections between internal and external realities.

Goals

1. Explain the significance of *kri'ah* in Jewish mourning tradition
2. Provide space for mourners to outwardly express grief

Objectives

1. Articulate in their own words the role of *kri'ah* in Jewish mourning tradition
2. Outwardly express emotions relating to their personal grief experience

Materials:

-1 ceramic plate per participant
-sharpies
-1 large Ziploc bag per participant
-hammers
-clear jar/vase (to hold ceramic pieces)

Procedure:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction: Expressing Distress

Ask: What are some ways a person might outwardly express feelings of distress, grief or anger?
Potential answers: screaming, breaking things, crying, hugging, etc.

In Jewish mourning tradition there is a ritual known as *kri'ah* or "rending" in which a person in mourning tears their outer garment in order to express their distress and then show it outwardly to the world. In more recent years, many people have taken to using a *kri'ah* ribbon that is affixed to one's outer clothing and worn throughout the mourning period.

Ask: What do you think this ritual accomplishes? How do you think you might feel to do it and/or how did it feel if you have done it before?

00:10-00:20 Preparing the plate
Name that while participants might be in different places of grieving, and therefore might approach *kri'ah* differently, we will have several options for how to go about this mourning ritual. In order to prepare the plate for *kri'ah*, we will first assign some meaning to it. Invite students to write out some of their feelings surrounding grief and this particular death that are coming to mind using the sharpies.

If students are struggling, you can offer them different words and see if any of them resonate. This could also become a group activity where they contribute to a word cloud that you broadcast to the class. This would require them to use their phones to contribute to the word cloud anonymously.

00:15-00:20 Expressing Distress-Smashing the Plate
Explain to students that it makes sense for them to experience grief differently from one another. This activity is not one size fits all. Explain that they may have written/drawn different things on their plates.

First, they should put their plate into the Ziploc bag and write their name on the outside of the bag in a sharpie (this will be crucial for the next ritual at the end of a month).

For this next step, they might just want to throw/smash this plate once either by throwing it to the ground or smashing it with a hammer as an outward expression of their grief or they might want to smash it to tiny pieces. Both of these options and everything in between makes sense and can be part of your process. In about a month, we will come back to these plates and either piece them back together into a plate using gold and glue OR into a mosaic depending on how it has been smashed. It will be easier to put back together with glue/gold if you smash it only once or twice and it will be easier to turn it into mosaic if you smash it many times. No way is the right way. Each student should smash/break according to what feels right to them.

No matter how they smash the plate though, each person will be responsible for contributing one piece from their plate to a larger mosaic. This will serve as a representation not only of the individual but also the collective grief of the community.

Every student should have their own personal space to smash their plate for safety purposes.

00:20-00:25 Reflecting on Smashing
Ask: Having now gone through your own version of *kri'ah* through smashing/breaking, what is one word that you're feeling after the fact?
Have students go around the room and each share one word.

00:25-00:30 Closing
Explain that in about one month, which is seen in traditional mourning as the end of an acute ritual mourning period, we will come back to these plates, which are now outward expressions of our grief. We will have the opportunity to piece the plates back together whether that is by making it back into a plate like it was before, though never exactly the same, or through mosaic because in order to move forward it has to become something new. Each student will pick a piece of their plate and as we close this ritual, they will add one piece to a communal jar. When we come back together for the next ritual, we will turn these communal pieces into a class mosaic of their thematic choosing.

Ritual 3: Ceramic *Kri'ah* (pt. 2)-Rejoining the Pieces

Rationale

This ritual serves as a part two to the smashing of a plate that took place closer to the beginning of the mourning period, which likely took place during a more acute period of mourning. According to Mishneh Torah 9:1, "any time a person tears their garments for their remaining relatives (not their parents), they can sew the tear after the seven days [of *shiva*] and mend it after 30 days. For one's father or mother one can sew after 30 days but can never mend it." This instruction tells us something about the period that must pass in between the initial rending of the garment and its eventual repair. This likely reflects part of the internal process of repair that must start to take place as a person grieves during the traditional mourning period. Perhaps when Maimonides wrote that one can never mend a garment for certain losses, it also reflected the internal of a person's experience with some losses and how they can never be forgotten or fully healed.

This ritual acknowledges that the students may not be in the same place as they were for the first part of the ritual and through this second part of the ritual, they have the opportunity to reflect on that passage of time. Furthermore, it recognizes that each student might be in a different place emotionally from each of their peers and thus allows them to repair in a way that makes sense to their individual grief. In not being able to restore the plate to its original state, the participants can learn something about grief as well as the beauty that can be found in brokenness. There are still beautiful things that can come out of grief, even if a person emerges from their grief differently from how they entered it.

This ritual goes a step further and speaks to the communal grief that exists in the school, asking students to contribute to a communal creation on which they can all agree. While individuals might find themselves at varying levels of grief, it is important to recognize that an entire group is existing in the mourning period and can share that grief in order to be less alone in the experience. This can normalize the grieving process.

Goals:

1. Explain the significance of repairing a rent garment in Jewish mourning ritual
2. Provide a space for mourners to symbolically transition out of acute mourning as a community

Objectives:

1. Articulate in their own words the transition from acute to moderate mourning according to Jewish mourning rituals
2. Reassess the feelings of grief they previously articulated at the beginning of acute mourning
3. Mark the transition out of designated acute mourning through physical repair of a broken object

Materials:

-newspaper/butcher paper (to cover tables)
-latex gloves (for working with glue/epoxy)
-smashed plates in bags from pt. 1
-gorilla glue OR epoxy
-gold paint
-paint brushes
-small paper plates (for gold paint)
-chipboard sheets
-blue tape

Procedure:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction

Write this on a board: “Any time a person tears their garments for their remaining relatives (not their parents), they can sew the tear after the seven days and mend it after 30 days. For one’s father or mother one can sew after 30 days but can never mend it. (Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Avel 9:1)

Explain: This quote comes from one of our most famous Jewish law codes. Maimonides wrote this code in the 12th century, and he hoped to help Jewish people know how to live and this was how he thought people were supposed to grieve. This is the “part 2” of the *kri’ah* (garment rending) ritual.

Ask: Why do you think a person should wait this amount of time to sew and mend the garment? What does it symbolize?

How do you think rejoining our plates will be a similar/different experience?

00:10-00:20 Explain the Rejoining activity
Explain: We did our own type of *kri’ah* ritual by breaking our plates a few weeks ago. Now that time has passed, it is important to begin to repair what is broken. These plates will not look the exact same as they did when we started and that is okay. In fact, it is important to note the ways in which they will be different and perhaps the ways that we are different after experiencing grief after a death. You all experienced *kri’ah* a little differently. Some of you smashed the plate once and others did many times. You now have a few options for repair. If you only smashed it once or twice and are able to easily put the pieces back together into the shape of a plate, you can do so with glue (or epoxy) and then from there paint gold over the cracks. This practice is inspired by the Japanese art of kintsugi, repairing broken pottery with gold.

Some of you broke yours differently, which also makes sense because we are all coming from different places and expressions of grief. If you feel like the way you smashed it does not lend itself to putting it back together in a plate shape, I will invite you to create a mosaic using your plate pieces that you’ll attach to this chipboard sheet. You’ll also use the glue/epoxy and gold paint to create something that could either reflect the previous shape of the plate or could be a totally new shape that you think better represents the plate now. One way to do this is to figure out a shape without the glue/epoxy and then attach it one piece at a time.

00:20-00:50 Rejoining the Pieces
Now that the participants have been given guidance about how to repair their pieces, walk through the room, offering assistance if they need it.

You can offer pieces of blue tape as temporary holders to help them while the glue/epoxy is drying.

If anyone is struggling and growing frustrated, encourage them to slow down and also allow them to pivot if their initial plan for rejoining isn't working.

As students begin to finish up, you can invite them to start working together to figure out what their group mosaic might look like. It could potentially be a shape/drawing, a word, the name of the deceased, etc.

00:50-1:00 Finalizing the Collective Mosaic
Once the final shape of the collective mosaic has been decided by the group, everyone will have the chance to glue one piece in its spot. Even if it is not the piece we originally put in, because we can't really know for sure anymore. This is part of our communal grief as a community. We can find ways to hold other people's grief even though it may be different from our own.

1:00-1:10 Concluding Reflections
Gather the group together, either in their seats or in a circle (space permitting).
Ask: What surprised you about this process?
How do you feel differently from when you smashed this plate?

Explain: The grieving process does not have an end date. This is certainly not the end of grieving. This is a moment of transition though as we begin to emerge from an acute grieving period. Whatever feelings you continue to experience around grief are valid and deserve expression. The plate you have before might look like a plate or something totally different. No matter what, it is different from when we started with it weeks ago. So too are we. We can hold our grief, it can transform us, and we can move forward in our new form.

Ask: How do you feel looking at your new piece (Do a one word go around for this final question)?

Ritual 4: Overturning Classroom Chairs

Rationale

According to Mishneh Torah Avel 5:18, "one is required to overturn the bed for seven days. Not just one's bed alone, but rather every bed in the house should be overturned, even if there are 10 beds in 10 homes in 10 cities, one must overturn all of them." This act of "overturning" is supposed to serve as an opportunity for one's internal word to be reflected in the outside world. This practice is no longer commonly observed, but there are ways that a physical space within a *shiva* house reflects that it is a house of mourning. For example, mourners in a *shiva* house will cover mirrors[32] and sit in low chairs that are close to the ground[33]. As such, the internal tumult of the mourners is reflected in the physical space they occupy.

However, this is something that takes place in a person's home. If there is a school community that is grieving and in a period of ritual mourning, it seems appropriate that a community would consider changing its physical space for its mourners. One way of doing this is by overturning the chairs in which they sit. While it may not be appropriate to overturn every chair in a classroom, it does make sense to have one overturned to represent the loss that has taken place so that it can serve as a constant reminder during the most acute period of mourning.

This ritual considers that every classroom will look different and have a different culture. It will be up to the members of the classroom community to decide how to overturn in a way that makes sense for their specific community. This also

---

[32] Brener, Anne. *Mourning & Mitzvah : A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path through Grief to Healing : With Over 60 Guided Exercises*. 2nd ed. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Pub, 2001, 43.

[33] Goldstein, Zalman. *The Jewish Mourner's Companion*. Satellite Beach, Fla.: Jewish learning Group, 2006, 144.

grants autonomy back to the mourners as they decide how to publicly express their grief.

Goals:

1. Explain the significance of overturning furniture according to Jewish mourning ritual
2. Create a change in the daily classroom culture that acts as a noticeable marker of the period of mourning

Objectives:

1. Articulate in their own words the significance of overturning furniture according to Jewish culture.
2. Articulate in their own words how a shift in the classroom could reflect their internal world

Materials

-regular classroom setting

Procedure:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction-Overturning Beds

Write on the board: “One is required to overturn the bed for seven days. Not just one’s bed alone, but rather every bed in the house should be overturned, even if there are 10 beds in 10 homes in 10 cities, one must overturn all of them. And even if there are 5 brothers and 1 died, all of them must overturn their beds.”

Ask: Why do you think Maimonides included this in his law code?
How could this ritual serve the grieving process?

00:10-00:20 A New Take on Overturning

As a class, discuss the ways that one might be able to change the physical space in order to make it as though their beds have been overturned.

Explain: Every classroom is different. Some have assigned seats, some have students sitting wherever they would like, some are in rows, others in clusters or a circle. Consider the everyday setup of your own classroom and decide as a class how the group can “overturn” the structure for seven days in order.

Ideas include: mixing up assigned seating, changing the setup of the tables/chairs, overturning a chair in the honor of the deceased, etc.

This should be a classroom conversation and decision. This will provide the community members with a sense of agency in a way that aligns with their current classroom reality. Learning still has to take place in a classroom and overturning every chair might not allow that to happen so consider the ways that you can facilitate a feeling of being “overturned” for the way that fits this particular classroom community.

00:20-00:30 Overturning the Classroom
Upon making a class decision, gather as a class to make the shift in the classroom, indicating to the class that it will remain this way for the next seven days.

(Seven Day Period Passes)

Post Seven-Day Period
At the end of seven days, as a class, the learners/teacher will return the class to its previous state and as a class will proceed into the next ritual (found on the next page in order to close this ritual).

Ritual 5: Walk around the "Block"

Rationale

While there is no strict instruction in codes that tells mourners to take a walk around the block at the end of *shiva*, it has become the custom of many to do so, as it is a way to mark emergence from *shiva* and acute mourning into a less intense period of mourning. While this does not necessarily reflect one's internal feelings of grief, it is important to allow oneself the ability to physically transition into a new period of mourning and demonstrate to oneself the possibility of moving through one's grief, rather than remaining stagnant in it. This also can serve as an announcement to the world that a mourner is beginning to re-enter the public sphere.[34] There are also those who view the walk as a means of escorting the soul of the deceased out of the *shiva* house.[35]

Allowing the students to map out the route mimics the familiarity that a person has about walking around their block and takes out the unknown element of just following along a route. Additionally, it lends an intentionality to the ritual so that the students focus on the walking and not be distracted with wondering where they are going. This ritual can also be seen as a way for the students to take one last walk around the school with their friend/peer/community member.[36]

This ritual also contains a component of understanding the passage of time in a grief period by allowing them to consider what they are leaving behind as they

---

[34] 1. Rabbi Peretz Rodman, "Ending Shiva," My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ending-shiva/.

[35] Nitei Gavriel 136:16 n.23

[36] It is not necessary to provide this interpretation in order to do this ritual. However, this might be a helpful framework for some students who have trouble seeing the relevance of this ritual and might be having trouble letting go of some of their grief as they progress through mourning rituals. This interpretation should be used at the discretion of the educator guiding students through this process/ritual.

progress through the mourning process. Through the use of washable markers on paper, this ritual helps to demonstrate that as time passes, nothing really disappears but rather is transformed and creates other types of beauty in our world.

Goals:

1. Consider the significance of the ritual of walking around the block at the end of acute mourning
2. Lead students in ritual to physically represent moving out of traditional acute mourning

Objectives:

1. Articulate in their own words the significance of transitioning out of acute mourning with physical action
2. Physically transition out of traditional acute period of mourning
3. Articulate in their own words how they feel about entering this new stage of mourning

Materials:

-big tub of water
-Post-its
-washable/water-based markers (not permanent markers)

Procedure:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction: Walking Around the Block

While there is not a certain source on this tradition, there is a custom of walking around the block in one's neighborhood as an endpoint of *shiva*. *Shiva* represents the first seven days of traditional mourning after burial. This is considered the most acute time of mourning rituals and grieving.

Ask: Why might someone do this as a transition? How do you think it might be able to assist in the grieving process at the end of *shiva*?

00:10-00:20 Map the Route

As a class, decide a pathway through the school to take as a way to "walk the block" of the school. The start and endpoint can be at the classroom or school entrance, depending on if this is a single classroom community or a larger section of the school community.

00:20-00:30 What are you leaving behind?
Explain: This ritual is a transition marker from a traditional period of acute mourning into a more moderate mourning period. This does not necessarily speak to your natural feelings of grief, as those might not feel ready to change. However, when it comes to Jewish mourning ritual requirements, this period is one that is marked by less intensity than the one we are in. That being said, what are the ways you are walking through the world differently since this death. I will invite you to write it down on a post-it and you will drop it in the tub of water as we exit the classroom.[37]

00:30-00:35 Silent Walk Around the "Block"[38]
As a class, gather in a single file line, giving each person walking ample room to walk at their own pace

00:30-00:35 Wrap up
As the students arrive back in class, gather around the tub of water.

Explain: As we can see nothing here is entirely gone. Rather the words have started to fade, and we see the messages/feelings we have written are starting to bleed into the water, adding color and beauty to the water, to the world. The paper and the note will never be the same, but it is not destroyed, rather it is changed. We have gone through our own moment of transition, and I hope that we can continue to see beauty as we change in our grief.

Close this ritual by doing the daily recitation of Ritual #6 (found on the next page).

[37] This can be a longer classroom conversation if the class is open to it. This should happen at the discretion of the educator to decide if this would be a productive conversation for the class or if they would better benefit from using a private note and doing the rest of the ritual silently.
[38] If it is the case that there is one mourner in the class and you hope to implement a ritual that allows the rest of the class to serve as comforters to the mourner (and the mourner is open to this kind of ritual), the mourner can do the walk around the school and upon entering the classroom again, the rest of the class can make two lines (as is traditionally done upon leaving a burial/cemetery). Students in the class can offer words of comfort to the mourner as they walk by.

Ritual 6: Counting the Days-An Alternative Kaddish

Rationale

The rabbinic code known as the Mapah by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, which is a gloss on the Shulhan Arukh instructs, "in the Midrashim it is found that one should recite Kaddish for a father. Therefore, it is the adopted practice to recite the last Kaddish [concluding the services] twelve months for a father and mother…and when the [mourning] son leads the Services and sanctifies [the name of God] in public, he [thereby] redeems his father and mother from *Gehenna*."[39] Often in modern day, Kaddish is the primary obligation of which people are aware when it comes to mourning rituals. This is a practice that is intended not only to elevate the soul, as some posit, but also to support the mourner as they grieve with their community. As Kaddish is always recited with a minyan (a group of 10 Jewish adults), an important feature of the Mourner's Kaddish is not just that it gives the mourner a chance to grieve, but also to be held by their community.

Furthermore, there is a deep Jewish tradition of counting important moments, namely the counting of the Omer between Passover and Shavuot. Counting is central in the mourning process as mourners move from one mourning status to the next. It is important to know where in a mourning cycle a person exists so that they know their mourning obligations. Because the counting of the Omer is already so central to Jewish tradition and because there is a tendency to count during the days of mourning, it is fitting to create a ritual that allows mourning to officially count their days of mourning.

[39] Mapah on SA YD 376:4

Additionally, according to Yevamot 62b, Rabbi Akiva's students were dying between Passover and Shavuot, the time during which Jewish people count the Omer. Thus, from this perspective the counting of the Omer already represents a mourning ritual. Giving mourners a chance to recite a blessing over the counting of the days of their mourning and to remember how much time has passed aligns with what already exists in another part of the Jewish calendar tradition.

This ritual can serve as a supplement to Mourner's *Kaddish*, while also serving as a tool to help a community in mourning remember how much time has passed since the deceased has been gone, or more specifically since the deceased was buried. This ritual can serve as a tool that encourages the recognition of the passage of time in a process of grief using mourning rituals. For someone who feels that they do not resonate with traditional prayer, this ritual might be particularly helpful as it guides them through the time. Furthermore, this ritual leaves more room for English in place of Hebrew or at least less Hebrew/Aramaic depending on the comfort level of the community members with this language. Finally, this ritual has the benefit of reminding mourners where they are within their mourning process. Although the way in which they are grieving might not feel aligned with where they are in the Jewish mourning process, this ritual can serve as a concrete reminder of where they are in time and in mourning. This can remind them that time continues to pass whether they realize it and therefore it keeps them rooted in the present day, at least for a moment.

Goals:

1. Present the significance behind a consistent daily practice of supporting a mourner during acute mourning

2. Explain the significance of counting as a Jewish ritual
3. Brainstorm potential support methods for mourners in a classroom community

Objectives:

1. Articulate in their own words how consistent daily practices can be beneficial to a mourning process
2. Participate in supporting the daily practice of a mourner
3. Propose 2-3 ideas of how a person could support mourners in their community

Materials:
-slips of paper
-jar or box

Procedure:
00:00-00:05 Set Induction: The Power of Routine
Ask: Why is routine important?
What parts of your daily routine help you feel ready for the day?
What is a piece of your daily routine that, if taken out, would throw off your whole day?

00:05-00:10 *Kaddish* as a Routine

Explain: For at least the past millennium, *Kaddish* has been a mourning practice for Jewish people. Some attribute this to further back in time, going as far back as the 1st century BCE though.[40] This prayer, written in Aramaic (which is similar to Hebrew), is the prayer most commonly associated with mourning as it is recited everyday by mourners at least for the first 30 days after burial and sometimes for 11 or 12 months after burial, depending on one's custom and relationship to the deceased. While this prayer is used when recalling the names of those who have died, it makes no mention of death. Rather, it is an affirmation for those who are alive as they remember their loved one. Some people believe that this act of daily recitation has an impact on the soul of the deceased. This act becomes rote or pattern for mourners.

Something that is also significant in the daily and yearly lives of Jewish tradition is counting. A person might count the days of Chanukkah, the days of the Omer (between Passover and Shavuot), or the plagues that took place in Egypt during a

[40]1. Anita Diamant, "Development and History of Kaddish," My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/development-and-history-of-kaddish/.

Passover Seder. A person might also find themselves counting how long it has been since their loved one died or has been buried.

Ask: How do you think counting or placing yourself in time is a helpful habit/ritual?

00:10-00:15 Explain the counting of the *Omer* Structure
First one recites a blessing: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tizivanu al sefirat ha'omer.*

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments and commanded us to count the omer.

After the blessing, one recites the appropriate day of the count. For example:

Then one states the number of day: *Hayom yom echad la'omer*

Today is the first day of the omer.

After the first six days of counting, one also includes the number of weeks that one has counted. Here is an example:[41]

Hayom sh'losha asar yom, she'hem shavuah ehad v'shisha yamim la'omer

Today is 13 days, which is one week and six days of the omer.

00:15-00:20 Counting the Days

Here is a blessing we can offer as we do our own counting of the days for the days of mourning.

Blessing: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha'Olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tizivanu al sefirat y'mei ha'aveilut.*

[41] 1. Rabbi Jill Jacobs, "How to Count the Omer," My Jewish Learning, March 15, 2023, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-to-count-the-omer/.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments and commanded us[42] to count the days of mourning.[43]

Structure for Counting the days:

Hayom yom ehad limei Ha'aveilut L' __[insert name of deceased]___

Today is the first day of the days of mourning of[44] _[insert name of deceased]__

[42] Although this ritual in particular is not an outlined commandment, there is an argument to be made that it is a commandment to count the days of mourning as a mourner is responsible for knowing where in the mourning process, they exist so they know their responsibilities in the role as they change between stages of *aninut*, *shiva*, *shloshim*, and *shanah*. Thus, to count the specific day in which they are living and mourning can constitute a commandment.

[43] I decided to use the language of *"sefirat y'mei ha'aveilut"* or "to count the days of mourning" because it mirrors the language that is founding the blessing for counting the Omer and accurately reflects that a mourning is existing with the days of mourning for the deceased.

[44] Similarly, this wording reflects the language found in the counting of the Omer and the preposition "l'" or "of/to" suggests mourning for the deceased person. This makes grammatical sense in Hebrew.

Conclusion

This ritual guide has demonstrated the importance of considering the particularities of adolescents who engage in Jewish mourning rituals and has therefore proposed a set of rituals that are designed to respond to the developmental and psychological needs of adolescents. I have specifically created rituals for adolescents in a classroom community setting as this is a place where many adolescents find themselves on a regular basis but do not always receive structured support, particularly in times of grief. The classroom as a population can serve as a powerful community to adolescent mourners, and through inspiration from Jewish codes and rabbinic tradition, I have aimed to create an inventory, albeit an incomplete one, to support adolescent mourners as they navigate grief after death in their school communities.

This ritual guide should not be used as a replacement for other types of grief support in a community. These rituals are intended to be used as supplementary tools to help give structure to adolescents who are grieving. However, it is still important that students have access to guidance and grief counselors, therapy (as necessary), and community-based support networks. This ritual also does not aspire to replace traditional Jewish mourning rituals, but rather aims to enhance, modernize, and deepen some of the rituals that already exist so that they might be more relevant and meaningful to modern day adolescents.

This inventory is incomplete in that it only addresses a few scenarios that might take place in a school community and only addresses a few moments within the first year of mourning. Grief extends far beyond the one-year mark and there is

plenty more to cover within the realm of adolescent mourning. Furthermore, there are scenarios that are specific to school communities that I have not covered, such as the horrific and unfortunately common occurrence of school shootings.[45] These events have become all too prevalent throughout the United States and pose a very real threat to the safety of children in schools. This is a particularly complex situation to navigate because it requires tending to the needs of mourners after potentially multiple deaths, which becomes its own halakhic case, and tending to the needs of trauma survivors throughout the school. This went beyond the scope of this project, though I recognize its importance in the field.

Additionally, there is more work to be done for the creation of rituals for young children facing grief after death. While adolescence as a developmental stage is important to consider when approaching grief, there is also plenty to know about grief and understandings of death amongst young children depending on their developmental stages and personal upbringings. There are plenty of rituals that one could create to help younger children process grief in ways that are developmentally appropriate and inspired by traditional Jewish mourning rituals.

I hope that this ritual guide will provide moments of comfort and reflection for adolescents and school communities in periods of mourning so that they can better understand and process their grief. So often, people are expected to return to their normal lives without thoughtfully processing a death that has taken place in their lives. Research has shown that this shortchanges the natural grieving process and can create long term harm in the person grieving. I hope that this guide will combat

[45] While this project does not include considerations around grief after a school shooting, this is something that I hope to one day address through the creation of additional rituals.

some of that societal pressure to move on and instead allow people to use Jewish mourning rituals as a way to help move their grief instead of moving around it.

Bibliography

Abelson, Kassel, *"Suicide,"* published by Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards, September 21, 2005.

Brener, Anne. *Mourning & Mitzvah : A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path through Grief to Healing : With Over 60 Guided Exercises*. 2nd ed. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Pub, 2001.

Diamant, Anita. "Development and History of Kaddish." My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022. https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/development-and-history-of-kaddish/.

Glass, J. Conrad. "Death, Loss, and Grief: Real Concerns to Young Adolescents." *Middle School Journal* 22, no. 5 (1991): 15–17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23023630.

Goldstein, Zalman. *The Jewish Mourner's Companion*. Satellite Beach, Fla.: Jewish learning Group, 2006.

Jacobs, Rabbi Jill. "How to Count the Omer." My Jewish Learning, March 15, 2023. https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-to-count-the-omer/.

"Judaism & Cremation - No Longer so Taboo. Why They Choose Cremation." Neptune Society, 2015. https://www.neptunesociety.com/cremation-information-articles/judaism-and-cremation-no-longer-so-taboo.

Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families. United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009.

Lenhardt, Ann Marie C., and Bernadette McCourt. "Adolescent Unresolved Grief in Response to the Death of a Mother." *Professional School Counseling* 3, no. 3 (2000): 189–96.

Mapah on Shulhan Arukh Yoreh De'ah

Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Avel

Meshot, C. M., & Leitner, L. M. (1993). Adolescent mourning and parental death. Omega Journal of Death and Dying, 26, 287-29.

Nitei Gavriel

Orenstein, Debra. *Lifecycles*. 1st ed. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Pub, 1994. 359.

Ozarowski, Joseph. "Kriah: A Tangible and Obligatory Expression of Grief." My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022.

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kriah-a-tangible-and-obligatory-expression-of-grief/.

Rodman, Rabbi Peretz. “Ending Shiva.” My Jewish Learning, November 2, 2022. https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ending-shiva/.

Shulhan Arukh Yoreh De’ah

Siegel, Daniel J.. Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain. United Kingdom: Scribe Publications Pty Limited, 2014, 27.

“Suicide Statistics.” American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, January 8, 2024. https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/#:~:text=Based%20on%20the%20most%20recent,13%25%20vs.%207%25).

“Suicide Statistics.” American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, January 8, 2024. https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/.

Van Dexter, J.D. (1986). Anticipatory grief: Strategies for the classroom. In T.A. Rando (Ed.), Loss and anticipatory grief. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.