



Shomer Collective Fellowship Cohort 2

Final Project: 7th and 8th Grade Intro to Death and Dying in Judaism

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Overview:

The purpose of this 3 part lesson is to introduce the customs and rituals around Death/Dying in Judaism to 7th and/or 8th graders. Following B'nei Mitzvah, Jews are expected to take part in minyanim and prayer services. In order to do this appropriately, young Jews should understand the fundamentals around death and dying in Jewish culture. Following this short series, they should be able to have a strong enough understanding of their role and how death is observed in Judaism.

There will be 3 lessons, each should take approximately 60 minutes (180 minutes in total). Lesson 1 will be an introduction to the process of death, grief, and mourning in Judaism. Lesson 2 will be an introduction to Chevra Kadisha, what this is, why it's important, and the various roles. Lesson 3 will be a mock shiva in which students will understand their role whether it be as a mourner or someone that is visiting those in mourning.

Lesson Plan 1 of 3

Introducing the Customs of Grief and Mourning in Judaism

Lesson: Introduce the laws and customs, as well as the mourning timeline, when someone dies in Jewish culture

Time: 60 minutes

Activity: Death Over Dinner (7th/8th Grade Edition)

Goals and Objectives:

1. Get students to share their experiences with death and grieving.
2. Address Jewish principles around death and grief.
3. Allow students to ask questions that they have. Normalize asking questions about death and dying.
4. Normalize the discussion around end-of-life preparations.

Intro/Program Background: ["Death Over Dinner"](#) is a global program that was created in 2013. It invites adults to discuss some of life's bigger questions in the setting of informal dinner conversation. The program came about when its creators saw a need to normalize conversations related to death in American society. The program has since expanded to include an Australian Edition, Healthcare Edition, [Jewish Edition](#) and more. Within the Jewish Edition, there are also more specific programs of LGBTQ+, Interfaith, and Vegan editions.

Time	Activity	Materials	Procedure
0-5 minutes	Intro	None	Address that we will be having a conversation about death and grieving and that we know it can be a sensitive topic. Students can ask to leave the space for a moment if it becomes too much for them.
5-10 minutes	Set Intentions		When studying death in Judaism, we dedicate the learning to someone in our life that has died. Share who you would like to dedicate today's learning to. Ask for others to share.
10-13 minutes	Divide into Groups	Enough tables and chairs for the needed number of groups	Divide class into 2-3 groups depending on class size. Each group should have no more than 5 students. Each group will sit at a different table. They will have the same discussions, but in small groups.
13-25 minutes	Small group discussions	Copy of the questions for each adult/facilitator	<p>Question 1: When someone talks about death, what do you feel? Why is death sometimes difficult to talk about?</p> <p>Question 2: What do you know about Jewish customs or laws relating to death? Have you experienced any?</p>
25-32 minutes	Group Debrief		What was it like to talk about death with your peers? How do we make end of life and dying an open ended conversation?

32-37 minutes	Grieving vs Mourning		<p>While often used interchangeably, grief is the internal experience of loss, while mourning is the outward expression and process of adapting to that loss.</p> <p>Mourning is the process of expressing grief and adapting to loss, particularly after the death of a loved one. It involves a range of emotions, behaviors, and rituals that help individuals come to terms with their loss and integrate it into their lives.</p>
37-42 minutes	Jewish mourning customs		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The moment of death 2. The period between death and burial (aninut) 3. The funeral (keverah) 4. The seven-day mourning period (shiva) - <i>avoid all activities and focus on mourning</i> 5. The thirty-day mourning period (shloshim) - <i>Avoid activities that aren't in the spirit of mourning</i> 6. The year mourning period for parents (yud-bet chodesh) 7. The anniversary date of someone's death (yahrzeit). <p>Explain customs that take place during each stage.</p>
42-50 minutes	Matching game	Printouts of the matching game	Students will match the name of the mourning period with its correct definition.
50-60 minutes	Debrief and Q&A		<p>Check in with students. How are they feeling? What questions do they have.</p> <p>Briefly introduce next lesson</p>

Mourning Period Matching Game: Match the Mourning Period to its correct description.

The funeral

Shiva

The anniversary date of someone's death

Yud-Bet chodesh

The seven-day mourning period
(avoid all activities and focus on mourning)

Shloshim

The period between death and burial

Yahrzeit

The year mourning period for parents

Aninut

The thirty-day mourning period
(Avoid activities that aren't in the spirit of mourning)

Kevurah

Lesson Plan 2 of 3

Introducing the Concept of Chevra Kadisha

Lesson: Introduce the concept of Chevra Kadisha and the Jewish values and customs associated.

Time: 60 minutes

Activity:

1. Guest speaker from local Chevra kadisha to give background, roles, purpose, etc
2. This or That: Minhag vs. Halacha

Goals:

1. Develop understanding of what a Chevra Kadisha is and why it is so important that Jewish communities have one.
2. Understand values associated with Chevra Kadisha.
3. Explore ways to be involved in a Chevra Kadisha.

Outcomes:

1. Teens will learn the importance of Chevra Kadisha and how they can be involved.
2. Teens will begin to understand the practices surrounding death and burial and some differences between what has become tradition/custom vs what is commanded.

Background:

Chevra Kadisha - The Holy Society

A Chevra Kadisha (holy society) is a Jewish organization composed of community members that support and assist families and communities at the end-of-life and after.

[Kavod v'Nichum](#) is an organization that empowers, educates, and trains Chevrei Kadisha – sacred communities that come together at the end of life to care for the deceased and comfort the living through Jewish rituals and traditions.

Kavod v'Nichum says:

Being in a Chevra Kadisha, a Sacred Community, means:

- Accessing an ancient Jewish framework that acknowledges and cares for everyone in the community equally and without judgment
- Creating an ecosystem of care rooted in Jewish text and values
- Navigating end-of-life transitions as a community
- Meaningful Jewish engagement and volunteer opportunities
- Embodying Jewish values: chesed shel emet (non-judgmental love), living with the consciousness of death

Time	Activity	Materials	Procedure
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0-3 minutes	Introduce topic of the day and the guest speaker from local chevra kadisha		
3-30 minutes	Guest Speaker	Whatever the presenter requires	Background in establishment of Chevra Kadisha. Significance. Roles.
30-40 minutes	Q&A with speaker		
40-45 minutes	Concept of chesed shel emet		What is chesed shel emet and how is a Chevra Kadisha the ultimate act of this value? (e.g., Loving without judgement or the expectation of anything in return.)
45-55 minutes	This or That: Minhag or Halacha	Masking tape line on the floor (optional) List of practices to ask about	Read the list of practices one at a time, instructing teens to: step forward if you think it's minhag (custom/tradition), step back if you think it's halacha (law). Share the answer after all teens have stepped forward or backward.
55-60 minutes	Closing		Share information about local Chevra Kadisha (optional) Answer final questions

List of Practices:

1. Bikkur Cholim (Visiting the sick). Is this minhag or halacha?
 - a. Halacha - it is a mitzvah (commandment) to do bikkur cholim, visiting the sick
2. Prayers at the deathbed. Is praying with the individual that is dying minhag or halacha?
 - a. Halacha - it is a mitzvah to be present with someone at the moment of death.

- i. If time for discussion, ask the group why this would be a mitzvah (commandment).
3. Tachrichim (burial garments). Is it minhag or halacha to be buried in tachrichim?
 - a. Minhag - It is customary to bury the deceased in tachrichim. They are intended to represent the garments worn by the High Priest on Yom Kippur in the Temple.
4. Simplicity of the aron (coffin). Is the aron's simple design minhag or halacha?
 - a. Minhag - the tradition began to demonstrate the equality of all persons in death.
5. Digging of the grave. Is the digging of a grave to be at least two cubits deep minhag or halacha?
 - a. Halacha - The law states that a grave must be dug at least two cubits deep (a cubit being a measure of the forearm from the tip of the middle finger to the bottom of the elbow).
6. Is stopping seven (7) times on the way to the grave minhag or halacha?
 - a. Minhag - It is customary to stop seven times on the way to the grave, each stop causing the individuals in the procession to reflect on death and its teaching on how to live.
7. Is it minhag or halacha to console the mourners?
 - a. Halacha - it is a mitzvah (commandment) to do nichum aveilim (consoling the mourners).
8. Is it minhag or halacha to wash your hands upon leaving the cemetery?
 - a. Minhag - it is a custom of spiritual purification.

List of Roles within Chevra Kadisha:

1. Tahara Team: Members directly responsible for performing the ritual washing and dressing of the deceased, including following strict procedures and reciting traditional prayers.
2. Sewers of Tachrichim: Members sew the burial garments for the deceased.
3. Shomrim (Watchers): Volunteers who watch over the deceased body until burial, ensuring its protection and respecting the deceased.
4. Coordinator/Liaison: Individual who communicates with families, funeral homes, and cemeteries to arrange logistics and details surrounding the burial.
5. Support Staff: Members who may assist with tasks like preparing the tahara room, providing emotional support to families, and coordinating meals for mourners.

Important Things to Note About a Chevra Kadisha:

1. Gender roles: Traditionally, men prepare the bodies of men and women prepare the bodies of women, although this can vary depending on the community.



2. High moral standing: Membership in a Chevra Kadisha is considered a great honor and is typically reserved for individuals with a strong commitment to Jewish values and practices.
3. Community service: The work of a Chevra Kadisha is considered a sacred duty, providing a vital service to the Jewish community by ensuring dignified burial practices.

Lesson Plan 3 of 3

Mock Shiva

Lesson: Teach about shiva and the roles/responsibilities of those in mourning and those that are visiting the mourning.

Time: 60 minutes

Activity: Simulate a shiva so that students can learn about behaviors, traditions/customs, and observances during a shiva call.

Goals:

1. Students will participate in a mock shiva
2. They will take on various roles to help them learn about this Jewish custom
3. Teach students about why certain laws or customs are practiced

Outcomes:

1. Students will feel more comfortable attending a shiva call
2. They will understand the difference between being someone in mourning and being someone that is supporting the mourners
3. Students will know appropriate behaviors for a shiva
4. Students will understand specific customs

Set up and Materials:

1. Shiva boxes or crates for seating
2. Mirror that is covered
3. Table of photos
4. Table of foods (sandwiches, cookies)
5. 'Mourner' and 'Visitor' cards
6. Kippot (optional)
7. Siddurim

Time	Activity	Materials	Procedure
Arrival	Cards passed out	Mourner and Visitor cards Hat or bag	Each student will draw a card from a hat as they enter the room (card should be folded in half and taped or stapled closed). Students will be instructed not to open the card until they are told to do so. The card will either say 'Mourner' or 'Visitor'. Depending on the number of students in the

			<p>class, there should be 2-4 'Mourner' cards. The remaining cards will be 'Visitor' cards. The 'Mourner' cards will each also say their relationship to the deceased, i.e. Parent, Child, Sibling. 'Visitor' cards will each say something they should say or do during the shiva call, i.e. ask a mourner if they would like something to eat.</p>
0-10 minutes	Introduce Program		<p>The instructor should start by explaining that they will be doing a mock shiva. Ask: Does anyone know what shiva is? Has anyone ever been to a shiva either as a mourner or a visitor?</p>
10-20 minutes	Introduce customs represented in the room	<p>Covered mirror Shiva boxes Siddurim Food</p>	<p>Why do mourners sit on shiva boxes? Why are mirrors covered? Why do people bring food?</p>
20-25 minutes	Q&A		<p>Let students ask questions before getting started</p>
25-30 minutes	Introduce the Deceased		<p>Instructor should make up a character that has died. They should tell the students a brief history of the individual. What they did for a living, what their family was like (marriage, children), what their hobbies were, etc.</p>
30-45 minutes	Mock Shiva		<p>Students will be instructed to open their cards and take a minute to familiarize themselves with what is on their card. Mourners will sit on shiva boxes and visitors will mingle</p>









			and address the mourning based on their cards.
45-55 minutes	Debrief		Ask the students what it was like. Let anyone that wants to share do so. What do they feel comfortable with? What are they unsure of? What lingering questions do they have?
55-60 minutes	Wrap-up		

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Mourner and Visitor Cards

<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Mourner Spouse</p>	<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Mourner Sibling</p>
<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Mourner Parent</p>	<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Mourner Child</p>
<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Visitor Show sympathy to those that are mourning</p>	<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Visitor Offer to get food or drink for the mourners</p>
<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Visitor Tell a story about the deceased</p>	<p>Shomer Collective</p> <p>Educator Fellowship</p>  <p>Visitor Tell your friend you are there for them. Ask if they want to talk or just sit together</p>

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Visitor

Ask the mourners to share their favorite memory of the deceased

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Visitor

Offer a hug to your friend that is mourning

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Visitor

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Visitor

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Visitor

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Visitor