



Grief and Cultural Competence: Jewish Traditions

1 CE Hour

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Final Exam - PREVIEW

Course Name: Grief and Cultural Competence: Jewish Traditions (1 CE Hour)

1. _____ make up about 18% of American Jews.
 - a. Conservative Jews
 - b. Reform Jews
 - c. Orthodox Jews
 - d. Secular Jews

2. _____ tend to be the most conservative in belief and strictest in practice.
 - a. Reform Jews
 - b. Secular Jews
 - c. Orthodox Jews
 - d. Conservative Jews

3. Jewish belief claims that all humans are created in God's image, and thus the body, whether sick, dying, or dead, must be treated with respect. This core belief is called _____.
 - a. Viduy
 - b. Mitzvah
 - c. Shomer
 - d. Kevod ha-met

4. Jews prefer to bury the deceased _____.
 - a. After embalming
 - b. After public viewing
 - c. In ornate coffins
 - d. Immediately

5. After the body has been washed and purified, it is _____.
 - a. Cremated
 - b. Dressed for burial in a white shroud made of linen or muslin, known as a *tachrichim*

- c. Dressed for burial in formal attire and jewelry
 - d. Dressed for burial in the clothes the person wore during life.
6. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be _____.
- a. Made of synthetic materials
 - b. Highly ornamental
 - c. The simple pine box
 - d. Lined and padded
7. Jewish tradition holds that the burial should be attended by _____.
- a. As many as possible
 - b. Immediate family only
 - c. Immediate and extended family only
 - d. Immediate family and close friends only
8. During the first meal (or *seudat havra'ah*), among other foods, things that are _____ are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle.
- _____.
- a. Locally-grown
 - b. Round in shape
 - c. Highly spiced
 - d. Freshly-baked
9. During the initial seven-day mourning period, or *shiva*, mourners _____.
- a. Are traditionally expected to sit on low stools or chairs as an expression of humility
 - b. Should display public grief during synagogue activities
 - c. Should bring the family of the deceased gifts of flowers
 - d. Are required to maintain their personal appearance out of respect for the deceased
10. The Hebrew word *yizkor* means to “remember;” accordingly, Jews pray the *Yizkor* to ask God to remember those family and friends who are deceased. This special memorial is prayed _____.
- a. After the Torah reading on the first day of Passover
 - b. By those whose parents are both still living
 - c. At the discretion of the descendants
 - d. Four times a year

CONTINUING EDUCATION

for Funeral Directors

Grief and Cultural Competence: Jewish Traditions

1 CE HOUR

Learning Objectives

This course is intended to increase funeral directors' awareness of, and sensitivity to, Jewish cultural traditions with regard to grief and mourning. By the end of the course, learners should be familiar with:

- ❑ General demographics, language, and religious beliefs pertaining to Jewish culture
- ❑ Jewish attitudes towards sickness, dying, and the deceased
- ❑ Deathbed rituals and traditions in Jewish culture
- ❑ Jewish interment traditions
- ❑ Common Jewish beliefs regarding the afterlife, or the lack thereof
- ❑ Jewish mourning and remembrance rituals, including *Shiva*, *Kaddish*, *Yahrzeit*, and *Yizkor*
- ❑ Additional points of cultural sensitivity

PLEASE NOTE:

The facts laid out in this module are presented as a general guideline to dominant cultural characteristics: they are not, and are not intended to be, applicable to all people of the Jewish culture. This module in no way diminishes the diversity of the many different Jewish populations in the United States.

Judaism is somewhat difficult to pin down because many Jews today ascribe to the traditions and cultural heritage of their ethnicity, but not to the religious beliefs. For this reason, some prefer to label Jews as religious Jews and secular Jews in order to make the distinction between practicing Jews who are observant in their faith, and those who identify with and celebrate their heritage but are not strictly observant or faithful to particular religious practices and beliefs. While this distinction can be helpful when conducting research on Jewish peoples, it is not altogether accurate in understanding how “secular” Jews will approach death – while they may self-identify more as atheists or agnostic, most “secular” Jews will still tend towards Jewish practices in dying, death, burial, and mourning, because these practices are also an indicator of Jewish identity. You will want to ascertain the extent to which Jewish patrons wish to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices, just as you would with any patron.

Introduction: Demographics, Language, Religious Beliefs

Jews in the United States make up approximately two percent of the American population,¹ with the largest majority of Jews residing in the Northeast (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania), California, and Florida.²

There are three major denominations in American Judaism – Reform, Conservative and Orthodox – along with several much smaller branches (such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal) not discussed in this module. Reform Jews are the largest branch of American Jews, with approximately 35% of all American Jews practicing in the Reform branch. This is followed by 30% of American Jews who claim no formal Jewish identity (secular Jews). Conservative Jews make up about 18% of American Jews, Orthodox Jews make up about 10%, and then finally the smaller groups make up the remainder. Because Reform Judaism and secular Jews make the largest percentage of American Jewry today, they have been the most influential on Jewish thought and behavior. The number of secular Jews is growing with each generation: 32% of all Millennials (those born after 1980) identify as secular, or non-practicing, Jews, while only 19% of the earlier baby boomer generation chose to identify as secular. This will more than likely continue to be a trend among American Jews.³ However, Orthodox Jews remain highly visible – partly

because of their distinctive dress and strict dietary laws, and also because they are having the largest families – so Orthodox Judaism will likely also continue to grow in importance and population.⁴

The different denominations originally emerged over debate surrounding several issues: whether scripture is literal or symbolic, whether services and prayers should be recited in Hebrew or in the vernacular language, the roles of women, how strictly dietary and Sabbath laws should be maintained, and how lineage is determined.

As Hebrew is the universal language that unites all Jews, most Jews learn it when they are studying for their bar/bat mitzvah, the coming-of-age ceremony for young boys and girls that marks their presence in the synagogue as full-fledged adult members.

Another unifying element is the observation of the Sabbath, or Shabbat, as the day of rest, dictated as mandatory in the book of Genesis, and observed from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. The Talmud, or rabbinic commentary on the Torah, dictates that observing the Sabbath usually means no utilization of electricity or anything involving electricity (viewed as the contemporary equivalent of making a

exam question...

1. _____ make up about 18% of American Jews.
 - a. Conservative Jews
 - b. Reform Jews
 - c. Orthodox Jews
 - d. Secular Jews

1 This has shrunk—in 1940, Jews comprised nearly 3.7% of the population.

2 “Jewish Population in the United States, by State” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/usjewpop.html>, last accessed June 19, 2015.

3 Pew Research Center, “Infographic: Survey of Jewish Information,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/03/infographic-survey-of-jewish-americans/> last accessed June 20, 2015.

4 Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” October 1, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/> last accessed June 19, 2015. It should be noted here that while Orthodox Jews have larger families, switching between Jewish denominations is most common from the most traditional to the less traditional; in other words, it is more common for Orthodox Jews to switch to Reform or Conservative, rather than the other way around. This, too, may have some effect on the future denominational population of American Judaism.

fire). Interpretation on how strictly this must be observed, however, differs across Jewish schools of thought. The observation of the Sabbath begins at sundown with the Shabbat meal, though some families will wait until a bit later (various factors such as the timing of synagogue services, when sundown occurs, or even the seasons may affect the Shabbat meal – there is no hard and fast rule as long as it occurs following sundown). The meal starts with prayers, blessings, and the lighting of candles, after which children are blessed, challah bread is broken and shared, and the meal is eaten (for a more detailed description, see the link below).⁵

Finally, keeping a kosher diet used to be universally observed by all Jews, but now is only practiced by more stringent followers, and includes both avoidance of certain foods (no eating of pork or shellfish, for example) and a particular preparation of remaining foods, including the separation of dairy products from meat products in both preparation and consumption (this comes from the Leviticus proscription against cooking a lamb in its mother's milk).

Orthodox Jews tend to be the most conservative in belief and strictest in practice, endorsing separation of women and men in worship, a more literal interpretation of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible – namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the nearly exclusive utilization of Hebrew in prayer and synagogue services, strict kosher dietary guidelines, a stringent observance of the Sabbath and the recognition of only children of Jewish mothers as Jewish. Reform Jews are on the other end of the spectrum, with men and women worshipping together, an understanding of the Torah as both literal and symbolic, the utilization of both Hebrew and the local language (in the United States, English), looser guidelines regarding dietary restrictions (many reform Jews also live in areas where it is harder to keep kosher and there is little access to kosher butchers, delis, and restaurants), and more liberal observance of the Sabbath (though many have a Shabbat meal, many also work on the Sabbath, and few will actually refuse to use electricity or ride in a car as their Orthodox brethren might). Reform Judaism has also begun to recognize children as Jews when their father is a Jew, unlike the more traditional Orthodox branch which insists that it must be a mother.⁶ Because Conservative Judaism was a response to the Reform movement – in that Conservative Jews felt that Reform Judaism had gone too far in reforming the Orthodox

branch, and sought to “conserve” some of their original beliefs – Conservative Jews generally fall in the middle between Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

Jews are also biologically divided according to ethnic background, with approximately 85%-95% of American Jews descendants from German, Polish, Russian and other Eastern European Jews, commonly known as Ashkenazi Jews. The majority of American Jews today descended from Ashkenazi families who emigrated here during the Russian pogroms and the persecution of Jews in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, and then decided to remain (though some came as early as the 1880s). Two other major groupings, the Edot ha-Mizrach Jews (non-European Jews who originated from the Middle East) , and Sephardi Jews (Jews from Spain, Portugal and North Africa) comprise the other 5-15% of American Jews, but American Jewery is dominated, both culturally and demographically, by the Ashkenazim. Regardless of cultural heritage, most Jews in the United States today are second, third and fourth generation Americans, and well established in American culture. The importance of this will be seen further down, when the morbidity of Jews in the United States is discussed.

Attitudes towards Sickness, Dying, and the Deceased

Jewish custom tends to be very matter-of-fact and down-to-earth in regards to illness and dying. Sickness is perceived as a part of the experience of being God's creation, and not something an individual can control (in other word, it is not viewed as a result of a person's choices or actions, as some Protestant Christian denominations tend to believe). While sickness is seen as a natural part of living, medicine is not frowned on: medicine, and doctors in general, are seen as essential to helping God restore healing to his creation, returning humans to their full potential. Similar to sickness, death is viewed as yet another part of life; euthanasia, however, is not permitted nor looked upon in a favorable light: God gave humans life, and it is not their right to take that life away.

Because historically there was little intermarriage with other faiths, Jewish morbidity is higher in diseases that are genetically inherited: more Jews tend to die from metabolic diseases, autoimmune diseases (such

5 See Sara Shapiro-Plevan's "Shabbat for Families," for a more detailed explanation, <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-for-families/>, last accessed July 28, 2015.

6 The reason for this is simple—one could always guarantee the identity of the mother—but not always the paternity of the father. By making Jewish identity dependent on the matrilineal line, Judaism has limited Jewish intermarriage, and ensured its own clan identity.

exam question...

2. _____ tend to be the most conservative in belief and strictest in practice.

- a. Reform Jews
- b. Secular Jews
- c. Orthodox Jews
- d. Conservative Jews

as Tay-Sachs disease), certain inheritable cancers (particularly colon, ovarian, and breast cancer), and heart conditions.⁷ They do not tend to have issues with alcoholism, substance abuse, and diabetes, however.

Organ donation is permitted, if it is done to save a life, and many Jews consider the act of donating an organ to be a *mitzvah*, which can be loosely translated as a good deed, or even a commandment.

Deathbed Rituals, Traditions, and Taboos

Jewish belief claims that all humans are created in God's image, and thus the body, whether sick, dying, or dead, must be treated with respect. This core belief is called *kevod ha-met*, and is the guiding principal for all Jewish customs regarding burial and mourning.⁸

A prayer of confession, the *viduy*, is generally recited before death; it can be said to correlate with the Catholic prayer of extreme unction, in that it is a prayer of contrition, in which the petitioner prays to God to forgive her sins so that she may face death calmly and peacefully. Unlike the Catholic tradition, however, the prayer for forgiveness is recited by the penitent to God directly, unless the dying person is unable to recite it for herself, in which case the family, or even the rabbi, will pray in place of the dying person. Prior to praying the *viduy*, it is advised that Jews first ask forgiveness from those people that they have wronged, addressing earthly matters before turning to heavenly ones; it is also advisable that others – particularly those who are crying – leave the room. Finally, before praying, the petitioner should purify herself, washing her hands three times. (While the *viduy* is a prayer that prepares the petitioner for death, it is noted in Jewish folklore that sometimes a person is healed and lives for many years following the prayer of *viduy*.) Following *viduy*, it is common to also recite the psalms, particularly Psalm 121, 130, and 91.

The final moments of life are considered very important in terms of preparing a person's soul for the afterlife. It is customary that everyone (particularly family and close friends) remain in the room with the dying person, as it is believed this gives them great comfort; no one should leave unless physically ill or overcome with emotion to the point that it is

exam question...

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- Mitzvah
- Shomer
- Kevod ha-met

upsetting to the dying. Additionally, like attending the burial, sitting with a dying person is considered a great mitzvah or gift to the dying, and an act of love. (Medical personnel are excepted from this tradition, as are members of the Cohen, or priestly caste: a Jew who is a descendent of the Cohen clan may not come within four cubits of a Jewish corpse or a Jewish grave, as they are said to become defiled and ritually impure if they come into close contact with the dying or the dead. Thus, a Jew who is a Cohen might be outside the room of the dying, or visit the funeral home but not enter the building. There are two exceptions to this rule: if someone has no one to bury them, then a Cohen is expected to defile himself and make burial preparations and arrangements for the deceased; likewise, if a member of a Cohen's immediate family dies, then he may care for him or her.⁹)

There is no universal agreement on the actual definition of death—whether death is defined by cardiovascular death, brain death, or both.

Because a body is viewed as the home for the soul, the corpse is treated with the utmost respect, and is generally never left alone following a death. Friends and family sit with the corpse until it is taken to be prepared for burial; in addition, a person known as the *shomer*, or watcher, sits with the body reading Psalms and reciting prayers on behalf of the dead.¹⁰ Originally instilled to keep watch over the corpse to prevent theft or critters from having access to the body, the *shomer* now functions more ceremoniously, but is so important that some synagogues even formally employ them and dispatch them to stay with the corpse from death until burial.

The most meaningful aspect of both sitting with the body and the purification rituals performed on the deceased (detailed below) is the communal nature of these actions: at no point is the deceased alone; from dying to death to burial, the Jewish community accompanies them on their journey.

7 See the Jewish Virtual Library for valuable information about Jewish morbidity. "Sickness," *Jewish Virtual Library*, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ ejud_0002_0018_0_18459.html, last accessed June 21, 2015.

8 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California.

9 When a Cohen is buried, he will generally be buried in the Cohenim section, which is on the outside of a Jewish cemetery, thus allowing the rest of the Cohen clan to be able to attend the funeral and visit the grave without breaking the proscriptions against Cohens attending funerals or visiting cemeteries. "Jewish Funeral Guide," <http://www.jewish-funeral-guide.com/tradition/mourners-cohanim.htm>, last accessed June 26, 2015.

10 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.4.

Interment Traditions

Jews prefer to bury the deceased immediately, and do not embalm the body or condone its public viewing, considering it to be disrespectful. For this reason, Jewish services for the dead are usually held as soon as possible after the death of a person. (It should be noted that, though there is a movement among some Jews to be cremated, cremation is *not* generally accepted in the Jewish community: the belief that our bodies belong to God, and therefore we are not allowed to do harm to them, applies even after death. Cremated remains have traditionally not been permitted in Jewish cemeteries, as they are viewed as a desecration of the dead and a denial of proper burial. The intentional cremation of over six million Jews by Hitler in the Holocaust has increased the Jewish abhorrence for the practice. In general, cremation should not be discussed with Jewish families unless specifically requested.)

Preparation of the dead body proceeds according to Ecclesiastes 5:14, in which it is written, “As he came, so should he go;”¹¹ thus, when a person dies, their body is washed and purified just as they were when they were born. *Taharah*, the act of washing and purifying the body, is generally performed by a person trained in the traditional Jewish purification rituals: men wash and purify men and women wash and purify women. Usually this act includes washing the body with warm water from head to toe, though it is never turned face down. The washing of the body usually occurs at a funeral home, and is performed by the *Chevra Kedisha*, or the burial officiates of the local synagogue. Generally, there should be three tables – one for the empty casket, one for the materials needed to wash and purify the body, and the third, onto which the body is placed. If possible, the table for the body should be made of wood, and the body of the deceased placed on the table with its toes facing towards the door. Water, buckets, gloves, and at least six white sheets are needed in the preparation of the body, and all jewelry and personal effects should be removed prior to the purification and returned to the family or next of kin. The full list of materials needed for the purification of

the deceased can be found at the website listed below; if the funeral home serves the Jewish community, it might be advisable to contact the local Rabbi and see if these materials can be provided as part of the funeral home’s services.¹²

After the body has been washed and purified, it is dressed for burial in a white shroud made of linen or muslin, known as a *tachrichim*, rather than in the clothes the person wore during life. This is rooted in the belief that all are found equal in death – no person is deemed better or wealthier – and the white shroud is symbolic of that equality. Usually the shroud is hand-sewn so that the stiches will easily disintegrate; if the shroud is machine-sewn, someone will often rip some of the seams so that it disintegrates more easily. The *tachrichim* is so important to Jewish burial custom that if no one is immediately available to dress the body, the funeral will be postponed until someone can be found. Jewish men are also buried with their *tallit*, a traditional fringed shawl that is usually used by Jewish men during prayer; prior to burial, one of the fringes of the prayer shawl will be cut so that it is rendered ineffective. If the deceased did not own a *tallit* then usually one is provided for the burial.

Genesis 3:19 states that the proper cycle for the deceased is to return to dust; for this reason, once shrouded, it is preferable for a Jew to be placed directly into the ground. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be the simple pine box: generally speaking, they should be made of wood, with no designs or metal ornamentation (some Jewish communities contend that even metal nails or brackets

11 “A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices,” published by the Funeral Practices Committee of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.3.

12 David Zinner, “Tahara Supplies for the CHEvra Kadisha,” <http://jewish-burial.pbworks.com/w/page/8065012/Tahara%20Kit%20Contents%20List>, last accessed July 28, 2015.

exam questions...

4. Jews prefer to bury the deceased _____.
 - a. After embalming
 - b. After public viewing
 - c. In ornate coffins
 - d. Immediately
5. After the body has been washed and purified, it is _____.
 - a. Cremated
 - b. Dressed for burial in a white shroud made of linen or muslin, known as a *tachrichim*
 - c. Dressed for burial in formal attire and jewelry
 - d. Dressed for burial in the clothes the person wore during life.
6. As some cemeteries do not permit direct burial, allowances may be made for the use of a casket. Funeral directors should be aware that the preferred casket will often be _____.
 - a. Made of synthetic materials
 - b. Highly ornamental
 - c. The simple pine box
 - d. Lined and padded

may not be utilized in the construction of a casket, because metal is the material for weapons of war). Similarly, the inside must be plain and unlined, with no ornamentation or decoration.¹³

Obituaries will often announce both the death and the funeral service (though because of the tendency to bury immediately following a death, they are more often perceived as announcements than invitations); they also may state where donations can be made. At the funeral service itself, it is common for several people close to the deceased to offer eulogies, either at the beginning of the ceremony, or at the site of burial (unless the deceased has previously specified that nothing be said about them). Many Reform Jews will recite Psalm 23 as the deceased exits the funeral home, and some recite Psalm 91 as they accompany the deceased to his final resting place in the cemetery (when Jews first immigrated to the United States, cemeteries were often among the first things they purchased; many Jews will therefore have their own cemeteries and will opt to be buried there). Jewish tradition holds that the burial should be attended by as many as possible: viewing the final interment of the body is considered the final act of kindness one can perform for the deceased, since it is a kindness that cannot be reciprocated.¹⁴ Often, attendees are expected to place dirt on top of the casket if they cannot actually bury the body themselves – this is seen as beneficial for both the deceased and the bereaved. When the deceased is lowered into the ground, it is customary for a Rabbi to recite Psalm 91 once more, along with a prayer for the dead. Finally, if the deceased cannot be placed directly into the ground, it is not uncommon for the casket to be broken to speed the decomposition process.

The first meal, or *seudat havra'ah*, is served at the home of the deceased upon returning from the cemetery, and is usually provided by the family, friends and synagogue of the bereaved. Among other foods, things that are round in shape such as hard-boiled eggs, bagels, round pasta, and round cakes are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life¹⁵ and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle. This meal marks the official beginning of sitting *shiva*, the intense seven-day mourning period, discussed below.

The Jewish holiday calendar affects both services and burial: for example, Jews may not be buried on the Sabbath, or on a high holy day, though burial may occur on one of the intermediate days of Sukkot or Passover. Likewise, eulogies are forbidden on intermediate high holy days.

*Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are considered high holy days, and are observed by most Jews by time off of work, attending services in the synagogue, and spending the day in prayer and reflection; the days between these two holidays are considered intermediate holy days.*¹⁶

Beliefs Regarding the Afterlife

As a group, Jews do not concern themselves with the specifics of an afterlife (though the beliefs of particular sects may differ). Thus, a wide variety of individual interpretations exist, ranging from a belief in the final judgment and a resurrection of the dead, to a belief in reincarnation, to a belief in extinction. In Judaism, there is no concrete concept of heaven and hell, though many embrace the belief of *Gehinnom* (*Gehenna* in Yiddish, and sometimes also referred to as *She'ol*), which is somewhat similar to the Catholic concept of purgatory, and is essentially viewed as a purification of the soul so that it is ready to enter the presence of God; this purification is believed to last up to one year following a person's death.

13 Zalman Goldstein, "The Taharah; Preparing the Body for Burial," http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/367843/jewish/The-Taharah.htm, last accessed June 21, 2015.

14 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.5.

15 "A Guide to Jewish Burial and Mourning Practices," published by the Funeral Practices Committee of The Board of Rabbis of Southern California, p.5.

16 The exact dates for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur change yearly, so consult a Jewish calendar for exact dates. A good Jewish calendar is found at [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/month.htm) or here <http://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/month.htm>, last accessed July 22, 2015.

exam questions...

7. Jewish tradition holds that the burial should be attended by _____.
a. As many as possible
b. Immediate family only
c. Immediate and extended family only
d. Immediate family and close friends only

8. During the first meal (or *seudat havra'ah*), among other foods, things that are _____ are eaten; these symbolize the cycle of life and remind mourners that death is only one part of that cycle.
a. Locally-grown
b. Round in shape
c. Highly spiced
d. Freshly-baked

Unlike some traditions, Judaism stresses the world of the living over that of the dead, which generally means that a belief in dead spirits – or even prayers to, or private conversations with, the dead – are strongly discouraged as they are believed to be too similar to a worship of the dead.

Mourning and Remembrance

Unlike those seen in Roman Catholicism, for example, which focus on speeding the deceased's entry into Heaven, Jewish mourning and remembrance rituals center on the bereaved and the community. They give those impacted by loss a way to both reintegrate the dead into the community in their new role as deceased, and to honor their memory. Judaism stresses the need for a balance: "that people should avoid the extremes of constant visitation on the one hand, and of complete disregard on the other." Thus, some visitation is permitted, particularly on days of distress, anniversaries of the death, etc., as long as these visitations do not occur on a Jewish holy day, when the living should be focused on the worship of God.

Traditional Jewish custom dictates that mourners rip their clothing when someone close to them dies; this is meant to symbolize the breaking of their hearts at the loss of their loved one. Today a *keriah* ribbon, representing clothing, is often ripped instead: it is worn over one's heart on the left side when mourning the loss of one's parents; when mourning the loss of one's spouse, children, and/or siblings, it is worn over the right side. The ribbon (or ripped clothing) is worn during the entire initial mourning period of seven days, or *shiva*.

Shiva

The custom of observing *shiva* has its basis in Genesis 50:1-14, in which Joseph mourns the death of his father Jacob, or Israel, for seven days (in fact, "*shiva*" comes from the Hebrew word seven). During this time, mourners are expected to devote themselves solely to the task of grieving, withdrawing from all social activities and performing no tasks that might be associated with work. (If one's occupation involves saving others' lives, such as a doctor or a nurse, or if not working will cause extreme financial hardship, one may be excused from observing the full seven days, though a minimum of three days of mourning are expected.)

17 Jewish law also states that worship services may not be held where one can see a reflection of oneself, and since worship services are held in the home of the deceased, mirrors need to be covered in order for the minyan to occur. For more on this, see Maurice Lamm, "Preparing the House of Mourning," http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/281594/jewish/Preparing-the-House-of-Mourning.htm, last accessed June 25, 2015.

Mourners are expected to forgo many of life's daily pleasures and mundane tasks during *shiva*: bathing and grooming (particularly for pleasure) are given up, women usually wear no makeup, men give up shaving, and mirrors are covered for the duration, so that one's focus is inward rather than on one's appearance.¹⁷ Those observing *shiva* are traditionally expected to sit on low stools or chairs as an expression of humility; in reality, this aspect of *shiva* is not always strictly observed, though many mourners may remove the cushions from their sofas and chairs in order to sit on hard surfaces. All of these customs are meant to remind the mourner of the absence of the deceased, and allow the bereaved to focus nearly exclusively on her loss.

Mourners are not supposed to leave their house during this period, except to observe Shabbat, or the Sabbath, during which they may participate in synagogue activities, but must not mourn publicly. Exceptions to observing the full seven-day period also exist: if one of the Jewish high holy days of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot occurs during a *shiva*, then the Jewish holiday takes precedence, and the rest of the *shiva* is cancelled. The reason for this is similar to the reason the bereaved still observe Shabbat (the Sabbath) as God's worship takes precedence over bereavement.

A candle traditionally burns in the dining room for the entire seven-day period: it is lit, accompanied by a prayer, upon returning from the funeral and burial of the deceased (or upon hearing of the death). This candle symbolizes the bond between the deceased and the mourners, with the flame serving as a metaphor for the soul of the deceased, and it is not affected by the Sabbath or by high holy days (though it will be moved to a more private place during these times, as their focus should remain on God).

In Jewish custom, it takes ten adults to form a *minyan*, or a quorum – the minimum number required to hold a public prayer service. This reminds Jews that though they may individually hold much power or prosperity, it is only in a group of ten or more that they can form a true Jewish community. Correspondingly, because it takes ten Jewish adults to hold a *shiva minyan*, or a prayer service for the dead, the act of visiting and participating in a *shiva* is considered to be a good deed.

exam question...

9. During the initial seven-day mourning period, or *shiva*, mourners _____.
 - a. Are traditionally expected to sit on low stools or chairs as an expression of humility
 - b. Should display public grief during synagogue activities
 - c. Should bring the family of the deceased gifts of flowers
 - d. Are required to maintain their personal appearance out of respect for the deceased

There are several expectations of the greater Jewish community surrounding the bereaved during this time. Because Jews observing *shiva* are neither allowed nor expected to prepare meals, and may not serve those who come to visit, it becomes the task of the community to ensure that the bereaved are well fed and cared for. It is considered a blessing to prepare food for the bereaved, bring it to their home, and then serve them. Additionally, in lieu of bringing flowers to the home during *shiva* – which are considered ostentatious and unnecessary, rather than humble – most Jews will select a charity to which the grieving may donate. This, again, is considered a blessing – particularly to the deceased, who can never repay the gift given in their name.

Kaddish

Kaddish, a Jewish prayer that celebrates the sanctification and power of God, originated sometime in the 8th century, as mention of this practice is mentioned in the Talmud text of Sofrim. It is widely recited during mourning as reminder that even in the midst of sorrow, God is great and worthy of praise. Additionally, some believe that offering *kaddish* prayers will accumulate merit on behalf of the deceased and thus their souls will not suffer (in this way, it is not unlike the Roman Catholic recitation of the rosary, which directly praises God, but is indirectly believed to benefit the soul of the deceased and ease its time in purgatory).

The *kaddish* is said for the first year following the death – for more distant relatives and friends, the typical timeframe is thirty days, or one month – and then annually on the anniversary of the death. Since Jews traditionally pray three times a day (in the morning, afternoon, and evening), the *kaddish* will usually be recited several times in the morning, both before and after the prayers, and then again in the afternoon and evening, following the prayers. Jewish law dictates that the son pray the *kaddish* for his parents following their death, but if no son (or son-in law) is available to recite the prayers, then someone else is chosen to recite the prayers on the parents' behalf. This practice is gradually expanding to include women.

Yahrzeit

Yahrzeit is the celebration of the anniversary of a death, and occurs in three locations: the home, the synagogue, and the cemetery. In the home, a 24-hour candle is lit at sundown, *kaddish* prayers are recited, the deceased is remembered, and the person engaging in remembrance foregoes any social events, and sometimes fasts as well. Most synagogues will also remember and honor the dead, with many modern synagogues lighting a lightbulb next to the person's name once a year in honor of the deceased, and sending a notice to the family remembering their loved

ones and reminding them of the *yahrzeit*; sometimes a family member of the deceased will lead the synagogue services. Family members also often visit the graveyard and recite psalms. In this way, the dead are reincorporated into the realm of the living, reinforcing the greater Jewish community.

As ever, exceptions exist: if one forgets to observe the memorial, then it should be observed as soon as it is remembered; if one is too sick to observe the memorial, someone else can observe it by proxy, lighting the candle and reciting the prayers in their place. If the anniversary of a death falls on a Sabbath, the candle is lit before sundown, and the grave is visited the day before or after the Sabbath, so as not to interfere with worship. Likewise, if a mourner chooses to fast in honor of *yahrzeit* but the death anniversary falls on a Sabbath, then they must schedule their fasting either one day prior or one day after.

Yizkor

The Hebrew word *yizkor* means to “remember;” accordingly, Jews pray the *Yizkor* to ask God to remember those family and friends who are deceased.¹⁸ This special memorial is prayed four times a year:¹⁹ after the Torah reading on the last day of Passover, the second day of Shavuot (the Jewish high holy day celebrating the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people), Shemini Atzeret (the eighth day of Sukkot), and on the Jewish day of atonement, Yom Kippur. Generally, those whose parents are both still living will leave the synagogue during the *Yizkor* service, while those who are in their first year of mourning (and therefore actively mourning, and not quite yet in the remembering or memorializing stage of their grief) will remain for the service but will not actually recite the *Yizkor*. In this way, the Jewish calendar accounts for the various stages of grief – gradually moving from active mourning into more passive remembrances –

18 Zalman Goldstein, “Yizkor—The Memorial Prayer,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/371509/jewish/Yizkor-The-Memorial-Prayer.htm, last accessed May 25, 2015.

19 The prayer is as follows, and is taken from the Chabad.org website. This particular translation is for a person's deceased father. Remember the original is in Hebrew, but this will give one a sense of the meaning behind the prayer. “May G-d remember the soul of my father, my teacher (mention his Hebrew name and that of his mother) who has gone to his [supernal] world, because I will — without obligating myself with a vow — donate charity for his sake. In this merit, may his soul be bound up in the bond of life with the souls of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, and with the other righteous men and women who are in Gan Eden; and let us say, Amen.” Zalman Goldstein, “Yizkor—The Memorial Prayer,” http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/371509/jewish/Yizkor-The-Memorial-Prayer.htm, last accessed May 25, 2015.

while also helping the mourners through their grief by accompanying them ritually as a community.

The prayer varies according to those for whom it is being prayed, but it is generally customary to also attach a private vow to perform a charitable service in honor of the deceased (which mirrors the emphasis placed on performing charitable works or giving donations immediately following a death). Charity on behalf of someone who has died has two functions: performing deeds for the dead that they would have cared deeply about but can no longer perform themselves, and reminding the living that they remain in the world of the living and there is still work to do to make that world a better place. In other words, it helps the living remap their place in the world without the dead by finding meaningful work to do that the dead would have valued and cared about.

Additional Points of Cultural Sensitivity

It may seem as if the Jewish mourning tradition is very self-contained, centering on the home and/or the synagogue; however, a funeral director can still perform some important duties, including functioning as an intermediary for Jews who are not actively practicing, yet wish to bury or be buried in the traditional Jewish custom; helping those who are

unfamiliar with Jewish traditions to understand why there is no viewing, embalment, etc.; and helping to identify propitious days for burial and interment. If the funeral home is in an area with a sizable Jewish community, it would be advisable to identify a ready source of wooden coffins and Jewish headstones, and to familiarize oneself with the more popular charities in the area that may need donations. Also, if there is not an active synagogue in the area, the funeral home might consider holding *Yizkor* prayers for the local Jewish community.

- Be certain to ask the family for both the full Hebrew name and English name of the deceased, and find out which (if not both) should be on the program for services
- For Jews, there is no Old Testament (because there is no New Testament), only the Hebrew Bible. Calling the Hebrew Bible the Old Testament is a faux pas that should be avoided.
- Do not assume that all Jews are also pro-Zionist and pro-Israel. These are political issues, while Judaism is a religion.
- Do not assume all Jews keep kosher or don't eat pork. While some prefer to follow strict dietary guidelines, some choose to observe their religious faith in ways that are not dietary.

exam question...

10. The Hebrew word *yizkor* means to “remember;” accordingly, Jews pray the *Yizkor* to ask God to remember those family and friends who are deceased. This special memorial is prayed _____.
- a. After the Torah reading on the first day of Passover
 - b. By those whose parents are both still living
 - c. At the discretion of the descendents
 - d. Four times a year