



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



When to Attend a Levaya

Question: It is difficult for me (a part-time working woman with school-age children) to know when to attend a *levaya* (lit., accompanying the deceased) of people I know but am not close with. Can you give me guidelines?

Answer: It is more feasible to provide background and perspective than exact guidelines.

The basic sources seem clear. The *gemara* (Ketubot 17a) discusses the deceased's spiritual prominence's impact on how many people should stop their activities, including Torah study, to escort him. Another *gemara* (Moed Katan 27b) says that when there is a deceased in the city, the townspeople are forbidden to work unless there is a *chevra kaddisha* to prepare for the funeral. Tosafot (Ketubot *ibid.*), accepted by the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 361:2) says that at the time of the *levaya*, all are forbidden to work, implying that all should take part.

However, many *Acharonim* encountered a more lenient common practice. In some cases, one could distinguish between Talmudic and later times. Perhaps Talmudic

Jewish communities were smaller than some later ones. (See Minchat Elazar IV:2, referring to L'vov, exclaiming that if one went to every funeral in a big city, he would not be able to learn.) However, it is difficult to claim that differing situations account for the whole difference between sources and practice.

The Netziv's opinion (Ha'amek She'ala 14:2) serves as a *limud z'chut*. The *gemara* (Berachot 18a) harshly criticizes one who **sees** the deceased and is not *melaveh* him, and the Netziv posits that the obligation is only upon seeing him; if one knows about the *levaya* without seeing it, he need not go. While the Netziv and others identify important *poskim* who disagree (including Beit Shmuel 65:3 and Shach, YD 361:5), this may suffice to justify the established practice.

The Pitchei Teshuva (YD 361:2) accepts the opinion that the requirement of *levaya* extends all the way to the cemetery. But others (Netziv, above; see more opinions in Even Yaakov (Waldenberg) 19) limit it to 4 *amot*, and according to them, we can explain the lenient practice as follows. Perhaps it was common for the funeral procession to pass through town, and each person would pause his activities and escort the deceased a short distance, showing respect by giving a few minutes of his time. Nowadays, when attending a funeral involves an hour and often much more, the

average person is not expected to do so.

Divrei Nechemia (YD 25) fascinatingly explains that the lenient practice is “self-fulfilling.” One can, during his life, waive his posthumous honor, e.g., he can instruct not to eulogize him, (see Sanhedrin 46b). Thus, one who lives in a society in which people go only to the funerals of people with whom they had a significant connection, he accepts having this be true for his funeral. The *gemara* (Ketubot 72a) indeed views death-related *chesed* as reciprocal. A man’s broad forbidding of his wife to be *menachem avel* is grounds for divorce because “one who eulogizes will be eulogized, one who buries others will be buried by others, ...”

Let us put things in perspective. The Rambam (Avel 14:1) lists *halvayat hameit* among the Rabbinic obligations that fulfill the general *mitzva* of “*V’ahavta l’reacha kamocha*,” along with *bikur cholim*, *hachnasat orchim*, etc. It is almost impossible for a person to find the time/energy to excel in all of these, thus leaving room for people to specialize in some areas, while doing the minimum (perhaps even with leniencies) in others. Sometimes life dictates one’s abilities regarding such *mitzvot*, e.g., some people would get fired for going to funerals too often; for others, doing so would contradict familial responsibilities – see Kiddushin 30b). One should internalize the Rabbinic perspective on the great reward for *levayat*

hameit (see Berachot 18a) and the belief that a well-attended funeral is impactful for the deceased (multiple *gemarot*). Then she can try to determine when this is appropriate for her, factoring in the level of connection, “deservedness” of the deceased, and her availability at that time. ■

Eretz Hemdah has begun a participatory Zoom class - "Behind the Scenes with the Vebbe Rebbe" - an analytical look at the sources, methodology, and considerations behind our rulings, with Rav Daniel Mann. Contact info@eretzhemdah.org to join.

Having a dispute?



For a Din Torah in English or Hebrew contact ‘Eretz Hemdah - Gazit’ Rabbinical Court: 077-215-8-215 • fax: (02) 537-9626
beitdin@eretzhemdah.org