



RABBI BRIAN'S



NOTES ABOUT MOURNING

[ROTB.org/Mourning](https://rotb.org/Mourning)



#Notes on Mourning

What follows is a compilation of things that I've picked up about mourning. I hope you find comfort. ❤️ rB • rabbi_brian@rotb.org

****Grief****

Grief is love with no place to go.
Grief is the final stage of love.

****Permission****

Don't worry about what you think you ought to be doing.
Judaism, so you know, permits mourners to violate almost every commandment. Give yourself the permission to mourn as though it were your primary objective.

****Be****

Pain is in direct proportion to your love. So scream. Cry. Wail.
Weep. Be sad. Very sad. Your dear one has been taken from you.

****Time and Attention****

Putting things somewhat back together takes both time and attention. Both. You can put off the pain, but you cannot not experience it. (Deferred pain gains interest.)

****Advice from a grief therapist****

Sit in the pain and discomfort.

****Waves****

The Waves of Grief and Memories

When you are mourning, emotions and memories come in waves.

Ocean waves come and leave of their own accord. You cannot control them. Neither can you control the waves of emotions (or memories) when you are mourning.

At times, emotions will be overwhelming and take you without warning. You won't be done until they are done.

It's the same with memories. Memories you didn't even know you had may arrive, seemingly from nowhere, and, again like waves, you are not in control of them. These waves will come and go according to their own course of time, heavier and harder now, and lighter in the future; but for today, you do not need to look to be anywhere but where you are.

****A Law: Comfort In. Dump out.****

The deceased's spouse, children, parents, caregiver, etc. are at the epicenter.

Friends in the next circle.

Acquaintances in the circle outside of that.

The rule, according to researchers Silk and Goldman is: "Comfort in. Dump out."

Those closer to the center get to dump their sadness on those further out, and those further out are to comfort those closer in.

At times, people break this rule and someone further out tries to make the person closer-in take care of them. It doesn't work out well.

****A Haiku****

Grief is a dull ache,
Ready to spring, tears waiting.
It is always gone.

– Reverend Lori Turner-Otte

**Walk around the block**

Rituals move us from one place to another; they help our spirits know that what has happened is real, and they help us understand the new identity that we are called to in light of our loss (from companion to the one left behind).

Many people underestimate the power of rituals.

Ripping your clothing, covering mirrors so you don't see how you look, and many others are good rituals. Ask around: people have great ideas to share. Rituals help us move in our sense of identity.

A ritual I have found helpful is walking around the block. A week after the death, take a walk around the block by yourself or with loved ones. This ritual is ancient and unbelievably effective. The mourning doesn't end with the walk around the block, but something shifts.

**Shower tears**

It's great to let yourself cry in the shower.

****You are off autopilot****

In the movie Fight Club, one of the main characters talks about having had a near-life experience. It is after having a brush with death that life, and the quality of life, shifts.

I heard Rabbi Arthur Rosenberg talk about it as the moment when you are driving and you almost get hit and you wake up to the fact that you are driving – that somehow you had drifted into a somewhat-dreamlike state of consciousness.

Facing death knocks us off of auto-pilot, and that paradigm shift is often quite jolting.

And, as with many paradigm shifts, we can feel shame, like we have wasted time, or as though we are in a dream, wondering if when we were awake that was the dream. This realization can feel like quite a mind trip.

****Dead Assholes****

If you had a conflicted relationship with the deceased, the relationship isn't over—and that grates a lot of cheese!

****Oops****

People will say stupid things to you.

Like really stupid and insulting things. In an “can you believe they could say that” kind of way.

Email me a list with the stupidest ones. Really. You can.

This way when you hear to "Grandma is with Jesus now," instead of getting offended, you might think instead, “Oooh, I’m going to write that one down and make Rabbi Brian laugh.”

****Witness lost****

When we lose a loved one, we lose a witness to our own lives.

When our beloveds die—we get lost a little. We lose the person with whom we share those memories. We are left holding the bag. We feel alone, abandoned, isolated, emptied, etc.

****New chapter****

When a major figure of your life dies, you enter a new chapter of your life. Like starting a new chapter of a novel, you don't know what is going to happen. Some characters from previous chapters might start acting differently. Some new characters might be introduced.

Just as you wouldn't pretend to know what will happen when a new chapter of a book starts, you oughtn't expect to understand right now how things will play out with the loss of your loved one.

****Decisions****

Do not make any major life decisions until the death is no longer the biggest focus of your life.

****Done crying****

Person A: When will I stop crying?

Person B: When you run out of tears.

****Mind/Body****

The stress of loss does amazing things to our beings. Your body might react in ways you are not used to: ravenous, no appetite, tremors. You might lose your memory, be unable to follow things with attention, feel cold.

This is all normal. Scary at times, but it's just what happens.

Over time, equilibrium will return. But, not just yet. Trust your mind/body's process.

****Exhaustion****

You should rest. (And, hydrate.)

****No Jedi****

You will not be able to handle this gracefully.

****Distance****

When we first are faced with death, it is just that – it is right in front of our faces. We cannot see much else. It is at the forefront of everything.

Over time, the grief moves about a foot away. Still in the forefront, still smack in the center, but a little further away, and we start to see some of the other things in our lives, peripherally.

Then, the grief moves even further away, and you see more things in focus before you.

Finally, the grief becomes part of the background again.

Do not criticize yourself for being single focused until enough time has passed.

****With love****

Do as much as you can, as well as you can.