Sitting Shiva

From the time of death until the conclusion of the funeral, the primary focus and concern is on the care of the deceased and the burial preparations. The care for the departed before burial, the eulogy, the actual burial -- all are done to honor the one who has died, and not to comfort the mourners. (hyperlink to Lamm article - the Jewish Way of Death)

However, once shiva begins, the focus shifts to the mourners. The mourners experience a week of intense grief, and the community is there to love and comfort and provide for their needs. This is a critical point, for if one must feel the heart-wrenching pain of grief and loss, it should be done at a time when all those around are there to help and comfort.

People are confused as to how to sit shiva and how to properly pay a shiva call. Because people do not know, and because talking about death makes people nervous and awkward, the shiva house often turns into a festive gathering filled with nervous chatter, instead of the proper house of mourning.

The laws of mourning have the purpose of focusing a person on their own spirituality. We experience an overall feeling of physical discomfort as we totally focus on the soul of the one who has departed. We de-emphasize our own physicality by not pampering

our bodies, so we remember that what we are missing at this time is not the physical person who is gone, but the essence of who that person was, which of course is their soul.

The overall focus throughout the week is: I am a soul, my loved one is a soul