**BIG IDEAS FROM CLASS FIFTEEN:**

**A TIME TO MOURN: TRADITIONS FOR DEATH, GRIEF, AND HEALING**

***Some Key Vocabulary***

[**Bikkur Holim**](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Caring_For_Others/Visiting_the_Sick.shtml): The mitzvah to visit the sick.

**Kavod Ha-Met**: Showing honor to the deceased. This is done by attending to the body (washing and dressing it, and not leaving it alone), by refraining from harming the body (cremation, embalming, autopsy), by maintaining simplicity, and by burying within three days with the appropriate rituals and prayers.

**Nihum Avelim**: Comforting the mourners. Following burial, the focus of Jewish ritual shifts from honoring the deceased to caring for the living. The Jewish way of bringing comfort is to create a structure for mourners in which the community comes and takes care of them in the first week (shiva) and then gives them opportunities to be publicly recognized and supported in synagogue after that (by saying Kaddish, observing Yartzeits and Yizkor.)

[**Pikuach Nefesh**](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Our_Bodies/Health_and_Healing/Saving_a_Life.shtml): “Saving a life.” Halakha requires that in any case where Jewish ritual practice endangers life or health, that we set aside ritual punctiliousness in favor of human compassion. For example, a pregnant woman or a diabetic is exempt from fasting on Yom Kippur, because to do so would compromise their health or the health of their baby.

***The following is done to honor the dead (kavod ha-met):***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Hevre Kadisha | The “holy society,” made up of community volunteers who attend to a body following a death and perform the ritual washing (taharah) and dressing (takhrikhin) |
| Kriah | The ritual act of tearing a garment as a sign of mourning. |
| El Maalei Rahamim | The funeral prayer that asks that God shelter and protect the soul of someone who has died. |
| Hesped | A eulogy, delivered by a family member, friend, or a rabbi.  |
| Shoveling | The community’s final way of showing *hesed shel emet,* true kindness to one who can never repay it.  |

The following are the relatives for whom one is required to observe the rituals of mourning:

* Parents
* Children
* Siblings
* Spouse

**The following is done to comfort mourners (*nihum avelim*) :**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Shiva | The seven day period of intense mourning following burial, in which mourners traditionally stay home from work and receive guests in their home. |
| Shloshim | The thirty day period following burial, in which mourners may return to work, but refrain from most leisure activities. |
| Yartzeit | The anniversary of a death, marked by lighting a special candle and going to the synagogue to say Kaddish. |
| Yizkor | The memorial service that takes place on Yom Kippur and during each of the Shalosh Regalim. |
| Aninut | The period of time between the death and the burial, when mourners are excused from all normal activities. |
| Kaddish | The prayer recited by a mourner in memory of their loved one. |
| Unveiling | The ceremony upon the erection of the headstone, usually one year after burial.  |