

L E T T E R S

Do Not Abandon Shivah

I fully agree with URJ President Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie on the need to observe *shivah* (“Dear Reader: Do Not Abandon *Shivah*,” Spring 2009).

Last June, my sister and I flew to Johannesburg in just enough time to see Mom before she lapsed into a coma from which she never recovered. According to tradition in South Africa, as all of her children were present, she was buried at 1:00 pm that same day; prayers were held that evening. What a terrible day it was—seeing someone you love die, be buried, saying *Kaddish*, and then choosing a stone, all in the space of fourteen hours. We had no time to sit *shivah*, as Mom’s personal effects had to be packed up and given to charities before we left (our brother in Johannesburg could not do this). We were sorting and packing and running for take-outs and restaurant meals, as

the food in the house had run out. We were too exhausted to cook, and no one was there to help. How we would have appreciated a hot home-cooked meal! How we needed to be surrounded by friends who would listen and cry with us and share our stories about a very special, inspirational lady! We never felt so alone in all our lives.

When I returned to Toronto, my fridge was filled with homemade meals. There were phone calls and cards. People popped in constantly. My rabbi asked what he could do, congregants comforted us, the temple’s Chessed Committee offered any help they could give. This was exactly what I needed, but because it came late, my grief was intensified and prolonged. I

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will always regret not sitting *shivah* for my mother.

So, when your time comes to be a mourner, please, allow yourself to observe *shivah* the way it should be done. Jewish customs are smart and should not be forsaken. *Shivah* won’t make your loss any easier, but when you look back, you will realize how much it helped you at a time when you needed love and support the most.

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I agree, Rabbi Yoffie, that observing *shivah* provides much needed community and healing. I wish, though, that you had taken the next step to address how our Reform community observes *Kaddish* in modern times. Many Reform Jews miss out when they dismiss observing *Kaddish* as a practice only for the very observant. My own experience in

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