

REFLECTIONS OF THE MOURNING LIGHT

Mourning and Consolation
in Jewish Law & Thought

Given by Rabbi Larry Rothwachs

MONDAY NIGHTS AT 8:30
at Congregation Beth Aaron
950 Queen Anne Road Teaneck NJ

- ▶ **MAY 2** Sacred Passage: Escorting Loved Ones During the Moments of Death
- ▶ **MAY 9** "And To the Dust You Shall Return": Before, During and After the *Levaya*
- ▶ **MAY 16** The Mourning Light: Perspectives on *Aveilus* in *Halacha* and *Hashkafa*
- ▶ **MAY 23** The Comfort Zone: Practical *Nichum Aveilim* in *Halacha* and *Hashkafa*
- ▶ **JUNE 6** "May the *Neshama* Have an *Aliyah*": Memorializing the Soul of a Loved One

This lecture series is generously sponsored by:

Allen and Rachel Friedman in memory of Allen's mother Dvora (Rakover) Friedman z"l
Alden and Evie Leifer in memory of Alden's parents, Hy and Trudy Leifer,
Chaim ben Nachman Moshe z"l and Gittel bas Shlomo Yaakov halevi z"l

THE MOURNING LIGHT:
PERSPECTIVES ON
AVEILUS IN *HALACHA*
AND *HASHKAFHA*

Most מצוות have a:

1. מעשה המצוה – action of the mitzvah
2. קיום המצוה – fulfillment of the mitzvah

Typically, these merge into one and are achieved simultaneously

• Examples:

1. נטילת לולב: ACTION of taking לולב = קיום המצוה
2. אכילת מצה: ACTION of eating מצה = קיום המצוה
3. הדלקת נר חנוכה: ACTION of lighting candle = קיום המצוה



There are times however, when the **מעשה המצוה** and the **קיום המצוה** are bifurcated. In this situation, the physical execution of the **מצוה** does not automatically constitute fulfillment. Rather the fulfillment of the **מצוה** requires a particular state of mind. These **מצוות** have a "קיום שבלב".

- Examples:

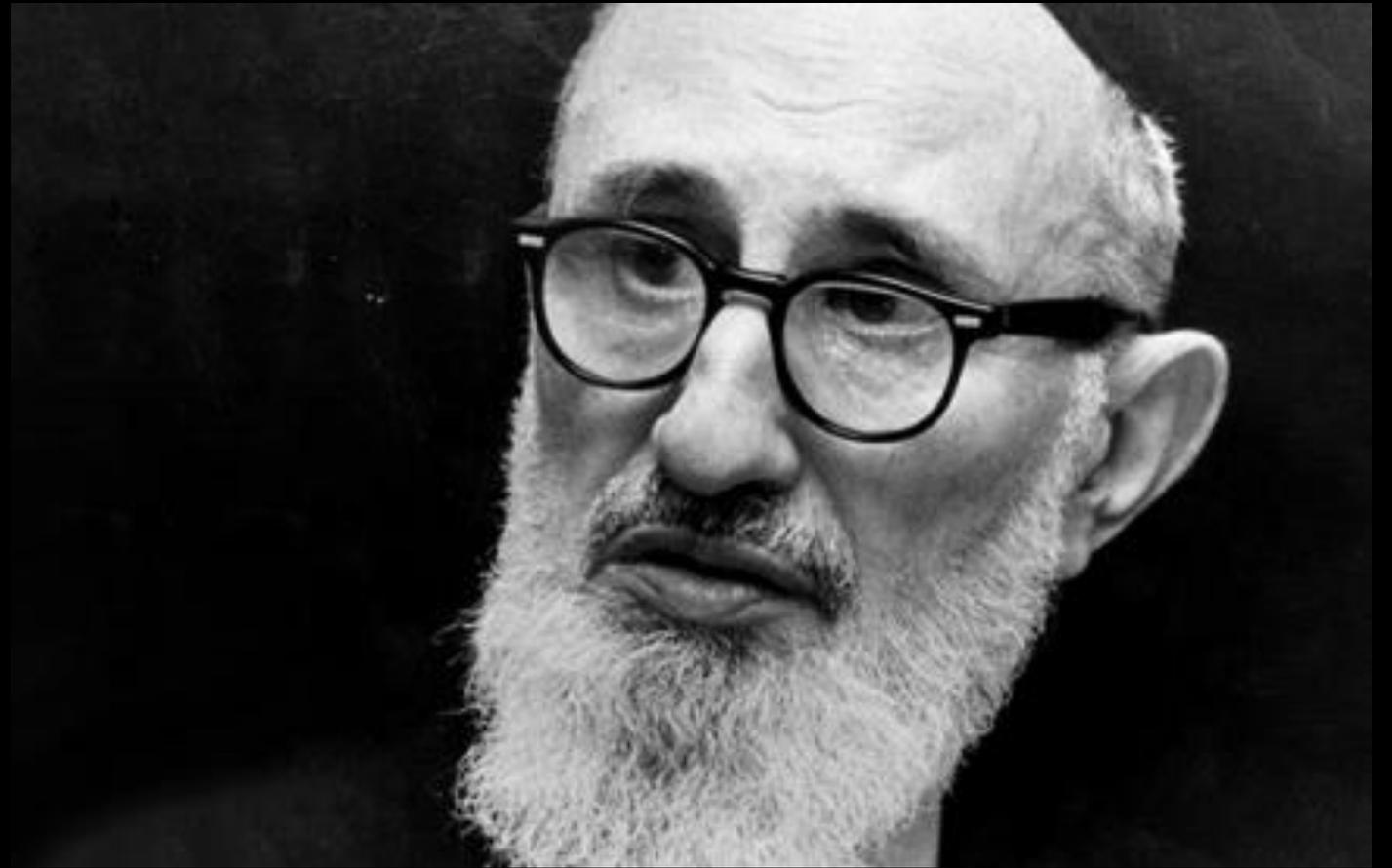
1. תפילה: The action(s) of davening + כוונה שבלב = קיום המצוה
2. שמחת יו"ט: The action(s) of davening + כוונה שבלב = קיום המצוה
3. תשובה: The action(s) of repentance + כוונה שבלב = קיום המצוה
4. אבילות: The action(s) of repentance + כוונה שבלב = קיום המצוה



Out of the Whirlwind

*Essays on Mourning,
Suffering and
the Human Condition*

By Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik



With the commencement of Avelut, the Halakhah commands the mourner to undertake a heroic task: to start picking up the debris of his own shattered personality and to reestablish himself as man, restoring lost glory, dignity and uniqueness



Duality of Shiva: for whose benefit...?

Both the נפטר and the אבלים

רמב"ם הל' אבל יד:ז – יראה לי שנחמת אבלים
קודם לבקור חולים שנחום אבלים גמילות חסד
עם החיים ועם המתים

מס' מועד קטן כ. – מנין לאבילות שבעה? דכתיב "והפכתי חגיכם לאבל" מה חג שבעה אף אבילות שבעה.

עמוס ח:י – וְהִפַּכְתִּי חֲגִיכֶם לְאֵבֶל וְכָל־שִׁירֵיכֶם לְקִינָה וְהִעֲלִיתִי עַל־כָּל־מִתְנַיִם שֹׁק וְעַל־כָּל־רֹאשׁ קָרְחָה וְשִׁמְתִּיהָ כְּאֵבֶל יָחִיד וְאַחֲרֶיהָ כְּיוֹם מָר

"I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day."

- Process, transformation, etc...
- Rabbi Maurice Lamm: "A person should not commemorate or remember the trauma of death for more than a given amount of time... So as to not strain the mourner's mind to retain an active memory of that death. We cannot progress, even survive, if such memories hung around in our acute awareness. They would paralyze us, freeze all of life into one hour, and we cannot then make the transition back to living – surely not transcend the death or become transformed and reenergized."

סעודת הבראה

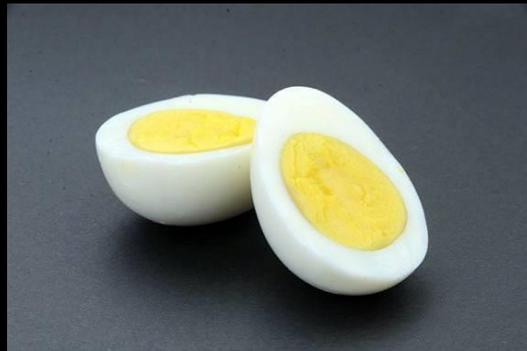
- שו"ע יו"ד שעח:א – אבל אסור לאכול משלו בסעודה ראשונה אבל בשניה מותר אפילו ביום ראשון ומצוה על שכניו שיאכילוהו משלהם כדי שלא יאכל משלו
- ירושלמי מועד קטן ג:ה – אמרו תבוא מאירה לשכניו שהצריכוהו לכך

The logic of this *halacha* is clear. In their moment of intense loneliness, it is unthinkable for the mourners to return to an empty house; the community must be there to feed them. The mourners are distraught over their loss and have no interest in eating, hoping to die themselves; their friends are there to tell them that life goes on, that as strange as this may seem to them now, they will want to eat; that they are part of the community that there is to support and nurture them. Indeed, a curse on the neighbors if they desert the mourners in their hour of need. And just as the community may not abandon the mourners, the mourners may not retreat from the community; they may not reinforce their sense of isolation by eating of their own. They are obligated to reach out to those who are obligated to be there for them. In the Jewish tradition, being comforted is an essential expression of mourning.

– Rabbi Joel Wolowelsky, *The Mind of the Mourner*, p. 36

סעודת הבראה

- Upon returning to the home, *aveilim* partake of a special meal, called the סעודת הבראה. This meal is to consist of food that is prepared and served by others, not by the *aveilim* themselves.
- Traditionally, the *seudas havra'ah* begins with bread (bagels) and lentils or hard boiled eggs.
- Meal is literally **served** to the *aveilim*; namely, after washing, the *aveilim* wait and the bread is placed directly in their hands and the eggs are peeled for them.
- It is customary that other close family members partake of this meal.
- Only on the same day of the burial. Not on *erev Shabbos* or *erev YT* after 9 hours (שעות זמניות).
- Following the *seudas havra'ah*, the *aveilim* do not form a *zimun* and recite *bircas hamazon* together.
- Many *siddurim* include a special text for the *birchas hamazon* which follows the *seudas havra'ah*. However, the prevalent custom today is to recite the normal *birchas hamazon*.



בית אבל / HOUSE OF MOURNING

- Traditionally, a candle is lit in the house in which the *niftar* was deceased (even if the *shiva* will be observed elsewhere) and remains lit for the duration of *shiva*.
- If the candle continues to burn after the conclusion of *shiva*, it should be allowed to burn out, rather than be extinguished.
- The accepted practice seems to be that a candle is lit in the *beis avel* (even when the *niftar* died elsewhere), and remains burning throughout the period of *shiva*.
- Traditionally, the mirrors in the house in which the *aveilim* will stay during *shiva* are covered throughout the week of *shiva*.
- Uncovered for Shabbos
- Source...? כפיית המטה...?
- <http://www.hakirah.org/Vol13Ron.pdf>



בית אבל / HOUSE OF MOURNING

- At times, it is beneficial to reconfigure the room that will be used for *davening* and / or *nichum aveilim*, in order to maximize the available space. *Aveilim* should welcome the efforts of friends and members of the *chevra kadisha* to temporarily rearrange the room in such a way.
- Many food deliveries are often made during the week of *shiva*. There may frequently be an excess of food and the need arises to temporarily store or refrigerate food. *Avielim* should welcome the efforts of friends and the *chevra* to free up and maximize space in the existing refrigerator(s). If the need arises to store excess food at a friend or neighbor's home, that is a completely legitimate option. In fact, it is preferable that food be removed from the *beis avel*, stored elsewhere and consumed after *shiva*, rather than be discarded or allowed to waste.
- If there are any pictures that are positioned directly facing where the assembled *minyan* will stand, they should be temporarily moved, covered or repositioned (i.e. faced down or turned around).
- If there are pets in the home (other than fish), they should be removed from the room which will be used for *davening* and *nichum aveilim*.

אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- מלאכה / Work: an *avel* is prohibited from engaging in any work related activities, as they will undoubtedly distract him from his *aveilus*.
- An *avel* should not engage in any business related discussions, phone calls or email discussions. Every effort should be made to arrange for coverage at work before the *shiva* begins.
- In a situation where one is concerned that he will suffer a monetary loss if he refrains from work, a *rav* should be consulted for guidance.



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- רחיצה / Bathing: An *avel*, is prohibited from showering or bathing his entire body during *shiva*, even using cold water.
- An *avel* may wash his face, hands and feet, using cold water only. The water need not be freezing cold, but should not be warmer than room temperature.
- Washing other parts of the body is prohibited, unless there is a medical need (even if it is not a serious need).
- The prohibition of bathing is limited to רחיצה של תענוג, namely, bathing for pleasure or for the purpose of comfort. Therefore, one may wash himself to remove dirt from his body. Similarly, an *avel* who has perspired significantly may wash himself to remove the perspiration.
- One who feels extreme discomfort due to these restrictions should consult with his *rav* for guidance.
- An *avel* may brush his teeth and in the normal fashion and rinse with mouthwash.



אבילות / SHIVA

- סיכה / Anointing: An *avel* may not apply lotions, perfumes or other topical ointments of any sort, unless there is a medicinal need.
- An *avel* may use antiperspirant or deodorant.
- Gel or mousse may not be applied to the hair.
- A woman should not apply makeup during *shiva*.



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- נעילת הסנדל / Removal of Leather Shoes: An *avel* should not wear leather shoes throughout the period of *shiva*.
- An *avel* should not wear a shoe that contains any leather, whether in the sole, sides or back.
- An *avel* is permitted to wear shoes made of any other materials, even if they provide the equivalent comfort to a leather shoe.
- One who is medically required to wear leather shoes for additional support is permitted to do so



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

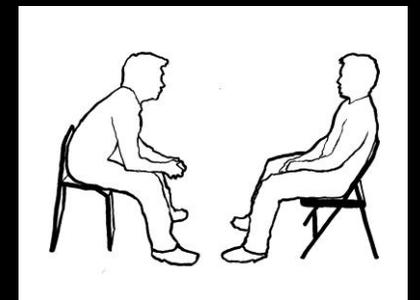
- תשמיש המטה / Marital Relations: An *avel* may not engage in marital relations throughout the entire period of *shiva*.
- When either the husband or wife is observing *shiva*, they should refrain from any affectionate physical contact, including sharing the same bed.
- Other *harchakos* that are normally applicable when a woman is a *niddah* (i.e. casual physical contact, passing, serving, etc.) are permissible during *shiva*.
- A woman who is observing *shiva* does not immerse in the *mikvah* during that week. Rather, she should wait and immerse after the *shiva* has concluded.

אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- תלמוד תורה / Torah Study: An *avel* is prohibited from studying Torah throughout the week of *shiva*. The prohibition applies to all areas of *Torah*, including *torah she'bichsav*, and *torah she'baal peh*.
- An *avel* is permitted to study any of the following:
 1. *Sefer Iyov* (with commentaries)
 2. *Megillas Eicha* (with commentaries)
 3. the tragic descriptions recorded in *Sefer Yirmiyahu*
 4. the laws of *aveilus*
 5. the 3rd chapter of *Moed Kattan* (אלו מגלחין) with *mefarshim* as well
- If needed, an *avel* may reply to a *halachic* inquiry, without elaboration or explanations.
- An *avel* may recite *tehillim* if they are said as a *tefillah*, but they should not be recited for the purpose of study.
- An *avel* who is accustomed to learning שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום, is permitted to do so on *shabbos* during *shiva*.
- In addition to the prohibition of studying *Torah*, an *avel* should refrain from reading other materials that will distract him from his *aveilus*, such as newspapers, magazines, books, etc.
- It is permissible for an *avel* to read any materials (i.e. personal letters, family pictures, etc.) that facilitate discussion and invoke memories of the *niftar*.

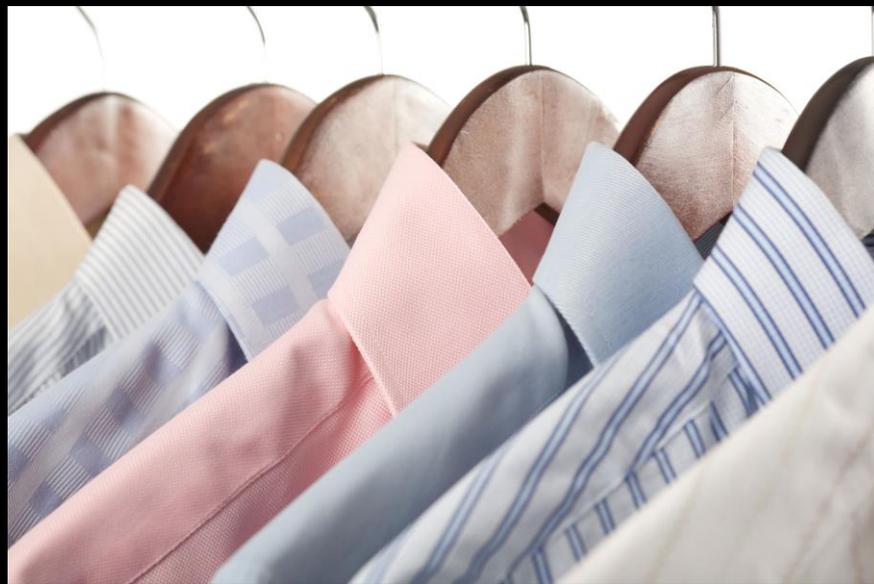
אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- שאילת שלום / Offering Greetings: An *avel* may not offer greeting to any individual, nor is anyone to extend a greeting to an *avel*.
- Prohibited greetings include: "שלום עליכם", "Good morning" and "hello". However, a simple nod of the head toward the *aveilim* is permissible.
- If a visitor unknowingly extends a greeting, after three days, the *avel* may quietly respond.
- Even if the *avel* receives a visitor who travels a long distance, he should still refrain from extending a formal greeting.
- An *avel* should not greet or stand for his *rebbe* or any other distinguished individual. However, he may offer a slight gesture or motion, indicating that he would stand if he were permitted to do so.
- It is prohibited for a visitor to initiate conversation with the *avel*, before first receiving a cue from the *avel* himself.
- It is permissible for the *aveilim* to thank those who have come to offer their condolences.



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- כיבוס וגיהוץ / Laundering: An *avel* is prohibited from washing clothes during *shiva* and from wearing freshly laundered clothing.
- If an *avel's* clothing becomes soiled, he may change them. One who is observing *shiva* for a parent and must change his shirt, is required to tear *keriah* again.
- On *Shabbos*, an *avel* may wear a freshly laundered garment.





אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- ישיבה על גבי הקרקע / Sitting on the Floor: An *avel* must sit on the floor or within three *tefachim* (approx. 12 inches) of the floor during *shiva*.
- An elderly person or anyone who experiences significant discomfort from sitting in this position may sit on a regular chair.
- The requirement to sit low down only applies when one is sitting. However, at any point during *shiva*, an *avel* may choose to stand or lie down; there is no requirement to sit per se.
- The accepted practice is that an *avel* may sleep in his normally accustomed fashion.



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- תספורת ונטילת צפרניים / Personal Grooming: An *avel* may not cut or shave his hair, nor may he cut his nails.
- It is permissible for an *avel* to comb his hair.
- Following *shiva*, a woman may shave body hair.
- The prohibition of cutting one's nails applies to fingernails and toenails.
- The prohibition of cutting nails only applies if one uses a nail clipper or scissors. One may however, trim his nails with his hands or teeth.
- A woman may cut her nails in preparation for *tevilah b'mikvah*.
- One who finds it significantly uncomfortable to refrain from cutting his nails, should consult with his *rav*.



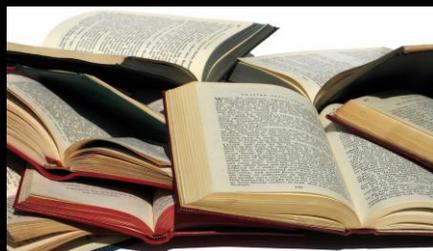
אבילות / SHIVA

- יציאה מן הבית / Leaving the Home: An *avel* is prohibited to leave his home during *shiva*.
- If an *avel* must leave the home to go elsewhere to sleep, he is permitted to do so.
- An *avel* may leave the home on *Shabbos*.
- If in *avel* feels the need to step outside and get some fresh air, he should preferably exit through a side or back door and remain in the back of the house, rather than leave through the main entrance.
- In a situation where a pressing need arises and the *avel* feels that he must leave the home, he should consult with his *rav*.



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- In keeping with the spirit of *shiva*, the *avel* should refrain from
 - Reading pleasure material
 - Reading the newspaper
 - Watching TV
 - Engaging in an form of personal or social correspondence
 - Playing with a child
 - Listening to music



אבילות שבעה / SHIVA

- שינוי מקום / Changing Seat: An avel is required to move from his permanent seat in shul during his aveilus.
- There are many different opinions and customs regarding this practice. The minhag in the Beth Aaron community is that an avel should change his seat on Shabbos only during the period of shloshim. One who is observing aveilus for a parent should change his seat for 12 months, only during the week.
- An avel should move to a seat away from the *aron hakodesh*, either farther back or to the side. Needless to say, every effort should be made to locate a new seat that will be no less conducive for proper *davening* than where he sat beforehand. Similarly, his new seat should not interfere with his ability to *daven* next to younger children, when applicable.

אבילות שבעה בשבת / SHIVA ON SHABBOS

- On *Shabbos*, an *avel* refrains from displaying any outward or public observances of *aveilus*. Nevertheless, the *aveilus* is not fully suspended and all private restrictions remain in place. Private restrictions include: marital relations, washing and *Torah* learning.
- An *avel* may begin to prepares for *Shabbos* within a reasonable amount of time before the onset of *Shabbos*. It is permissible for the *aveilim* to accept *Shabbos* early during *shiva*.
- An *avel* does not recite קבלת שבת during *shiva*, but does recite מזמור שיר ליום השבת, upon entering *shul*.
- Some have a custom to refrain from singing "שלום עליכם" in a בית אבל. אשת חיל and all other זמירות may be sung as usual. No ברכת הבנים.
- At the conclusion of *Shabbos*, an *avel* should *daven maariv* in his home. Immediately after reciting *borchu*, he should remove his leather shoes (preferably without touching them with his hands) and should change out of his *Shabbos* clothing after he has concluded *maariv*.
- An *avel* may recite *kiddush* and *havdalah* on behalf the household.

שלושים / SHLOSHIM

- It was customary to refrain from normal bathing during *shloshim*. Nevertheless, the prevalent practice today reflects the very lenient position that the *poskim* of our generation have adopted regarding this custom. Therefore, it is permissible for one to shower and bathe, as needed. Ideally however, one should try to limit the frequency and duration of showers or baths to that which is needed for cleanliness and comfort, and refrain from bathing for pleasure. Similarly, one should not swim for pleasure during *shloshim*.
- One should try to avoid wearing freshly laundered and ironed clothing. It is permissible to allow someone else to temporarily wear the clothing and then place them on afterward.

שלושים / SHLOSHIM

- One should refrain from wearing new clothing during *shloshim*. After the *shloshim*, one who is mourning for a parent is permitted to purchase only new clothing for which there is a need. Otherwise, one should refrain from such purchases throughout the year.
- An *avel* may not take a haircut or shave his facial hair during *shloshim*. Additionally, an *avel* may not cut his nails during *shloshim*. One who is mourning for a parent may not take a haircut until people begin to tell him that he looks like a mess. To clarify the definition and applicability of this law, the *avel* should consult with his rav.

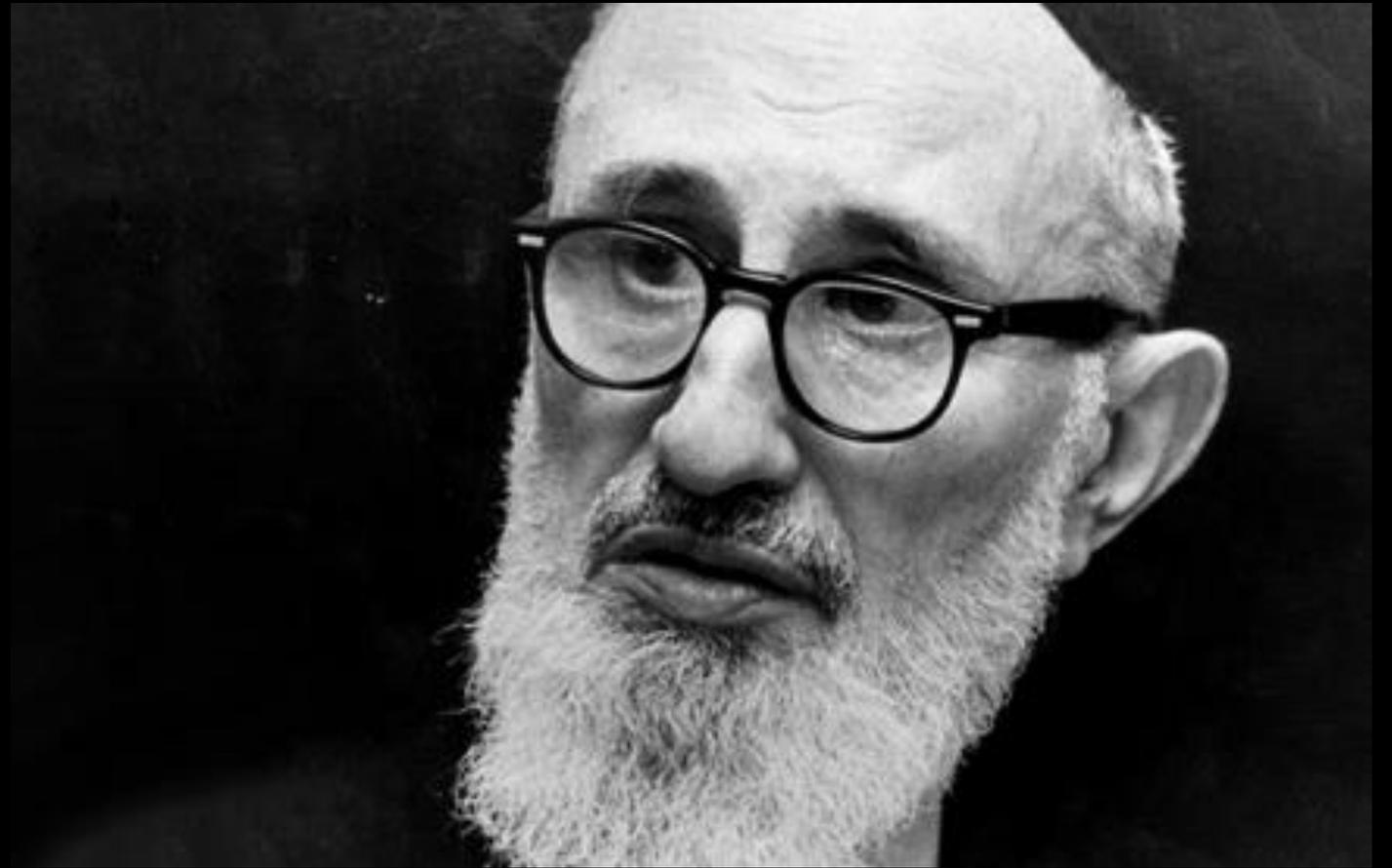
שלושים / SHLOSHIM

- An *avel* is required to refrain from participation in public celebratory gatherings or other social events that bring a person significant enjoyment (שמחה מרעות). The definition, parameters and applications of this restriction are somewhat subjective and one may discover a certain degree of variability between different communities. It is advisable that one consult with his *rav* in order to establish a clear set of personal guidelines and seek to apply them in a consistent manner throughout the period of *aveilus*.

Out of the Whirlwind

*Essays on Mourning,
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Mourning, if observed with restraint in compliance with halacha, enhances the status of man. It is an experience of great dignity; it is a sacrificial act enlightening the sufferer as to the meaning of life as well as the destiny of mankind. This axiological critical analysis enriches his personality. It purges him of the ugly and contemptible in life. On the other hand, when man remains emotionally neutral he loses a lot of his humanity. The animal is neutral. Men must not disengage himself from his involvement in the fate of his fellow man. Nevertheless, men must not react hysterically to pain and suffering. He must not surrender to them. He must at a certain moment be capable of rising from the mourner store, no matter how difficult it is.

- Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l

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Chaim ben Nachman Moshe z"l and Gittel bas Shlomo Yaakov halevi z"l