

How to Pay a Shiva Call

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Some advice for people visiting shiva houses.

Mourning is very personal. Some will weep, others will be stoic. Do not measure the depth of love by the degree of evident emotion. There is no 'right' way to grieve. You are there to comfort, not to judge.

Do not compare pain. "At least you had your husband for forty years; my husband died after only twenty years of marriage" is, unsurprisingly, not a comfort to one who is in mourning. Respect the pain that is before you without diminishing it. We all know that things could be worse in virtually any situation. Saying it is no help.

Share any stories about the one who died. These are precious bits, the lifeblood of continual survival in this world. What you remember, relate.

Don't assume a false or exaggerated somberness. Be serious but not maudlin, unless that is how the family wishes you to be. Give space for the mourner to guide the reaction.

If you have a question — should I call/should I visit, will it be welcome? Here is the answer — call. Visit. Staying away will not be seen as delicacy, but as indifference. Better an unwanted visit than an unexplained absence.

As the poet Joseph Brodsky said, "If there is a substitute for love, it is memory." Help them remember. It is a great mitzvah.