

Mourning in the Tanakh, Part 1

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Loosing a loved one or a person we know is hard and it reminds us of our own mortality. As many of our family members get older, all of us will experience loss and mourning will happen. There are some practices we are told not to do. We will look at mourning practice in the Tanakh.

As we study Mourning we must look at the Hebrew words related to this.

Aval (Aleph-Bet-Lamed) reference number 56. It is a verb.

Qal form of verb

Yeshiyahu/Isaiah 24:7

7 The new wine **fails** (aval אָבַל), the vine languishes; and all the merry-hearted sigh.

Here we see the word used figuratively as wine, which mourns.

Hosea 4:3

3 For that, **the earth is withered** (te'eval ha'aretz תֵּאָבַל הָאָרֶץ – **mourns the land**): Everything that dwells on it languishes— Beasts of the field and birds of the sky— Even the fish of the sea perish.

The Land mourns because of the sins of the people.

Amos 8.8, 9:5

8:8 Shall not the earth shake for this **and** all that dwell on it **mourn** (v'aval וְאָבַל)?
Shall it not all rise like the Nile And surge and subside like the Nile of Egypt?

9:5 It is my Lord the GOD of Hosts At whose touch the earth trembles **And** all who dwell on it **mourn** (v'av'lu וְאָבַלוּ), And all of it swells like the Nile And subsides like the Nile of Egypt;

This is talking about the people who dwell on the land mourning.

Iyov/Job 14:22

22 He feels only the pain of his flesh, And his spirit (nefesho) **mourns** (te'eval תֵּאָבֵל) in him.

Here in Iyov we see that his nefesh grieves.

Hiphil

Shemu'el Aleph/I Samuel 15:35

35 Samuel never saw Saul again to the day of his death. But Samuel **grieved** (Hit'avvel הִתְאַבֵּל) over Saul, because Yehovah regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Here Saul has not died yet he grieved over him loosing his Kingdom.

Bereshit/Genesis 37:34 (32-34)

32 They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?" 33 He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" 34 Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, **and observed mourning** (vayit'avvel וַיִּתְאַבֵּל) for his son many days.

This gives us an early account of how mourning was done in Yisrael's time.

Exodus 33:4

4 When the people heard this harsh word, **they went into mourning** (vayit'avvalu וַיִּתְאַבְּלוּ), and none put on his finery.

The people heard the report from Moshe and removed all the ornate items. Generally this is thought to be jewelry.

Shemu'el Bet/2 Samuel 13:37, 14:2, 19:2

13:37 Absalom had fled, and he came to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. **And** [King David] **mourned** (vayit'avvel וַיִּתְאַבֵּל) over his son a long time. 38 Absalom, who had fled to Geshur, remained there three years. 39 And King David was pining away for Absalom, for [the king] had gotten over Amnon's death

14:1 Joab son of Zeruah could see that the king's mind was on Absalom; 2 so Joab sent to Tekoa and brought a clever woman from there. He said to her, "**Pretend you are**

in mourning (hit'aveli הִתְאַבְּלִי); put on mourning clothes (bin'dey evel בְּגֵדֵי־אֵבֶל) and don't anoint yourself with oil; and act like a woman who **has grieved** (mit'avvelet מִתְאַבְּלֶת) a long time over a departed one.

19:1 The king was shaken. He went up to the upper chamber of the gateway and wept, moaning these words as he went, "My son Absalom! O my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son!" 2 Joab was told that the king was weeping and mourning (vayit'avvel וַיִּתְאַבֵּל) over Absalom.

Though Absalom was an adversary of his Father, his father still cared for him.

Divrei HaYamim Bet/2 Chronicles 35:24

24 His servants carried him out of his chariot and put him in the wagon of his second-in-command, and conveyed him to Jerusalem. There he died, and was buried in the grave of his fathers, and all Judah and Jerusalem went into mourning (mit'avvelim מִתְאַבְּלִים) over Josiah. 25 Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah which all the singers, male and female, recited in their laments for Josiah, as is done to this day; they became customary in Israel and were incorporated into the laments.

Notice that all of Yisrael mourned over the King's death.

Numbers 14:39

38 Of those men who had gone to scout the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived. 39 When Moses repeated these words to all the Israelites, the people were overcome by **grief (vayit'avvelu)**. 40 Early next morning they set out toward the crest of the hill country, saying, "We are prepared to go up to the place that the LORD has spoken of, for we were wrong."

Here we mourning as not as a long process but almost like regret.

The Next word is Evel (Aleph-Bet-Lamed) which is reference number 60. It is from Aval which we previously covered which meant to mourn. It is a masculine noun.

Bereshit/Genesis 50:10-11

10 When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation (vayis'pedu 5594 וַיִּסְפְּדוּ); and he observed a **mourning [period] (evel אֵבֶל)** of seven days (shiv'at yamim) for his father. 11 And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said,

“This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians.” That is why it was named **Abel** (**avel**)-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

This is one place where we see that seven days used for mourning period. However, it was not perceived as a mourning period for the Hebrews but one of the Egyptians. So was the mourning a practice like this in Egypt?

Bereshit/Genesis 27:41

41 Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, “Let but the **mourning period (yamey evel ימי אבל)** of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.”

Here we don't see a period of mourning but that there were days in which mourning was happening.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 34:8

8 And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days. The period (days yamey) of wailing and **mourning (evel אבל)** for Moses came to an end.

Here Moshe was mourned for 30 days.

Qohelet/Ecclesiastes. 7:1-4

- 7:1 A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.
2 It is better to go to a house of **mourning (evel אבל)** than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every man, and a living one should take it to heart.
3 Vexation is better than revelry; for though the face be sad, the heart may be glad.
4 Wise men are drawn to a house of **mourning (evel אבל)**, and fools to a house of merrymaking.

Understanding one's life is finite reminds us that we were not put upon this earth to live forever. We are born, live and then die.

The Next word is Avel (Aleph-Bet-Lamed) that is reference number 57 and also from the verb form of Aval. It is an adjective.

Bereshit/Genesis 37:35

34 Jacob rent (tore) his clothes, put sackcloth (saq) on his loins, **and observed mourning (vayit'avvel ויתאבל)** for his son many days (yamim rabbah). 35 All his

sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, “No, I will go down mourning (avel אָבֵל) to my son in Sheol.” Thus his father bewailed him.

Yaaqov was mourning his son and tore his clothing, put on saq on his loins (the lower part of his body, and wailed/cried for the death of his son.

Mourning as an action is bowing down, not wearing fine things but non-flattering clothes, and placing ashes or dirt upon our heads. It also includes the practice of tearing ones clothes.

Associated with Mourning is also sorrow. So lets look at the word in Hebrew for sorrow, which is Aven (Aleph-Vav-Nun) that is reference number 205. It is a masculine noun. The root is related to an Aramaic word, which can be described as fatigued, tired, weary, sorrow or trouble.

Bereshit/Genesis 35:18

18 But as she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-**oni (oni from aven)**; but his father called him Benjamin. Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem.

Rachel’s name for Benyamin was Benoni or son of my sorrow.

Bamidbar/Numbers 23:21

21 No harm is in sight for Jacob, No woe (aven אָוֵן) in view for Israel. Yehovah Elohayv is with them, And their King’s acclaim in their midst.

Sorrow is not with them because of the blessing of Yaaqov.

Tehillim 90:10

10 The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years; but the best of them are trouble and sorrow (va’aven אָוֵן). They pass by speedily, and we are in darkness.

Here the writer calls life sorrow for the time we have on this earth. Even life speeds past us.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 26:14

14 I have not eaten of it while in mourning (ba'oni בְּאֹנִי), I have not cleared out any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed Yehovah Elohay; I have done just as You commanded me.

We see the same word as used for Rachel, which is sorrow as one might mourn.

The next word is Qader or Kader (Qof-Dalet-Resh) and is a verb. It is reference number 6937. It is often used as a figurative way to express mourning.

Ezekiel 31:15

15 Thus said adoni Yehovah: On the day it went down to Sheol, I closed the deep over it and covered it; I held back its streams, and the great waters were checked. I made Lebanon **mourn deeply** (va'aq'dir וְאַקְדֵּר) for it, and all the trees of the field languished on its account.

As one would mourn deeply for a loved one so the Lebanon mourned for Egypt.

The Next word is from Qadar which is Qadoranit (Qof-Dalet-Resh-Nun-Yod-Tav) and it is an Adverb.

Malakhi/Malachi 3:14

13 You have spoken hard words against Me—said Yehovah. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?” 14 You have said, “It is useless to serve Elohim. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe (qadoranit קְדֹרָנִית) of Yehovah Tzava'ot? 15 And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared Elohim and escaped.” 16 In this vein have those who revere Yehovah been talking to one another. Yehovah has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere Yehovah and esteem His name.

They were questioning why they keep what he charged them and in a form of Awe that was mournful. Thus instead they saw the arrogant as happy which was the opposite and that they escaped wrath of Elohim. Thus, the questioned why do it.

Where can we find mourning being practiced in the Tanakh.

II Samuel 12:16-23

16 David entreated God for the boy; David fasted, and he went in and spent the night lying on the ground. 17 The senior servants of his household tried to induce him to get up from the ground; but he refused, nor would he partake of food with them.

David fasted, bowed down, for his son. Just like one who mourns.

18 On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell David that the child was dead; for they said, "We spoke to him when the child was alive and he wouldn't listen to us; how can we tell him that the child is dead? He might do something terrible." **19** When David saw his servants talking in whispers, David understood that the child was dead; David asked his servants, "Is the child dead?" "Yes," they replied. **20** Thereupon David rose from the ground; he bathed and anointed himself, and he changed his clothes. He went into the House of the LORD and prostrated himself. Then he went home and asked for food, which they set before him, and he ate. **21** His courtiers asked him, "Why have you acted in this manner? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food!" **22** He replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? Yehovah may have pity on me, and the child may live.' **23** But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me."

David mourned for his son and entreated Elohim for his life. After he was dead there was no more reason to mourn. He could no bring back the child.

Ezra 10:6

6 Then Ezra rose from his place in front of the House of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib; there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he was in mourning (mit'avvel **מְתַאֲבֵל**) over the trespass of those who had returned from exile.

Ezra mourned for the ma'al that is the wrong or sin the people were doing. Here we see that fasting, prayer is also done. Thus this type of mourning could be for forgiveness and not simply mourning for a child or loved one. This might also explain it being done by David too.

Nehemyah/Nehemia 1:4

4 When I heard that, I sat and wept, and was in mourning for days, fasting and praying to the God of Heaven.

Again in Nehemyah's case again it is like Ezra.

Esther 4:3

3 Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Here we also see Mourning in the sense of great catastrophe which was coming upon the people. Like the mourning of the People not being able to go up to the land. Thus, it also is similar but not specifically like that of the child or loved one.

II Samuel 3:31-35

31 David then ordered Joab and all the troops with him to rend their clothes, gird on sackcloth, **and make lament** (vasif'du 5594 וְסִפְדוּ) before Abner; and King David himself walked behind the bier. **32** And so they buried Abner at Hebron; the king wept aloud by Abner's grave, and all the troops wept. **33** And the king intoned this dirge over Abner, "Should Abner have died the death of a churl? **34** Your hands were not bound, Your feet were not put in fetters; But you fell as one falls Before treacherous men!" And all the troops continued to weep over him. **35** All the troops came to urge David to eat something while it was still day; but David swore, "May God do thus to me and more if I eat bread or anything else before sundown."

David gave a command of how to mourn for a fallen comrade. Tear they clothes, gird on sackcloth (saq), and Lament/mourn. He continued to fast until after the day had ended. There was not set or prescribed period.

Bereshit/Genesis 37:35

34 Jacob rent (tore) his clothes, put sackcloth (saq) on his loins, **and observed mourning** (vayit'avvel וַיִּתְאַבֵּל) for his son many days (yamim rabbah). **35** All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, "No, I will go down mourning (avel אָבֵל) to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him.

Here we see a similar example of one who mourns for a child. It is very similar to the David account. Also notice that the period of Mourning was for many days which does not designate a prescribed period.

Bereshit/Genesis 50:10-11

10 When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation (vayis'pedu 5594 וַיִּסְפְּדוּ); and he observed a **mourning** [period] (evel אָבֵל) of seven days (shiv'at yamim) for his father. **11** And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians." That is why it was named **Abel** (avel)-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

This is one place where we see that seven days used for mourning period. However, it was not perceived as a mourning period for the Hebrews but one of the Egyptians. There is no another place in all the scriptures where a number of days is prescribed for mourning.

So does this mean we should mourn for 7, 30, or any number of days it take to express our grief? I think so.

So this brings us to the end of Part 1 of Mourning. Next week we will cover lamenting (safad) and lament (mis'ped) as mourning as well as review the the traditional mourning of our brothers the Rabbanites who do sitting shiv'ah.