The house of mourning (Bet haAbel)

1. Once the burial ceremony ends, the mourners come back to their house. Usually, the house of mourning is the house of the deceased, but this obviously varies according to the circumstances. This is the house where people will gather to pray and/or pay their respect to the mourners during the following seven days.

2. Many families in our community would opt however, to have the prayers in one of our Synagogue Minyanim because of the difficulty to gather a Minyan at their house or for other reasons. And although the ancient customs was to have the Minyanim at the house of mourning, our community is lenient in this matter, and attentive to the personal needs and preferences of each family.

3. In the 'house of mourning' where prayers will take place and/or visitors will come to pay their respect and condolences during the seven days, the following arrangements should be made:

a. The mourners should sit in short chairs or shallow couches or benches.

b. The mirrors of the house should be covered.

c. It is customary to leave one candle lid, during the seven days. One could use one special seven days candle or light a different candle every day. Each time, before lighting the candle it should be said:

LEILUI NISHMAT… for the elevation of the soul (in memory) of… and then one should mention the name of the deceased.

4. When arriving to the house of mourning, the mourners should

change their leather shoes for cloth shoes (see the chapter that describes the rules of the seven days or shib'a). Some communities have the tradition to change the shoes in the cemetery, once the burial has finished.

5. When the mourners arrive at the house of mourning, they should eat a special meal called se'udat habra-a , the first meal after the burial.

This meal consists solely of bread and hard-boil eggs without salt. In some communities it is customary to eat lentils as well.

What characterizes this meal is:

a. It must be prepared by the friends, family members or neighbors of the mourners.

b. The mourners must eat this meal while seating on pillows on the floor, or short chairs or stools.

c. After saying haMotzi for the bread, the pieces of bread must be distributed by the one who recites the berakha, handing it into the hand of the mourners.

d. At the conclusion of this meal the Bircat haMazon (blessing after a meal with bread) is recited, adding one special text for this occasion Nachem. . . et Abele Zion etc…). In this text, two berakhot are recited instead of the regular ones, Bone Yerushalaim and Birkat haTob. The zimun or invitation to say Birkat haMazon, is also modify to Nebarekh Menachem Abelim, etc. This special Birkat haMazon and zimun should be recited in this manner during the seven days of mourning, and even during Shabbat if there is no one else present there, except the mourners.

6. When the prayers take place in the house of the mourners, some parts are omitted like the Tachanun, Lamnatzeach mizmor leDavid, the first part of Uba LeZion, Tefila leDavid. And

other prayers are added: Lamnatseach Libne Korach Mizmor and Siduk Hadin at the end of services.

7. In some Sephardic Communities it is customary to say Bircat Cohanim when praying in the house of mourning; however, if the Abel is Cohen, he should not participate of this berakha. He should walk into another room while the Birkat Cohanim is recited (during Shabbat, in the synagogue the Cohen in mourning does the Bircat Cohanim normally).

8. During Rosh Chodesh (first day/s of the Hebrew month) the Halel (prayer of praise) is recited in the house of mourning, but the mourner himself will no say it. In some communities it is customary that on Mondays and Thursdays, after praying Shacharit in the house of mourning, those who were present there, excluding the mourners, will go to the Synagogue to read the Tora.

9. When the mourners come to the Synagogue during the seven days of mourning (shib'a) in our community we omit the recitation of the Tachanunim (prayers for repentance and forgiveness). In other communities, the mourner does not say it, but the rest of the congregation does.