

Mourning That Which We Cannot Name —Rabbi Janet Madden, PhD

We name something to make it real, to give it meaning...If we feel fear or shame or trauma around something that our tradition has historically told us does not exist, how can we name our mourning?

1. Mourning in Judaism is generally guided by Jewish law; they are “not a reflection of the sadness experienced by the mourner but of the loss to the world” (Ke-Chalom Ya’uf 22)

2. Full human status in Judaism pertains only at the birth of a full-term baby.

3. “We do not mourn for fetuses (nefalim), and anything which does not live for 30 days, we do not mourn for it.” — Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Aveilut 1:6

1. Miscarriage: נפל—Nefel (“miscarriage,” “stillbirth,” “abortion,” “untimely birth”). No laws of mourning apply.

Resources:

<https://www.kveller.com/article/the-invisible-baby/>

<http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/jewish-miscarriage-ritual>

<https://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2019/04/mourning-unknown-child/>

2. Stillbirth: נפל —Nefel (“miscarriage,” “stillbirth,” “abortion,” “untimely birth”). No laws of mourning apply.

Resources:

https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/dickstein_stillbirth.pdf

3. Abortion: נפל. Nefel (“miscarriage,” “stillbirth,” “abortion,” “untimely birth”). **No laws of mourning apply.**

Resources:

“Self-Birthing: A Ritual for Termination of a Pregnancy” by Gabrielle Pescador. <https://ritualwell.org/ritual/self-birthing-ritual-termination-pregnancy>

<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/140543/jewish-abortion-rituals>

<https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/carr-23-27/>

4. Infertility: עקרות. Ahkaroot (“infertility,” “barrenness”). **No laws of mourning apply.**

Resources:

<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/the-silent-struggle-of-infertility/>

“Seder Kabbalat Akharoot:” by Lawrence Baron. In *A Ceremonies Sampler* (Woman’s Institute for Continuing Jewish Education), edited by Elizabeth Resnick Levine.