

# Nichum Aveilim; The Shivah Visit

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Based on *Nichum V'Nechamah: To Comfort and Be Comforted*  
A Guide to the Mitzvah of *Nichum Aveilim*



**Shivah visits can be extremely comforting or can be hurtful.  
How can we make sure that our visits have the  
maximum positive effect?**

### MENTAL PREPARATION

- 1 Before entering, *take a few minutes to think* about what you might say.
- 2 *Nichum* is all about what the *aveilim* need. What *they* need and want. Let *them* talk.
- 3 There may be different *aveilim* at the house with very *different needs*. Be mindful of this.
- 4 You are there *only for them*. Do not socialize with other visitors. Turn *off* your cell phone.
- 5 *Nichum* is *not* about distracting the *aveil*. Allow *them* to cry or express their pain.
- 6 *Listen* to the *aveil* for the *cue* of what he/she needs and wants to talk and hear about. Do not come with *your* prepared speech.
- 7 Sometimes *quiet* is what is wanted and needed – just sharing their pain.
- 8 Talk to the heart (“I feel *your* pain”). Be *nosei b’ol*. *Validate* their pain and feelings.

### CONVERSATION POINTERS

- 1 *Keep the focus on the niftar*.
- 2 *Elevate* the discussion to something meaningful.
- 3 Focus on the fine character traits (*middos*) and accomplishments of the *niftar*.
- 4 If the *aveil* wants to talk but is not focused, you can lead with questions such as “Can you tell me about your.....?” or “I heard the eulogies were very touching. What did they speak about?”

### BEING THOUGHTFUL DURING AND AFTER SHIVAH

- 1 Do for them what needs to be done. *Don’t ask, just do*. Don’t expect thanks.
- 2 *Stay in touch*. Don’t be afraid to call. Make sure there is a plan for the future. Financial, social, emotional.
- 3 If the *aveil* is interested, speak about *what can still be done* to help the *neshamah*.
- 4 Interact with *aveilim* as you normally would, no matter the circumstances of the death.
- 5 Do not give *aveilim* a time limit to grieve.

### SOME DON'TS

- 1 Don’t ask questions to satisfy your curiosity.
- 2 Don’t feign closeness, when you never had that relationship. *Be genuine* and sincere. It shows.
- 3 *Do not minimize* or discount *their pain*. “Be strong” is wrong at this stage unless you are a *rav* or mentor. Allow guilt and self-blame, if expressed.
- 4 Never say “I know how you are feeling”. Even if you had a similar experience. “I feel your pain” is more appropriate.
- 5 Don’t come at an inconvenient time because YOU need to pay a *shivah* call.
- 6 Don’t call unless you must. It puts a strain on the *aveil* and visitors.
- 7 *If you are unsure* if something is appropriate to say or you don’t know what to say, *don’t say it*.

**Remember: Resist the notion that the purpose of your *shivah* visit is to cure the *aveil’s* pain. This mindset often leads to unhelpful comments and monologues. Our goal is to share in their pain and let the *aveil* grieve.**